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December 7, 2021  
Draft 2: Group 1

## The Word Starts Here

### **Ashley's Interview: Susan Albrecht**

A: Aloha and welcome to our podcast "The word Start Here." My name is Ashley Bellinger and my partner Lauren Giles, and I will be discussing today two interviews with educators with experience in Secondary Education and College Level. Within this interview we will be discussing their experience in teaching and thought's when it comes to English Language Learners otherwise known as ELL Students in and outside of the classroom.

The Goal of our podcast is to help educate future and current educators on the challenges that ELL Students face within the contact zones of the education system. For it is always important to remember that even though it may be challenging, every child deserves and has a right to the same educational opportunities within life, no matter the obstacles that they may face.

We also have the pleasure of being with Susan Albrecht, who is currently a middle school teacher who teaches the subject in writing to her students. Susan, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background and experience as a middle school teacher?

S: I went to college and my undergrad is in social studies and then. I then decided to get my masters in reading at Syracuse University. My first job I ever took was at New Hartford Middle school and it's a pretty affluent district in the area where I grew up in. I taught there for 4 ½ years to 7th and 8th grade students. I'm going on my 17th year in the Rome City School District. Which is your typical inner-city school.

A: Cool, are you fluent in any other languages?

S: No.

A: Do you have any experience with English language learners?

S: Just this year I have two that were put in my class. And I literally have no idea what to do with. One does not speak English at all and the other just nods her head OK.

A: What are your thoughts on language barriers within a dominant educational system?

S: English is a very difficult language to learn. There's a lot of peculiarities with written language and you literally have no idea when a student comes to if they're proficient in their own language, and if they're pretty much not proficient in their own language, it's going to be pretty difficult to teach them English.

A: Do you feel teachers should be trained on how to handle children's whose first language isn't English?

S: I do because like I said, I have two students this year. I have no idea what to do with them. In the past couple days they just have a translator that I could just speak into now that converts it to their language.

A: Would you feel comfortable and qualified to teach a student whose first language isn't English.

S: I'm terrified right now and I have no idea what I'm doing. Our district, I have no experience. I have no training. I don't know strategies or anything to use with them.

A: That's very understandable. What programs would you want to see put into place in order to help ELL students and their families in order to help them overcome these barriers?

S: I don't know. I'm not exactly sure we. I know there in our district in Rome I know there's like some church groups. That helped the students. I know I had a colleague who was next to me and he was very active with his students and his families. I'm not sure exactly what he did, but he was always in the community with them.

A: Do you feel tests and assignments should be modified for the ELL students?

S: I would think. Based on their level of proficiency, their understanding of the English language that there should be modifications. If they're a little more high performing, maybe. You know? They might go to a separate location, maybe if there are, you know. Fairly low in their ability of the ELL teacher could translate.

A: OK. What would you do with a ELL student who cannot read or write in any language within your classroom?

S: Again, that's pretty much where I am right now, and I know I'm not prepared. I literally didn't know where to begin. I wouldn't know where to begin, so I did reach out to the ELL teacher because I have two of her students. And it took two weeks for the translator to come in.

She told me to label things. She told me they had to repeat what I said. And it's very difficult in a classroom to do that, when you have other kids doing, you know in other different things.

A: That's gotta be a hard position that you are in.

S; It's not fun.

A: Do you expect ELL students to do the same work as dominant English students?

S: I think they should be in the classroom and exposed and hear it. But again, I think it goes back to the other thing is that depending on where they are depending on their knowledge, depending on if they can speak, if they can write the language. I think there should definitely be modifications. For each student on a Individual basis.

A: I agree with that. What are some problems you see within the educational system?

S: I would say I know in our district there's lack of money. We definitely have a lack of teachers. We have like a Subs. And I think even though we have trainings we can go if you're not going to utilize them right away it defeats the purpose and there isn't trainings on what like you really probably truly need. Like I need training and reading. I need more up-to-date current things. I don't need personally; I don't need diversity. I need expertise in my own area of teaching.

A: Do you feel diversity is important when it comes to the experience of ELL students and integrating them with other non-ELL students?

