

143-Aviva-Levin

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SPEAKERS

Aviva Levin, Kris Broholm



Kris Broholm 00:00

Welcome to the actual fluency podcast. Each week you'll find inspirational motivational interviews with some of the world's best language learners, industry experts, all trying to help you to learn foreign languages better, faster and more efficiently. And here we go. If you're looking for a language teacher to have your language learning, and I highly recommend I talk, I talk he is the most biggest tutoring platform 5000s of teachers and tutors at very reasonable prices. Get a free lesson after completing your first lesson by going to languageteacher.co Hey, everyone, Episode 143 of the actual fluency podcast here, imagine you're applying for a job. But the person responsible for the improvement says we're going to employ someone who can also do language teaching. And that's exactly what our guest today Aviva Levin experienced, who's applying to be a teacher and the person responsible for the recruitment basically said, We need someone who can also teach French and with limited French skills Aviva jumped straight into it. And she shares her experience in this show. We also talk about general teaching methods, ways you can make your classroom teaching more interesting how to engage the kids in a better way. So they learn more. And we also talk a little bit about the language dynamics of Canada, how you've got English and French and the differences between that and also whether Quebecois French or French, French textbooks are being used in the classroom, which I didn't know. So I hope you found this interesting. And we're just going to get straight into it.

A

Aviva Levin 01:48

So my name is Aviva Levin. And I am a high school teacher, originally from Richmond, British Columbia, which is a suburb of Vancouver, BC, in Canada. I've been a language teacher since Well, that's the story I'll go into. But I've been a teacher since 2009 and the story that we talked about a little bit before is, is very much like my journey into becoming a language teacher, which was not my intent. When I set out I trained as a history teacher. And then when I was new in my career, I had a principal come to me and say, I see that you've applied for this job as a history teacher and we have an opening quite a few people who applied and we're going to give the job to whomever can also teach one class of introductory French and, and she's like, we're going to give it to to the person with the most qualifications. And so I said, Well, you know, I'm, I'm not super qualified. But, you know, French was my most subject in high school was not and, you know, I love to teach it. And I had one more credit at university than the other applicants that gave me the job



Kris Broholm 03:13

Fantastic! And how was your own school with, with languages, I know, French isn't as popular in the West, if I can use that word as it isn't the east but did you? Did have any language classes growing up or how was your personal relationship to that kind of subject?

A

Aviva Levin 03:32

Well, so, um, you're absolutely right. In Eastern Canada, where we have cut back and the provinces that are adjacent to it, as well as New Brunswick, our only bilingual province, language learning French starts at the very beginning, but the further west you get, the more and more delayed it becomes. And so my experience was very similar to what my students experience was, which was a smattering of French, at the elementary level, and by smattering I mean, the teacher puts on a video called "Je suis un pizza", and the kids sing along to it. I highly recommend the song, it's excellent, but not very educational. And then in grade eight, which is when high school starts, at least in our district, that's when you have sort of square one basics. And then you can choose to take it up to grade 12. But you have to take a language. So for some students in British Columbia, they take French for one year, and then they switch to Spanish or Japanese or Chinese or any other languages that are offered. And so I kept, kept going all the way through to grade 12. And then took a couple courses in the university level, which fortunately got me the job. But it was very much like the academic my reading was much better than anything else, lots of worksheets, that kind of thing.



Kris Broholm 05:04

As a hot topic. The language institutions I had a chat with, I was in Montreal few years ago, and we were talking a little bit about how hard it is actually, to have a multilingual country. and Canada is not even, you know, that great of an example of one but, but certainly, if you as you mentioned, if you go east, you see it a lot more. And even over there, they're they're kind of confused in a way, sometimes they've got some personality splitting going on where English is a little bit more, I don't know, if I want to say trendy or it's a little bit more cool. Maybe the younger people maybe a little bit more attached to it. And then you've got the older generation trying to kind of maintain that French and really keep it going. So it's interesting to hear how that how that is over on the the West side. And that sounds I mean, to me that sounds almost like did not getting any French knowledge if you just do the minimum, like how much could you even get if you only start a grade eight and you only have to do a year I mean you'd get absolutely nowhere imagine.



