

Ukulele Music

Keith: Welcome to the LeeCoSchools Edcast #26 with Señora Zulaica Konz-Gonzalez. Sra Konz is a Spanish teacher at Smiths Station High School and is Lee County's Secondary Teacher of the Year for the 2018-19 school year. I wanted to sit down with her on the edcast because she is not only our secondary teacher of the year, this is her third time winning this honor and she has done so at other school systems, so she is obviously doing something right. After chatting with her, I understand why she has the esteem of her colleagues wherever she goes and the love of her students. We are very lucky to have her here in Lee County. So, after listening to this, if you have any questions, comments, complaints, criticisms, compliments, colloquialisms, conundrums, or concerns, you can find us on the web at www.lee.k12.al.us/EdCast, on Twitter and Instagram @LeeCoSchools, on Facebook at facebook.com/leecoschools, and we have our own icon on the Lee County App which you can find in Google Play or the Apple App Store. Finally, you can email us at edcast@lee.k12.al.us I want to start giving a shoutout to my former co-host and producer from the beginning, Mr. Kyle Christian. Thanks, bud, for making me sound smarter than I am. Without further ado....Allons-y!

Funky Transition Music

Keith: let's introduce yourself and talk a little bit about your professional journey and how you got to be here at Lee County and you know I've heard a lot of good things which is why I'm here so we'll get to that but I'll let you go ahead and just introduce yourself a little bit

Sra Konz: well my name is Zulaica Konz-Gonzales and I've been working for a total of 17 years I've started I started with private school before I even graduated college and I did that for two years and then I started my public schools and I started with btw or Booker T Washington High School in Tuskegee that was my first year public school and then I went to Russell County and now I'm here at Lee County I love working here by the way

Keith: moving up the ladder as you go which is what you hope to do

Sra Konz: working here I came here because I had to do an internship and I started doing the internship with our administration here with Mr. Richards, Wilson, and Mrs. Whitlock who have been very supportive for my administration degree and I did get that and so I'm excited I'm just you know really excited to be here students

Keith: so you have had administration ambitions

Sra Konz: yes I thought I did I think I have some ideas you know may be feasible but I don't know I don't know if I'm actually ready for that step yet yeah maybe I just lack a little bit of confidence in that area

Keith: well I mean you know there are so many extra decisions you gotta make and it's so you are Smith Station High's Teacher of the Year for this school year and then you're Lee County's overall secondary teacher of the year and not only that you received that at three different school systems so whatever whenever my boss Glenn told me that because he was at that board meeting where that was talked about he told me that and I was like okay well there's something there that we need to know we need to find out about so yeah

Sra Konz: well actually in Russell County I won it twice okay then here so just two school systems yes I have I've won it three times and district Teacher of the Year as well which has been an honor for me I

mean it it's it's very humbling it really is I know that's cliché to say but it really is I didn't I don't even know people actually knew me here how can they vote for me right but I don't know I hope I'm doing a good job you know I'm here for the kids really mm-hmm so I just enjoy what I do I have fun with it that's all

Keith: how what are some things that you do to get to grab your students attention and hang on to them

Sra Konz: as far as motivation goes I do rhythms with them for conjugation mm-hmm conjugation comes naturally to some students and not to others and I understand that you know having been an el student myself I know how hard it is to actually learn a new language right because I've been there and I tell them that I tell I tell them that I can sympathize it's just reverse you know it's it's and I also tell them that English is a lot harder to learn so