S: I would say yes. In my school our students go to any ELL teacher. They are pulled out then that teacher actually follows them to their English class. And then this is the first year in my 17 years that I have a student who I guess supposedly might have the ability to be in my classroom, which I don't think I've seen yet, but i'm trying.

A: Ok. Do you have any good web based resources that are student friendly that you would use to help with ELLS students?

S: I have absolutely no idea. Again, my school has not provided me with any information, any ideas. However, the one yellow teacher mentioned some common lit to do with the kids and I have not had the time nor the opportunity, so I'm assuming that would be one of those web base things.

A: Are some teaching strategies you could use to help teach ELL students.

S: My colleague had said for one of the kids that to label things in my classroom. I definitely use the translator a lot and that seems to help. One of my students, possibly peers help each other. Have a student.. I assigned one student to work with this boy Lucy because they work together last year so it seems to help slightly.

A: Alrighty, what did the humanities mean to you?

S: It's just like diversity of society as well as the history and culture of the world.

A: Because it is a humanities class do you feel that the humanities should be taught more within the classroom?

S: I think they should possibly be exposed to them, however there should be absolutely no political affiliation should be taught, no politics, no I'm this or I'm that. It's just I feel exposure is important, but that's all they need.

A: Okay well lastly, do you have any suggestions on group activities to incorporate with ELL students and not ELL students?

S: Maybe, instead of just like working with a peer, maybe they'll need, maybe they could do like more of a group. Maybe they could do like a triangle type thing, or maybe for kids. Maybe the kid the student will have a little better report with somebody else possible.

A: That's a good idea. Well, mahalo for your time and taking a minute to talk story with us today with your interview we were able to get a teacher's perspective on learning barriers with any school system that dominantly has English speaking students. Now I'll hand the mike over to Lauren.

### **Lauren Interview: Robyn Tasaka**

L: Hello Everyone my name is Lauren Giles and I'm here today with Tasaka tutor coordinator at the No'eau Center. Robin why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your credentials and your work with an oil center?

R: OK cool, so yes, I have been here at the No'eau Center, at UH West Oahu and since 2015 so about six years and so in my work at No'eau. So at No'eau we do writing tutoring as subject, area tutoring and so a huge part of my job is working with the tutors from recruiting, interviewing, hiring, screening and then training is a big part. You know, training increase

semester when they first start their job and then kind of weekly meetings and then also kind of like one on one as things are coming up again. Coming up on the job as well.

Besides my work with the tutors, I also work directly with students a lot. Whether it's working with them on Capstone projects, taking tutoring sessions from time to time like partly so I can, you know, keep in touch with what my tutors are doing and keep 1 foot in there as well. I find that super valuable and then also developing workshops and delivering workshops. Online we face to face also in line to help support students. You know, I guess in those needs that maybe are not happening in classes or just in my areas of activities that can help support what's happening in student's classes. So prior to you coming here I taught at Leeward Community College and UH Maui for about 7 years total.

So I teach like English, English 22, which is developmental English 100 and then 200 and 300 level research writing. Prior to that I got my PhD at Michigan State University in rhetoric and writing as while I was there, I worked as TA also teaching. You know, like introduction, sorry in English, English composition, that kind of stuff and working in the writing center and then part of that I was a student at Monoa where I got my bachelor's degree at my master's degree in English related things and doing a little bit of tutoring there. I also did a little bit of tutoring between grad school. Just in all kinds of areas like at Tokai International College at Franklin High School and at different kind of cobbling together those part time jobs immediately after while earning my bachelor's degree.

L: That's awesome and incredibly relevant actually. Well, one of the things that we're focusing on is English language learners and of course being in Hawaii we have a lot of English language learners. How do you feel, especially in your job at the No'eau Center; how can we support English language learners that come into the US education system later in life? Is there anything in specific that you think we can do to better support them? What we're currently doing, that sort of thing?