Aviva Levin 06:11

Yeah, I mean it's it's definitely a problem. And it recently well not so recently popped up when there was like a so all government communication is technically supposed to be in both English and French, but apparently one government agency in BC was just referring people to copy and paste and then Google Translate because they didn't have any qualified translators and I've seen like some funny internet memes where because everything needs to be labelled bilingually like your cereal boxes, to your medicine, everything to be able to sell in Canada, I've seen like Internet photos where someone just wrote French, French, French, French, French, French in the hope, that I guess it got filled in later and just nobody remember to do that.



Kris Broholm 07:01

Well, so and the other hot topic as well, I guess we should just mention is it's the language instruction itself. You know, a lot of people that I talk to, you have absolutely miserable experiences and in in language school in the let's say, primary in high school. So maybe you can share a little bit as a teacher how how, how is the task even presented to you? What what's the first you hear that let's say you're starting to teach French you given a syllabus you have to go through as a very rigid, can you how much say do you have in it? And how can you make it interesting as a teacher?



Aviva Levin 07:40

Yeah, so, um, I I'm very fortunate as a teacher in BC in that we have a lot of autonomy as teachers in our curriculum, like there's learning outcomes that we need to meet. But they're, they're fairly vague. And we can meet them in a variety of ways. So I was able to, for instance, in like, my senior curriculum, create all my own units. And so basically, what I do is I do units on things that are of interest to me, and that I know that I'm going to enjoy talking about and enjoy doing and then I'm going to enjoy marking, because as a teacher, we often hate marking. But my goal has always been for myself to create projects that I'm actually looking forward to mark. So like, for example, one of my units and like, have you ever done those murder mystery dinners where you like, have to figure out kind of, it's almost like an escape room with a bunch of clues. And you have to pierce it all together, interrogate the sub suspects. Figure out who who did it.



Kris Broholm 08:43

I played the game clue, the closest i get!



Aviva Levin 08:48

so um, yeah, there was a trend for a while in Vancouver like a lot of these kind of escape rooms with these like mysteries. And I've gone to a couple of murder mystery dinners. So, like, one of the projects that I do is that they have the group's name to put on like this murder mystery. And then we as a class, like, interrogate them. So using our questions and figure out who the the murderer or the robber or whatever is, which I love doing, like, I look forward to those days very much were marking tests, I do not look forward to as much



Kris Broholm 09:21

right, is there a risk with the autonomy that you have, let's say maybe less passionate teachers, or maybe just bad teachers, who might just kind of not do as good as the teachers who are passionate about I mean, that that will happen even with the syllabus, I suppose. But is it is the such a thing as too much autonomy Do you think or it in what ways I your personal let's say modules and projects and stuff evaluated on an academic level? Is it purely the the results that the students get? So as long as you have this certain average or certain examples hold your your assumed to be doing well, it was each component or the what you produce actually looked at by a third party in anyway.



Aviva Levin 10:12

Um, so both excellent questions, and I'll kind of speak to to one and then the other in terms of the autonomy like, absolutely it can, it can create some difficult learning situations. And that's actually the problem that I was in my first year teaching. So I get this class of, of great a beginner French students and I and I asked, you know, where is the where's the syllabus? What am I supposed to teach? And they're like, well, we ordered some intro books, like we've ordered a program and schools will often do that where they choose like a specific program that they follow in the Junior Grade, but they're like, hasn't arrived yet. Just do what you want to do - and I was like, Okay, and so what I did, the first thing I did is I went to my my former French high school teachers classroom and I said Help me Help me Madame Linh. And so she kind of gave me an outline of what she did, and like the learning outcomes and that she was looking for in some examples. And then it was just a lot of googling, I use actually, and I still use and I put my own stuff up on a UK site called TES, were like language and other curriculum is set up and are like the BC and it seems like the UK outcomes are very closely aligned and yeah, it was I was pretty much a day ahead of the kids. Like, they'd be like, what are we doing tomorrow, Madame? And I'd be like, it's a surprise, to me, too.