Keith: I was going to say you had the harder route I think

Sra Konz: exactly however I was immersed in it they are not immersed and that's where you know these troubles can occur but as far as motivation goes I do use rhythm for conjugations I use things that they can you know it's easier for them to memorize songs music I also put them in the situation we have a lot of partner work here because I want them to create a conversation in Spanish using the grammatical structures that I have taught them so you know I'll give them a topic you know let's say something easy like restaurant ordering at a restaurant go what can it give me one one let's say one whole page you know and they have to create a conversation they have to create conflict you know I tell them the requirements and I like for them to be in situations that are real for example I put my my Spanish 4 we recently took a field trip to El Vaquero with the most part of the field trip and we we went there because I spoke to the manager of El Vaquero and this happens every year and they know me but I like for their staff to speak to them all in Spanish when we go there and they get to order in Spanish they get to be in situations where if an order is not right they have to communicate that to them you know hey I'm missing this hey I didn't order this I didn't want this can this be changed you know will this be added to my ticket I mean things like that you would not even think right but I put them in those situations because I want them to speak in Spanish and yes they they get very nervous because I tell them hey I've spoken to all of the the manager and all of the waiters you know and they they know exactly what I am you know requiring and they'll tattletale you know so if you're trying to whisper something to them and in English and say hey can I have some whatever they'll know all right you know so it I just like for them to actually speak when they get out of my class I want them to be able to survive in a Spanish-speaking country and and you know get by

Keith: well so do you tell the waiters to screw up the orders a little bit on purpose so they have to

Sra Konz: no I I get pranked though a lot my students like to lie and tell the waiters that it's my birthday but this time it didn't happen this this field trip this no it didn't happen we pranked one of my students so that was fun but no I don't I don't tell them to screw it up on purpose but it happens you know these are things that happen and they need to be in these real situations where they can you know speak

Keith: yeah you know when I was in high school cuz I graduated in 01 and so coming through school you know everybody kept saying you know you really need to learn Spanish it's becoming the fastest growing language in the country and what do I know I didn't you know I don't know enough to believe it and now it's like man I wish I would have learned Spanish when I was younger cuz it would have helped

a lot of me so it's really good that that they're getting those real world experiences because it's a far cry from you know hola como esta in classroom to like yo this order is wrong so that's that's that's really cool

Sra Konz: well I also have students coming up to me and telling me hey I was playing this game and they were speaking Spanish you know the people that I was playing with they were speaking Spanish and I understood what they were saying hmm you know so that that's really a like when they come to me and tell me stuff like that I get excited I also had another student tell me hey I just started my work at a some shoe place and she was able to translate for the for the gentlemen that needed help you know because no one could you know get his shoe size or you know tell him how much it was or if it's are you gonna pay cash or credit card you know those things they learn here yeah and she was only in Spanish 2 - and she was able to communicate all in Spanish with this gentleman so I those things make me so proud

Keith: that's right even Spanish 2 she was able to do that that's really that's really cool that she's paying attention yeah what are some of your favorite examples where you've assigned your students requiring them some kind of collaboration to accomplish a goal and I don't know that may that may not be an applicable question to this type of class but I mean

Sra Konz: I just think my conversation situations yeah I also put them in skits fun and they create sometimes I don't let them create their own skit it depends on the class you know you have to see the class you know if the atmosphere is is right you have some classes and are go-getters and you have others you know that are that are not and then you have to kind of accommodate what you were doing you know according to what what the class atmosphere is you know so but yes I do I do have them do skits they have requirements for the skits sometimes I give provide them a skit you know and then they have to act it out and memorize their lines so I like that because when they acted out some some are so good you know and the class actually enjoys them and I mean it's it's wonderful I love it I love it so I think the skits are one of my biggest pride pride and joy

Keith: that sounds so cool because we never did anything like that no you know

Sra Konz: ours is a lot of presentation I tell them that and a lot of students don't like certain classes like that but I tell them that here you know my rule is you have you're gonna make mistakes you gotta let yourself make a mistake sometimes we are put in these situations where failure is bad no you have to just learn from your mistakes you know what I mean so I let them you know come you know just make those mistakes in pronunciation and you know things like that I'm here to help them I am their main resource of course and their peers are here too to help them you know some are really strong in pronunciation some others are not so you know you just kind of work on off of each other's strengths you know but yeah I I like I like putting them in situations where they're going to have to present because that's how they're going to learn better I well in my opinion because that's how I learned well you know it is by putting myself out there and actually speaking you know and that was hard because I didn't speak for the first oh my god like I don't even know how many years I just never listened my teachers when I came here to the US for the first time my teachers did not know how to say my name and I would answer to whatever they said mmm okay whatever it might have been my name is Zulaica and they would call me Silesia or doulica mm-hmm sure that's me you know I had remedial classes for for speech because I had such a thick accent in English and they were like hey you don't roll the R you know I'm like why not that's so natural yeah but you don't you know say rrrrun you say run yeah so I had to learn all that you know at a later age and it's not easy you know you get made fun out I was called all

kinds of names so and I didn't start learning English here I started learning English in New York and Boston and they talked funny yeah and then I got so used to it hearing you know the English from over there you come down here and then it's like over yonder

