

Peter: Peter McAward and Pavel Panfilov interviewing Claude Landauer on May 19th at 2:05

Pavel: ok, first question, as an English teacher, did you notice a gap in the performance of Hispanic and non-Hispanic students?

Landauer: well uh, I have to be, to be perfectly honest, no. Many of the Hispanic students that I get, having gone through the ESL program actually had a tendency to be better students than non-Hispanic students because in fact they are, in some cases, this is a generalization, so it's not true in all cases, but more diligent in work... concerned with increasing their language skills. So if I notice in differences, it's that many of my Hispanic students actually work harder than my non-Hispanic students.

Peter: so are the majority of the Hispanic students you get proficient in English?

Landauer: because I teach mainstream classes, yes I would say majority of students that I get, that have arrived at the school without English are taken through ESL and then come to me, many of them have been through, ESL I, ESL II, ESL III; I think their proficiency is more than adequate.

Pavel: So you're saying the ESL program prepares them adequately for mainstream classes?

Landauer: from my experience those students coming out of ESL classes tend to do fairly well in my classes.

Pavel: how do they determine when a student is ready to be moved from ESL to mainstream?

Landauer: that's a good question and to be honest I can't give you specifics, I don't know if there is an exit exam from the ESL program or if it is just based on teacher observation, judgment of the teacher. I presume that there's some standard that they bring forward when they decide to send to mainstream courses, but I don't know what it is.

Peter: do you think Hillsboro School District has done an adequate job with the difficult language imbroglio?

Landauer: I think that we continued as a district to pay attention to the problem and try to deal with the problem with the barrier and the challenge of trying to integrate students into our mainstream classes. I do think we've committed our resources and established strategies that are effective in continuing to make changes as we see changes that need to be made. So I think we've done a fairly good job. I don't have much experience in other districts to know and to compare to other districts. I know that other districts that face different challenges. There are districts with large populations of Russian-speaking immigrants as well as Spanish-speaking. Portland has a huge variety of languages spoken by students coming in as ESL students. And it seems as though we have primary

Hispanic and Asian, I think its been majority numbers which are Hispanic, and I do think we've done well, we've gone from people teaching ESL... uh... it used to be if you were an English teacher or sometimes a social studies teacher, if there was a period or 2 free in your schedule, you'd be thrown in teaching ESL, that happened in the past and we don't do that anymore, we have trained ESL teachers done partly under mandate, well legal mandate, that serves the students, so I think we've done a pretty good job.

Pavel: how long have you been in the Hillsboro School district?

Landauer: I've been in the Hillsboro School District for 15 years.

Pavel: and have you noticed any significant improvements in meeting the needs of Hispanic students during that period?

Landauer: well yes, absolutely, when I first started in the district, even the 15 years I've been here, our student population changed very dramatically from a primarily white suburban district to what is becoming more... uh... well a certainly higher percentage of minorities, Hispanics, Asians... which to me is a good thing.

Pavel: what improvements could be made to even better address the needs of Hispanic students?

Landauer: I think that one thing I would like to see is to have more mainstream teachers who are Hispanic or of Hispanic background as a way of creating a more inclusive atmosphere and I would also from my own perspective, one of the things I've always wanted to do is learn more Spanish; so that I could be perhaps a little more tuned into some of the problems that Hispanic students face. It's difficult for me to find the time. I've taken some course, but what I'd really like to do is spend a month or 2 in Mexico in the immersion program, but I can't because of my family. Maybe in a year or 2 I'll be able to. So mainly, more Hispanic teachers and more teachers that speak Spanish.

Peter: have you noticed any Hispanic students in your classes or at this school in generally having to leave school because of having to work to support their family?

Landauer: absolutely, I think that I've had the experience on numerous occasions and do right now have several Hispanic students who are parents... have kids. It's difficult to take care of their kids and come to school, because they're also working outside of school, so absolutely, I've also had the experience with non-Hispanic students so I'm not sure that it's a Hispanic phenomenon, in fact I'm sure its not. Yeah absolutely all the time students don't finish high school because of financial hardship. Sometimes it involves being parents at too young an age.

Pavel: I guess this question falls under personal philosophy, but, a 'dual immersion' program in which they try to keep ½ of the of the students Hispanic and the other half

white and instruction is done on certain subjects in both Spanish and English, do you believe that is an effective method 4 educating?

Landauer: so, I'm not sure I understand how a program like that would work. So the non-Spanish-speaking students would take classes in Spanish and non-English speaking students will take classes in English? And hope to get each one to learn the other language?

Pavel: the instruction is received in both languages, in an attempt to kind of get the white students to understand Hispanic culture and the Hispanic students to pick up on the white... (interrupted)

Landauer: so that would be in the same classroom, so I would be co-teaching with a Spanish speaking teacher ...?