Kris Broholm 12:01

Yeah, I can read it. That must have been quite the ride. So yeah, what can even do in that scenario, that's pretty funny that the materials had,



Aviva Levin 12:11

it was definitely like, I think, an unusual situation that they were in where the person that they had hired left, like, just before the beginning of the school year, and so there was a lot of confusion. But yeah, it was, it was an interesting time for me, fortunately, great. They're 13 no one really questions too much. They're not they're getting used to high school. So they didn't really know that. Like, maybe my panic looks weren't normal for high school teachers. And then, but I will say, and I guess this kind of goes into my journey. So I can save this for later. By the end of it. I was like, Okay, I don't think I did a great job this year. But I loved being a language teacher. And I need to figure out how to do this. Right.



Kris Broholm 12:59

Right. Those the ambition, the drive to kind of keep going as well.



Aviva Levin 13:04

Yeah, and so I eventually did several like immersion, immersion opportunities as well as I went back to university and got like a post back diploma on language teaching. So I could finally figure out what I was doing



Kris Broholm 13:23

well, I'd like to ask you a little bit about that. But just before just running up to the high school it the materials you use, I had a talk with someone recently about this is it. Do you have like, what kind of French to teach in Vancouver? Basically, is my question



Aviva Levin 13:43

so that's a question I get asked a lot and my I know that people want me to say like Parisian Quebecois, Haitian but really the answer is beginner. Like if you're creating French sentences and you feel confident doing it. I don't care if you're using slang from anywhere in the world. Or, you know you You're doing a great job. But for for me, because I done my language learning as an adult in in Quebec, I definitely have a tendency to, I think I've been told that my accent is a little bit more Quebecois and then, you know, that's where I'm going to go for resources, because I want to keep it local to being Canadian is our history is one of a bilingual country, you know, the English fought the French, the English won, but one of the concessions was that the French language would be kept alive in the country. And so although it's created a lot of cultural confusion, I do think that as a Canadian teacher that has been, you know, my goal is to honor that. But that being said, we spend a lot of time especially in the older grades, like listening to videos and podcasts of all sorts of different French and even like some Louisiana like Cajun Creole kind of stuff, and comparing the accents. So in terms of like, idioms. I'm mostly introducing kept quiet em and



Kris Broholm 15:25

yeah, so that's good to hear. And and the books do you like the courses? You mentioned the course? Is that a specific Quebecois course? Or is it just a general one?



Aviva Levin 15:39

yeah, so the one that be in my school, we use them quite a few schools and BC use is called Communicad, and that actually is locally developed, like, Canada for BC level French



Kris Broholm 15:53

fantastic, that's good. I heard some stories over in when I was in Montreal, that it was fairly recent, that they started using actual Quebecois textbooks. So they would use you know, French France, French, in textbooks, in the classrooms, and then everyone would leave the classroom and speak their normal, you know, spoken, dialect, conversion, but it's good to hear that, at least, that's not happening in your school. But I think it's important, definitely, it's a cultural heritage, it's, it's about identity, for sure. And it's also about unity, I guess, as a country, you know, as you kind of in the together so you need to have experience and knowledge with both languages to to be part of the country, I think.



Aviva Levin 16:41

Absolutely. And I think that there's just in language in general, there in the last decade, there's been a lot of examination around our own biases and privileging, you know, this, this idea that, for some reason, French France, French is better French than Quebecois French, which is absolutely not true. You know, we're realizing it's just a different way of speaking the same way that I think more and more linguists are accepting that, for instance, like African American dialects of speaking English are just as valid justice grammatical as your Received Pronunciation. And so I think as we recognize more groups and more identities, I think we're becoming more accepting of language.