Keith: yes it's over yonder past the second pine tree on the left

Sra Konz: and the accents and they're just so different but yes I it was it was I understand how hard it is to learn a language and to put all the effort into it

Keith: uh going back to the sketches thing so do you have do you ever have them do any kind of like sketch comedy kind of

Sra Konz: yes fying had in the past I haven't done that yet this year huh but we have done comedies yes we've done telenovelas which are you know telenovelas or our soap operas and they're super exaggerated I mean like so over-the-top so much more than the American ones oh I might I don't know bold beautiful alternative and ours have time timeframes like they don't how to say they don't they're not very long uh-huh you know they're like three or four months and that's it you know it's over but yes so we've done telenovelas here which are their comedy you know and it's it's been very fun

Keith: to actually get the joke you need to have a better a better than middling understanding of the language because so much can be layered and the jokes that if you actually get if you actually get the joke then you probably have a pretty good understanding of the language

Sra Konz: yes and I do a lot of those comedy we do in Spanish 4 because they do have a different understanding comprehension level then my Spanish ones & twos but yes I really enjoy those you know then analyze it is so much fun

Keith: there's several movies where I see that and you know that joke is well you know I can read whatever but I can't speak it and so how do you how do you make sure that they come out with both of those skills

Sra Konz: practice a lot of practice in here mostly you know I Drive them crazy here I don't give a lot of homework god bless you you know okay I don't because I I Drive them crazy here that's my point you know my number one thing is I drive you crazy here for an hour and a half okay whatever you don't finish that's your homework and a lot of them don't finish something they'll do it for homework bring it back fine wonderful but it's I try to immerse them here as much as I can you know without how do you say putting too much on them because a lot of them you know some of them are up for the challenge and some others are very timid shy they kind of shy away from presentations what I was telling you earlier and they just they just don't do well you know they don't like oh my gosh you know someone's gonna make fun of me that that thing I and I understand that I was there I get it you know but that's why I tell them the number one rule here is you're gonna make mistakes you know I hope you're gonna laugh at me no you know we're all gonna make mistakes they're all going to and they all do right you know and once they all do once I get the first conversation or presentation over they understand how this class is going to be and I always give me feedback every time they present or perform or do whatever you know here I give them feedback you know whether it's a group or whatever night and I do the feedback of course you know separate but I do give them feedback so they know next time what to work on you know Keith: and so that helps get the more timid ones out of their shells

Sra Konz: yes practice practice practice you know a lot of group work I think you know there's power numbers right so you know when they get in a group of two or three and they're all kind of like in the same boat per se you know if you will like they understand that they're not the only ones that are having issues with a certain topic or whatever you know a certain area of the language then they feel a little bit more ah at ease you know like I can breathe you know like I'm not the only one that's struggling through this and because misery loves company right more comfortable you know

Keith: so how do you provide a student who may require a little extra help how do you help them out

Sra Konz: well I'll like for example if the student is struggling in my class I will give them more one-on-one as much as I can I do have big classes I also provide tutoring and some do come to tutoring before school or after school usually they come before school but yes I a tutor and I do require them more one-on-one like I'll just check you know like if we have a quiz I'll check their their work and say hey you might want to check this one again you know if I know that they are you know truly struggling

Keith: yeah I know a little bit of I know a little bit of Spanish and used back when I knew a little bit more when I retained more from class even you know just listening to other people like out in the wild talking they would still be going too fast for me to catch because even with German I don't know German that well but I can still like I still generally catch the gist of whatever is being said my mom my grandmother's from Germany and mom whenever they lived in Germany for a while she learned German so she could still speak German fluently so when I was a kid and they wanted to talk about something that I and they didn't want me to know what they're talking about they start talking in German and by at the end of I was like I could tell them the gist of what they were saying and right about yeah that's how I was able to other would catch it just what they're saying but I I feel your pain with something with something force like you needed to slow down because right now it's all just one big blur for me