Pavel: unless you were bilingual

Landauer: unless I were bilingual yeah, that's a really interesting idea, I think that from a personal perspective... I think that value of learning a second language is enormous, and the value of learning Spanish in this country, given the future that we face, as we become more and more populated by immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries, I think would be a huge benefit for our kids to come out speaking Spanish and English. I think that would be great, I'm not sure the mechanics of it, it would certainly be challenging to deal with as a teacher if you weren't bilingual.

about dual immersion

Pavel: they have varying systems, math for example could be taught one way and such, but that varies from on model to another.

Landauer: Oh.

Peter: have you noticed any Hispanic students, uh, since u said you're in mainstream classes, not necessarily in your classes, but have you noticed Hispanic students that have dropped because of struggling too much with English?

Landauer: I think that's certainly something that happens, I think there are, I mean all of the statistics suggest that among our Hispanic population the dropout rate is higher than it is among our non-Hispanic population and I know that in some cases it's because of difficulty learning a new language that is there are inevitably some students in whatever category they may be, English-speaking, Spanish speaking who are going to find it more difficult to survive academically. I've also observed students who have made into my mainstream classes, both Hispanic and otherwise who have dropped out because of their perception that they can't succeed, I'm not sure that that perception is correct

Pavel: some schools in California have resorted to the 'sink or swim' approach in regards to the Hispanic students, do u think that method is effective?

Landauer: I think the notion of throwing someone doesn't have English language skills sort of to the wolves and saying 'your going to either teach yourself or learn or you're gone,' ... the suggestion there is that students don't need support that they don't need specific help in dealing with the specific issues they're going to face; it suggests that if the student doesn't succeed that it's only the students fault and that's a pretty naïve approach. So I don't believe that that is a system that makes much sense. I don't think the result would anything less than tragic because students do need support when facing a challenge like another language. That particular philosophy is based on the notion we shouldn't spend tax dollars to support people coming from other countries, which to me is also ridiculous, being a son of two immigrants to this country, we owe it to the people who want to live in this country to support them and help them to become citizens that are productive; teaching English is one of those things we should be doing.

Peter: out of the Hispanic parents that you've met at conferences have you noticed...do they have an encouraging attitude when it comes to their child's education?

Landauer: I have met parents through conferences and communications, phone and email, and absolutely seen a lot of parents who are involved in trying to push their children to succeed, by the same token I've seen students who I haven't been able to have contact with parents, this of course reflects no difference from the non-Hispanic population. Yeah, there's parents that care and are involved and there's ones that aren't; in some cases those who aren't either cant afford to... and again this goes for our entire population, I don't see when ...I'm at conferences, I usually see some 10-20% of my students' parents across the board whether they are Hispanic or non-Hispanic and I think that in many cases it's due to the fact that I teach juniors and that some parents have already cut their kids loose by that point, and in some cases they cant afford to be involved in their kids' school because they're working more than they should. That's something that's always been disappointing, but not in a cultural sense in a not in a specific cultural, but in the sense of our American culture I'm disappointed at how few parents are involved in our kids education by the time they're juniors in high school

Pavel: how would you rate or judge the preparedness of the school and the district as a whole in being able to work with students with little to no understanding of English?

Landauer: I guess again my ... I don't really become involved with those students until they've really been through probably 2 or 3 years of, at least that is, of the ESL program, that is all I have to judge by. I would say that we do a good job. I would say, if I were to rank it from 1-10, 1 being the worst, 10 being best, that we probably earn an 8 or 9.

Pavel: have you been involved in any programs that are aimed at helping Hispanics learn English or the culture?

Landauer: we had a number of staff in-service opportunities which were designed to help broaden our cultural perspective, teach us more about the Hispanic culture, we've done several as a whole staff and as small groups. 2 years ago I participated in a class, a Spanish for educators class where I was able to learn some basic Spanish, I'm not sure

how helpful that was but it at least exposed me to some of the language, so the district has made efforts to create to opportunities to learn more about the cultures that we're dealing with, that's been helpful. I, as an English teacher... as a teacher of literature I've also done a fairly extensive amount of reading of fiction from South America, from Mexico, in English of course, but it has exposed me to the culture in a way that maybe helped me appreciate it to some degree.

Peter: so in your opinion how do you evaluate how the Hillsboro School District worked with Hispanic-Americans, how effective has it been?

Landauer: in my evaluation I think we've a fairly effective job as a district, I know there's been an effort on the part of the district to seek and hire Spanish speaking staff in positions across the board but especially in ESL positions, I know that there have been aggressive efforts on the part of the district to pursue grants for training and provided us with opportunities for training, again in my evaluation, in my assessment, I think we've done a good job, I think there are some districts who may have run away from a perceived problem like this, but I don't think that we have, I think we've dealt with it fairly well. Not so say that we've solved every problem that we faced, but I think we've certainly taken on the problems and tried to solve them in an effective way so I think we've done a pretty good job.

Pavel: live from...

Landauer: ...(laughs) from South250 this has been...

Peter: this has been our interview with Mr. Landauer, English teacher at Century High School, Hillsboro School District 1J ...May19th.

ESL (I, II, III)
"Spanish for educators" class
"Dual immersion"
"inservice opportunities"