R: Yeah, so here at No'eau what I, the approach that I generally take, you know, is helping our tutors, you know, and I don't know. I guess I suffer from inferiority complex, I don't think about all the things I've learned about working with English language learners, but I guess I took a bunch of classes and I just lost my spaces. So recently what we've been doing, like I guess over the past couple of years I've been trying to offer training for writing tutors and for our subject area tutors as well, you know, thinking about strategies and working with English language learners and so certain things like. You know, like avoiding figures of speech, you know, because those are very contextual, and if you haven't grown up in an Native English speaking environment, you can make no sense, right? So that's one thing you know, maybe not. Rather than rewarding things, right? Maybe it's better to repeat the same thing, give more weight time and you know, I think these are all strategies that can be helpful not just for English language

learners. You know it can be helpful for folks maybe that have this ability and just need a little bit more processing time.

Or even you know, even if not a disability, having more processing time is often quite helpful. And then with writing tutoring specifically, I'd like to train our tutors in things like keeping that focus on is it understandable? First of all, you know that it doesn't need to be we only have to have out commas, perfect. We don't need to have our subject word perfect, you no. But on the understanding you know clarity first of all and prioritizing that.

L: So you mentioned that students with disabilities. Do you think that there should be more language resources for English language learner's students? For instance, interpreters and notetakers, just like are available for Americans with Disabilities Act students.

S: That, that is a challenging question and I think I think one. So I think part of it has to do with, with diversity within English language learners, right? So if you're talking about international students. So folks who grew up, you know, in another country and then as they graduated high school they're looking at up at going there feeling like OK having a degree from English, from American University is going to, you know, give me a leg up. You know so International, if were talking about international students in that sense, often at times those folks are from Privilege. Pretty privileged social economic background. You know, not always but often, right?

And so they have a lot of their own resources to purchase tutoring you know that sort of thing, Maybe? I'm not sure if that adds to our international since at West Oahu. I don't think we have a ton of international students, also is my understanding. But I think that's one group with one instead of, you know one set of one way there's one way of thinking about you know about that. Like I, I don't know that they necessarily need these extra supports provided by the university. But every time an immigrant student that, pretty different, you know, I think that's great. So I think you know, I guess I can see in that sense. You know, maybe these are folks who are part of our community. They're not just coming here for school and leaving again, and I think that probably is a lot more of what our student body is here at West of Oahu. So I can see having you know, maybe the university has a greater responsibility. But then I guess my next question right would be if we're talking about interpreters and notetakers, right? Like what is the purpose and what is the end goal? So, so, with tutor right? We talk about helping students to build independence like like, like, you know we all need extra readers. That's helpful for everybody.

We don't need extra support, but then you want to think about kay, if you go to the workforce after. And you're writing something, what, what are you going to do then? You know so. So, so I think, you know, I think we just need to think about that. So I think if we did have interpreters are not takers we would want to think about helping students too. In the same way,

right to build independence and thinking about that end goal? Or not necessarily.. I mean, not necessarily in independence, but maybe like a like a community who's going to be my person? When I gradually and I don't have the writing center. You know, is it gonna be a friend is going to be a coworker? You know how am I gonna navigate? How am I gonna navigate this? You know, in the workplace or in quote, unquote, real life. And I guess I also thought about when you said no taking curves, right? What about making friends in and passing sharing notes like could that be good model? You know?

L: Right, yeah. So since this is a humanities class and we're talking about contacts zones and really like to try and focus on the contact zone of the tutoring center. And when I say contact zone, a contact zone is a place where people from different walks of life and communities come together and work together, work alongside each other and that sort of thing. Have you witnessed this in the No'eau center? Have any fun tib bits or anything like that of how we can navigate this contact zone?

R: So I think when I was when I was thinking about this, like I have some general stuff in mind, right? But I'm trying to think of specifics. I like you think about specific, so let me see if I can get to that as well, but I think so. I think one of the big things right is just different understandings of writing. And like what I mean by that is like the lay persons view. Well, one difference, right is the lay person's view on the writing instruction view. And so so this happens, and I think, and laypersons view is not only students, it's definitely students, but it's also instructors in different. You know who don't have back on writing instruction. So I think one of the challenges. I think everybody has like damage. They're like they have trauma for writing like even our faculty members, you know?