Sra Konz: right and sometimes I do that on purpose I speak I speak Spanish to my students really fast because I want them to use what I've taught them like hey slow down please I don't understand you know what you know just use those phrases in terms that I that I've instilled in them you know so they don't forget it yes and the thing is you know just like in English you have different Spanish accents you know you have from Mexico here you have from Puerto Rico you have from you know La Republica Dominicana - Dominican Republic - you know you have everywhere has a different accent you know just like English from England vs. Australia versus you know yeah you know it's just all different and that's that's something that we're just gonna have to you know try to understand it it might be like for this is what really gets their attention unfortunately when one word means like say NAT in in one country like Panama and then the same word means a curse word in my country you know so it is very different and that's what gets their attention you know oh really what is that right back please yeah yeah now you want to be taught okay right but um but yeah that we have those those differences

Keith: mm-hmm well and I'm even because is this still it's still true that what is being taught here is the formal Spain you know Spanish from Spain or I think that's what that was being taught when I was in school was like the formal dialect or something

Sra Konz: Castilian no I don't teach the because I teach it to a certain extent and then I teach the vosotras form but I do not teach everything that is in Spain you know the Castilian Spanish no I teach a universal type of Spanish okay I couldn't go anywhere and they can understand you okay I know so that's what I teach okay that's what I believe in I believe in in getting the students prepared and you

know in conversing we need to converse you know not just learn vocabulary yellow amarillo you know gain better they got we need to learn more yeah vocab is important don't get me you know it's a part of it but now let's use it in a sentence now tell me describe this for me you know that's my you know

Keith: mm-hmm okay yeah I did because I remember being told afterwards was like I mean yeah you learned basically the King's English or the Queen's English form of Spanish and that's not gonna get you don't get you so far and places like Mexico Ecuador

Sra Konz: and then each country has their own slang

Keith: yeah how do you motivate students to push themselves to push that envelope without becoming without becoming discouraged you want them to push themselves then I get in just but not to the point they're getting discouraged but also not rest on their laurels where they're not advancing any how do you maintain that happy medium

Sra Konz: I like for them to reach out to for example watch TV in Spanish let's see how much you can retain what what did you learn what what are they doing what's happening you know and I think that you know when they start watching like like let's say Telemundo or Univision right there like what in the world did I just you know get into because they're speaking very fast then the accents are different just like we spoke earlier about however once they start like once they get over the shock then they start calming down and then they start understanding certain things so that's one way also I encourage them you know to to put in their applications you know a lot my students are seniors and juniors you know put in our application that you know Spanish let's see and they'll ask them you know I had uh several students between this year and last year tell me hey I got a job because I put in my application that I knew Spanish or I knew some Spanish and they tested me on it and I passed how awesome is that hey come on you passed a test I mean and now and now you're getting paid a little more because you know two languages I mean check yes absolutely no you know so I had that happen actually about two weeks ago I had a student a former student he graduated Cole told me hey Senora Konz guess what I got a job because I put in my application that I took I took you for Spanish and I knew some and they asked me some stuff I was able to answer and here we go and I got the job that is really cool really cool so I think they're challenging themselves I encourage them to do things like that you know put themselves out there you know if you're playing a game on online or whatever speak to them in Spanish go ahead you know it'll be really cool for them to know that you can understand them so stop talking about me yeah right right or I know the set you know the next steps that you're taking because I I know how to you know I know about directions in Spanish or whatever but that's I would say that's one of the ways I encourage them to challenge themselves

Keith: that's really cool what are some tips that you want that you can offer some other teachers

Sra Konz: uh you know I don't know I think you know having good classroom management is one thing I've learned you know especially with like big classes you know you have to win them uh-huh you have to win their respect and you have to be there for them as well you can't just demand respect and not give it back you know students are our people you know you have to you have to run this like you would a business you know and that's my that's my mindset you know and just hold them accountable you know for their actions I mean I I think all year this year have only had write up unfortunately goodness I almost made the whole year without a write up and I had to write someone up for doing something silly but