Kris Broholm 17:32

Yeah, I think that's definitely true. And hopefully, they'll be continue to grow in popularity. So English doesn't completely take over, and other places, I guess I was thinking also with the high school. So you said, grade 8 about 13 and then they can have it for up to four more years, or three more years total em, what kind of what have you seen be really effective with learners of these ages, maybe you can compare a little bit with your own experiences. But like if there's any language teachers out there who might be struggling, because I can imagine 13 yet probably a little bit young. But as they get not much older, they you've got the troubled teens starting, right. So I don't know if you have any tips or tricks for for any aspiring or current language teachers and, and how you can, I guess the point is about how to make them learn really, and not go crazy in the classroom with all sorts of other things will just take a quick break to hear from one of our sponsors. And then we'll be right back on this podcast. I've interviewed hundreds of language learners, some of the world's greatest polyglots and industry experts. And one thing they all agree on is the value of one to one tutoring lessons. And for this highly recommend italki they have thousands of teachers in all price ranges. And they even have certified teachers who have taken diplomas or have degrees in the language learning. So whether you're just brushing

up on your Italian head of a trip to Rome, or you want to master Russian, to take the exam or whatever it goes on languages italki, he has a tutor suitable for you. And compared to private tutoring offline is really affordable, you can find informal tutors down to \$5 an hour or, and you can have trial lessons for even less. So if you want to master a language from the comfort of your own home. And even get a \$10 credit when you complete your first lesson. Go to [languageteacher.co](https://www.languageteacher.co), and check out italki - it might be the best thing to do for your language learning this year.

A

Aviva Levin 19:54

Absolutely. Um, you know, that's something that I struggle with. But definitely, I have some tricks up my sleeve. Um, I'd say first and foremost, is just appealing to what they're interested in. So like, depending on what the major thing of the day is, whether it's like, used to be Justin Bieber, and then it was one direction you're wanting to direct the resources there. And I find to that channeling them into those passions to find something on their own. So we used to have a lot of, for instance, like class novels that everyone would read together. And I recently transitioned right out of that, because there's not a lot of novels that are going to appeal to everybody and done a lot of work around students exploring blogs. So the idea being, you know, you've, if you can find a blog about something you care about, whether it's cars or, you know, cryptozoology or me music, and you can show it to me, and I can see that it's in French, and it's not written by someone who isn't completely awful with a lot of swear words in it, then that's going to be your reading material for this week, because you're only going to read what you want to find out about. And that goes for English as well as any language that you're learning. So doing a lot more individualized learning, I think it is important, like I do genius hour projects with my students where they choose like an inquiry question at the beginning of their senior year. And then rather than do a big exit exam, like we used to have with like, 100, multiple choices and an essay they're presenting on the results of that inquiry question in a, in a kind of, like, science, very collaborative, collaborative way. So that, you know, you're sparking that inspiration, it's something they actually want to go home and do so that I think's important. Other thing that I do a lot of is improv in the classroom. I come from, like, an Improv Theater background myself. And to me, like when I was in high school, a lot of any speaking was memorize dialogue, like, do you have a banana? Yes, I have a banana. How much is your banana? My banana is \$1. And then as I was recreating that, in my own classroom, the question struck me is like, what happens if my students go to come back? And there's no bananas, right? Nobody's gonna know what to do. Because like, conversation is never in real life. scripted, no one ever takes out a dictionary. And unless, you know you're really struggling for that word. So how can I recreate it artificially an actual conversation. So I started incorporating a ton of improv. And so what it looks like is, you know, in some cases, they're just picking prompts out of a hat. And then they