L: Yeah.

R: I think what happens is like, say I'm in I don't know social sciences or natural sciences or whatever, right business. And I I'm now teaching instruction, and I'm like I don't know anything about teaching. My expertise is, you know, psychology or whatever marketing, whatever it is, right? But now I need to, now this is a writing intensive, so I need to teach students how to write. This research paper or whatever you know. You know we have writing intensive training and all of that but, but I think instructors a lot of times. Hold on tight to things like grammar. Or formatting and I don't know if it's and so from the writing instruction perspective right were like. Like that's the easy part, it's the ideas, collaborating your ideas. Bring out what I want to say, like making it all right, putting it all together to make sense. And then also I think folks were ready instructions view have the perspective. Have thought about everyone's trauma around writing and how we need everyone is just terrified, wright?

So what one of the first things we need to do is get folks to not be terrified and to feel good about that which I know you talk about as well, yeah?

L: Right.

R: And so and then I also wonder. You know instructors who are so kind of fixated on citation and formatting and grammar. I wonder if maybe they probably been, have been hurt. They were probably slammed for not knowing APM, they were slammed for getting there, commas wrong and I see it because it's just passed down, you know? And so I think that's one of the big challenges that affects. It effects all levels it affects, like my conversations with with other instructors, it affects how I train the tutors because. Because we're trying to bring together right, these best practices of writing instruction like like focusing on Unclarity first. But then we know we don't want to let the students down because they they're going to then turn this paper into their instructor who may not. Who may be nitpicky about this or that. Who may you know have been hurt by commas or whatever and so. You are providing the student the best support that's going to serve them through their whole life, but also for this one paper that they're just trying to get an A on, right?

L: Right now, that totally makes sense, I just I'm fixated on hurt by commas. What did the comics do to you?

R: I think you know professors are coming, instructors are coming from that same place of wanting to set their students up well so that when they go forward, they can, they're not going to be slams. You know, for this or that, but yeah, so that's the writing instruction and more of the laypersons, I guess. And we see that with students as well. So, when students come in asking for help a lot of times that I need help with grammar but sometimes that's not they, just don't know what else to call things. They just think grammar is what it's called you know, or they want to do grammar first. And you know that doesn't really make sense, and so we're trying to navigate. We're trying to navigate that as well, and then of course there's different majors, right? So writing in different major, I think that's another kind of contact zone that comes in. You know what's valued? Even just things like first person you know. Do you use first person pronouns? You know a different citation from. But just what valued in writing in different majors in different disciplines throughout the university we're trying to ride that, navigate that, and then students don't need. Sometimes they don't even know yet, right? Because they're just enter majors, so that's another piece. You know a lot of times our tutor are strong students right, their strong students in social sciences or whatever. Maybe they want to go into higher education. They want to be professors one day, so I tried too.

So, they're like you know my professor told me no first-person pronouns. I'm like that's your field, right? There are many other fields, so just kind of helping them to understand like to



see that bigger picture, I guess. My hope is that when they go forward and our instructors and professors. If professors still exist in the future.

L: I hope they do.

R: Yeah, I, I hope so too. I hope it's, I hope it's still a good job in the future. For many people, and not just a small group

L: Well, thank you so much for joining us today. Robin, I really appreciate your time and your efforts at No'eau center, and I look forward to working with you more in the future.

### **Ending Transition**

L: We talked today with two very different educators, Susan and Robyn.

A: Both of these interviewees gave us great perspectives on how the role of diversity plays within the education system. Susan gave us a unique outlook on what teaching is like within an environment such as Upstate NY that doesn't have the necessary support and resources to handle English Language learners.

L: Robyn gave us a local perspective on language learning in Hawai'i. And something I think that's important to mention is how Pidgin is the first language of many people here, so we're exposed to English Language Learners a lot more than someone who lives in upstate New York.

A: Overall both of these interviewees did an amazing job within this podcast sharing their experiences and thoughts with us today. An experience that we are grateful to share with our listeners.

L: Thank you everyone for listening to our podcast!

A: Mahlo!