have to make a like, a little skit around it. And it's like, Okay, you've got 20 minutes, and then you present or sometimes it's more structured to, okay, you're in a restaurant and you encounter a problem, you guys need to figure it out, and they can't have their phones that can have a dictionary, they just need to spend a little bit of time planning. And then they just go and at first, they're petrified. And I've talked, I've done some [inaudible] with other teachers. And they're like, Oh, no, the students would never do that. I'm like, No, no, no, you tell them that the first time is going to suck. And it does. And then you just keep doing it. And by the end, you are going to be blown away with what your students can show you. And I actually noticed that with the improv, their grammar improved a lot. Because again, I was making it relevant. Instead of like teaching a lesson on the anterior past, while they're prepping their scenes, they come to me and be like, Mam, I'm living I want to be able to say, blank, how do I do that, I do a little mini lesson on the whiteboard for just the three kids that wanted to know. And then they always remember it, because they were the ones that generated the interest in that grammar.



Kris Broholm 24:12

right - and I can imagine how that must be a totally different classroom experiences, you know, making it fun, and interactive is kind of the opposite of what most people who [inaudible] classroom



Aviva Levin 24:27

and then get the last thing I think that is a most important because being a teenager is such a vulnerable time is creating like a really safe community in the classroom. And so that can be done like, in in little ways. Like, for instance, I never jump in and correct my students when they're speaking. That's something that was done to me, and it just made me never want to open my mouth. And so students get a chance to just speak freely. And then if I'm noticing certain errors that are consistent, like, Oh, I'm hearing a lot of SS being pronounced at the end of words, we'll do like a mini summary where I'm like, Okay, that was a really good set of scenes. I just want to go over a quick couple grammatical things, but I'll never individually pinpoint student errors and make them feel like they have been, you know, because for a teenager, something simple like Actually, it's pronounced without the s becomes, oh, my God, my teacher hates me. Everyone's laughing at me, never going to do this correctly. I'm just never going to take this class again, in my life.



Kris Broholm 25:39

Yeah, you can quickly take it personally, even though there's no reason for that to happen.

Because nobody knows anything at age 13. So, but yeah, that's how they think for sure.

A

Aviva Levin 25:51

I once had a teacher tell me we had been analyzing, and this was me, as an adult, we had been analyzing a poem and in French and I had, you know, this idea about what, like, what it might actually mean. But I didn't exactly have the vocabulary for like, literary analysis, and the prof and in front of the whole class told me, you know, until you can properly express you what you want to express. You shouldn't raise your hand.



Kris Broholm 26:23

That's pretty rough.

A

Aviva Levin 26:24

Yeah, that feeling for me as like a 25 year old. I was like, I can't even imagine how a 15 year old would feel like, I'm never gonna make any student feel like that.



Kris Broholm 26:36

Yeah, that's horrible. Nobody should feel that way, so how did. Just go back to the beginning of the story. Were you getting this job? How do you What's the strategy there? When you when you know that, okay, I'm not a genius in this language, or this subject in anyway, of course, the people your teeth, uh, you know, even worse, but But yeah, so it's a, it's a bit of a case of the blind leading the blind, but how did you organize yourself? never getting what? So I guess this is a transition into you becoming suddenly an independent learner and taking that challenge on. But what was going through your mind? And how did you start?

A

Aviva Levin 27:25

the first thing I did was call my dad and my dad is an interesting person. He did a master's in linguistics, and it's like a hyper polyglot. At one point, he was able to converse almost fluently in 10 languages. He's the kind of guy that you can, like, drop into, you know, a remote island. And within three days, he's got the grammar figured out. He's speaking it. I unfortunately, did not inherit that I wish that I did. And so I called him and I said, Oh, no. And he's like, Oh, no. And so we had a kind of quick conversation about I was like, okay, and he did his job was basically to just, like, pumped me up and be like, well, if anything,

you've got enthusiasm. Thanks, Dad. Um, but it was funny, like, now that I say that because one of the best compliments that I've ever gotten kind of indirectly as a teacher was, I once had a colleague come in to my room, and she'd be like, Oh, my God, guess what? I overheard my classroom there was this kid Josh and he, you know, because teachers we told leaves off on our students all the time. And if you talk about a teacher, we're totally going to them and being like, guess what, the students you and she's like, it was student and he was talking to his friend about a French test that he has coming up. And he said, You know, I don't really like this class. I'm not that great at it. but man Miss Levin loves teaching it so much. I need to get a good grade so that she can see that it's worth it.



Kris Broholm 29:07

That's fantastic.



Aviva Levin 29:09

And I was like, that's the best compliment that obviously my enthusiasm has stayed going through. And so I set out with basically, okay, what is the very basics that I want the students to know when they they leave. So I went and grabbed somebody's syllabus for the next grade and be like, Okay, well they need, these are the things that they need to know before they can get to do what the grade nine teacher wants them to be able to do. And then I just started, like I said, doing a lot of googling, it came back a lot quicker than I thought it like, although it was I wasn't a stellar French student in high school and university, like, the more complex stuff did come back to me fairly quickly. And, you know, there was a lot of, well, that's a fantastic question, Billy, why don't we find out together attending that, you know, like, I'm modeling researching questions, when in reality, I'm like, I don't know, let's find out. Right. Um, and that actually, I think is, is something that I still do, even when I do know the answer now. So it wasn't as bad as I thought it was when I was doing it. Right. And, and honestly, it was a lot of asking the kids like, Hey, what are you interested, what do you want to learn about and then just scrambling to to fill in those gaps.



Kris Broholm 30:42

But I guess as the as you got more experience that you had more and more what can you call them years, you know, that you could build up sort of a routine and an arsenal you could you could use going forward. So it wasn't as scrambling every time.



Aviva Levin 30:58

Absolutely. And in fact, now I've got the opposite problem where I've got so many resources that it's having to like, which, which one of my babies that I worked on hundreds of hours do I eliminate,



Kris Broholm 31:11

can imagine that that's not always fun, but the is the instructional language English or do you try to speak as much as possible in the in the class was that the year



Aviva Levin 31:24

that's something that I've gone back and forth on a lot and talk to a lot of language teachers about and, and it really comes down to, to the class obviously, beginners, you know, there's going to be a lot more English, especially in the beginning, just because you again, there's a lot of their fresh into high school, you don't want to, for them to panic. And then more and more and more as, as the grades go up. One thing that I do promised my students at the beginning of every semester, is that I will never explain a grammatical concept that is new to you in French, right? Because it's like, there's just a double punishment, because not only do you not understand what I'm saying, Now, you're losing out on the learning to understand what I'm going to be saying tomorrow.



Kris Broholm 32:20

Yeah, that's, that's a bit rough. I remember doing some German at university and yeah, having German grammar explained in German was very, yeah, that was uphill or downhill. We don't know to use that metaphor anymore. I feel like say uphill. Yeah, it's really tough. And then downhill is really easy. But then again, downhill is also



Aviva Levin 32:45

you end up in the mudpit.



Kris Broholm 32:47

Yeah, the chasm or something. Yeah. So tell me how, how that experience kind of, I mean, you've already shared quite a bit of it, but how does how's your day you have any future language projects lined up, or I do want to, you know, be a bit like your dad learn 10

languages, or what is what's the future hold for, for you.



Aviva Levin 33:11

So for me, um, I definitely like my own learning. and improving is definitely a priority. I'm, you know, trying to read and speak, I go to like, a meetup kind of language cafe, once a week to speak French, and keep that from going rusty and having the chance to talk to adults. Because talking with kids all the time. It's super fun. But your own learning doesn't exactly increase. And actually, one of the things that I'm really passionate about. And then I'm I'm trying to work on on the side is a book for students that is relevant to their age group, but still linguistically relevant as well. Because often what happens is the, the books that they're able to read are about like the three Three Bears Goldilocks, but that's not where their interest is, right? And, but then when they want to read about, like, young people like them, they just can't, because of the language barrier, at least in the West and Ontario, they're reading Harry Potter, and they're fine. And so I personally, my, my little private project is trying to make a resource that is relevant for students to read fun for them to read, but that they can also feel confident in reading because it's to their language ability.



Kris Broholm 34:36

Yeah, that sounds like a great idea. I guess you just have to be ready to update a quite frequently because the fads change all this.



Aviva Levin 34:44

Oh, it's crazy.



Kris Broholm 34:46

Like a year ago, I don't think people knew what fortnight was, for instance, 10 years ago, nobody knew what a fidget spinner was. Or, you know, when I when I was in school, it was all about Pokemon, and all these collectible stickers and dragon heads and whatnot, then, you know, obviously, nobody talks about those anymore or I don't know.



Aviva Levin 35:09

Yeah, and I think for me, the Sorry, I think for me, the relevance also comes in, like social relevance. So, for instance, in all of our materials, we don't have a very diverse and

representative group of young people in necessarily in the textbooks or in the educational novels. So, you know, I actually, I remember being handed a stack of books, and I, like read the first page and it was like, Susie is pretty thin and blonde, she has a boyfriend and I was like, and no, like, I'm not giving this to my students. So trying to, you know, make it so that our LGBT q students feel like they're being represented our students of color, even like students with different abilities, rather than just this very standard language learner that everyone seems to think exists that is white and privileged and just exists in our textbooks.



Kris Broholm 36:15

Mm hmm. Yeah. So it's all important. And I think the learning is just better if it if it feels more realistic, or more applicable to the, to the students.



Aviva Levin 36:26

Yeah, like, I went, and I just out of curiosity, I went and looked at, I built up quite the novel collection over the years, either through some federal funding, as well as just going to like thrift stores, and buying as many used books as I can. And out of the, like, 200 plus books I had, I realized I only had four protagonists of color, which was just not representative of who our students are,



Kris Broholm 36:54

right? Yeah, there's a big, big, I don't know, revolution coming in terms of the materials definitely. And I think the, the way we can introduce materials Now, also, with online courses, or tablets, really allows for a much more dynamic picture and society instead of this, you know, very static and almost boring in a way, because you can't like you couldn't write a book 20 years ago with the most current video game or something, because that will be outdated Two months later, or five months later. But if you have a if you had a an online platform or dynamic platform, you could basically make a blog post sort of every month for the students to read that will be new in line with their interest, featuring people that they can recognize us as, Oh, that sounds like me, or that feels like me, or that's a situation I could be in, rather than what you mentioned before, you know, Susie and Eric, generic characters and in these books, because I really think that a big key to, to, to success and in children's language learning is really about just making it fun, which you're doing a great job with. It sounds like the materials obviously have to be there as well. It's almost better to me to not use any materials if, if it has to be those generic ones. I'd rather just do, you know, interactive and almost improv, like you mentioned, then then these old dusty textbooks, and just remember that



Aviva Levin 38:30

because there was this textbook fund, and they, they came to us, and they're like, okay, which textbooks Do you want us to buy? And we were like, Can we not



Kris Broholm 38:42

-other props.



Aviva Levin 38:44

Yeah. And so we ended up like, fortunately, we had a little bit of a fight on our hands. But at the end, it was decided that we could then use the money to buy like magazine subscriptions. And some access to some online game like language learning games, you can buy, like school subscriptions, so that everybody can go on. And actually, as a teacher, you can kind of monitor your students progress in these these games and everything in their life is gamified at this point. So there, you know, it's a lot easier to say, Okay, I want you to go up at least one level on duolingo tonight then to be like, all right, you have to read pages three, four and five questions.



Kris Broholm 39:32

But exactly, that's a good point, you know, even even do a lingo with its many flaws. And a lot of people criticize, it would be, in my view, infinitely better than most textbooks, certainly the ones that I had when I was in school, just because it's just such a boring way to do it. And you get the nice graphics, and you get the funny sentences and,



Aviva Levin 39:58

with things like dual lingo, obviously, like I agree with you there, there's some legitimate criticisms, but any, any little bit, a little bit of that a little bit of anything else. And with the guidance of a teacher, which I think is important, I'm always amazed by the the people that are able to self teach without any outside tutoring or guidance like that, just all the props to them. But you know, just having that guidance with those online prop platforms I think can be really amazing.



Kris Broholm 40:35

Yeah, definitely agreed. One One last thing I just had in mind before we finish is the you

said you went back to get I forget the word you used the proper linguistic background just remind me what was the



Aviva Levin 40:54

yeah so I went and got a diploma and language and literacy education



Kris Broholm 40:59

right so what that what does that teach you any surprises or aha moments that you could apply to teaching? Or was it more solidifying what you already imagined was the way to go?



Aviva Levin 41:13

Um, that's, that's a really great question. Um, I think I found it, I did it through UBC, where I also did my education degree. And I found the diploma very, very helpful when I was learning how to be a teacher, all that philosophy discussion about what is teaching and, and what is the subject matter and grappling with that it was too soon for me, because I was just like, how do I make a lesson plan Teach me that. Whereas later, as I've been teaching, to grapple with those bigger philosophical questions made me I think, a better teacher, and I was ready for it. The other thing that really came to me was the role of social emotional learning, and how we teach, and just how important it is for students in their learning. And to make those connections with our students, and to have that emotionally safe space for them to be in and really making it about teaching the students not necessarily teaching the subject matter, the students are the people that we teach, we're just happened to be teaching French where we do that. And I think that makes them better language learners, because they feel like they have a place in the classroom. And I'm not just throwing grammar at them, and waiting to see what sticks. I'm actually, you know, teaching what they want, and what they need to know. And then I highly recommend anyone getting you know, to go back because I like anything, I had some classes that were maybe not so great. But then I had some amazing classes, mostly taught by working teachers that were just hired lighting, some really cool techniques to use in the classroom, some references. And the other thing is that there's so much amazing research happening in the field of linguistics and language, education, and just education in general. And it often feels like these papers are published. And then the only people that ever read them or other academics, right. So being in the situation where I was forced to read them, because I mean, honestly, you come home, it's like Netflix or academic paper made me realize that there's some really amazing research out there,

and that some of the stuff I was doing was being backed by research. And then some of the stuff I was being doing was not. So for instance, I stopped doing spelling tests, because there's very little research that supports that being helpful in any way.



Kris Broholm 43:52

Yeah, can also argue if it's even important. I mean, I understand for language one, you want to get people a comprehensive level, but for language two or three, it should really be mostly about communication. And, and if you have, if you halt communication by being overly stringent on the spelling, then now, I could definitely see the, the reasons for why that would be a bad idea. I'd rather have people with spelling mistakes, but actually being, you know, understood, understandable and in context, and then students just afraid to produce anything because they don't want to make a typo or there. Oh, I don't know how to spell this. I don't, I'm not gonna write anything.



Aviva Levin 44:41

Amen. to that. I wish. I wish all language teachers and language learners kid have the same perspective you do about that.



Kris Broholm 44:49

Well, that's the revolution we're trying to start, you know, which is a long battle, but we're trying to get rid of the grammar tables and the dusty textbooks and the the spelling test and hopefully one day we'll we'll get there but But until then, I just want to say thank you for coming on and sharing your story and enthusiasm about really appreciate it.



Aviva Levin 45:13

Absolutely. Thanks for having me.



Kris Broholm 45:14

All right. Thank you so much for listening to this episode of the actual podcast. Really appreciate having you here today. Just before you leave I just want to give a quick shout out to today's sponsor which italki, italki to you as a tutoring platform where you can find affordable tutors for every language in the world. Pretty much so get started today and get a free \$10 credit when you book your first lesson. If you go to <https://italki.com/italki>. I give it a go and feel how to rank and really boosting your language learning.