Keith: give him double punishment for messing up your record

Sra Konz: I think class would just classroom management you know it's very important if you have classroom management and you have won these kids you know trust I think I think you got it I mean what more is there it's easy you know

Keith: how do you win them over though I mean because they're so surly at that age you know I used to teach freshman college history and so in college it's different because it's just like you know you're paying to be here so how do you win a class of surly teenagers over

Sra Konz: yeah with that comes consistency for example let's say a kid is late three times you tell them hey you're late buddy okay you don't get on to them you know you don't go crazy over it they already know they're late you just they're gonna have to stop you know go down the line with the consequences you know now you're gonna be nice eyes you know let's try to make it here on time that's all you can do you can't sweat I guess what I'm saying is don't sweat the small stuff no be there why why are you late what's going on you know you'd be surprised at what you get back you know I had I always tell the story I had a student this is years ago and this was not here you know she was I had a student crying you know and she was kind of she would act up sometimes I don't know why you know if I would tell her you know like straighten up so just give me an attitude you know like what in the world what did I do yeah well I just told you to straighten up you know we're taking a test yeah you know and I asked her this one time she was crying I said hey let's talk outside what's going on you know what's what why are you you know going why are you so edgy and why are you crying now what's going on she had had an abortion would I have known that no all right and then what does she get from teachers we're getting on to her because she's giving us an attitude because she doesn't know how to handle yeah certain things yeah you get what I'm saying there's always some background story and that's I'm telling you this one of the things I've learned most and you know we demand a lot but we really don't know what these kids have gone through you know we've been through ourselves you know a lot our backgrounds are you know very different very diverse but we do have to help you have to have a heart for these kids now you just do and some are late just because you're late you know some don't have an excuse odd their girlfriend or boyfriend whatever yeah then you just go down the line don't sweat the small stuff you can't if not you drive yourself crazy and don't get me wrong I do go crazy sometimes but then I have to have a moment where I'm like okay this too shall pass right and we are gonna continue on and and whatever I have my bad days everybody does now you know everyone does but I truly love my students hi oh look hi I love coming to work it is so much fun yeah to me it's just fun I have fun with it you know and I think that's the main thing once you stop having fun once work starts being a burden and you hate coming to work and oh my god I gotta get up then there's a problem with you you know then it's not the students you're taking it out on the students that's different yeah it's all psychological to me I don't know how we're getting down here but hey

Keith: I'm okay no no this is great stuff

Sra Konz: I think I think we just need to reflect you know do a lot of self-reflection sometimes I feel like I am too hard myself you know unfortunately you know being being a person where you're very critical of yourself is it's hard because sometimes you're I mean I sometimes I go to bed thinking God did I cover that from this chapter or did I do this did I handle this correctly you know that's my brain all the time eyes it's wired but sometimes I have to allow myself to say you know what let it go tomorrow so no day you get to you know make new decisions you get to make someone's life better somehow by just saying

hello or whatever you know but but to me it's just all psychological you know I think classroom management is about understanding it's about procedures it's about consistency you know I think that's the biggest key if you have classroom management like I said before you have it you've got it mm-hmm you know

Keith: I think I passed the French classroom on the way here is there any other foreign languages being taught here is it

Sra Konz: no it's just a Spanish and French okay and then we have some online students that take you know like Chinese or Japanese other German

Keith: so do you guys have like a rivalry like across the Pyrenees kind of rivalry

Sra Konz: no we don't actually she's a really good friend of mine and mr. Gregory's amazing so you know we kind of just we bond and we kind of go back and forth about strategies don't you use this this worked wonderful let me do it you know we were doing parodies that was so much fun so she did hers in French of course and I did mine in Spanish about conjugations of ar e ar verbs and they had write a parody you know I paired them up and then they had to pick a song and go at it you know and it just turned out I got

Keith: like a Weird AL Yankovic kind of parody

Sra Konz: yeah in Spanish yeah it was so much fun we even put it on pin and this is last year this is another little project that I'll be doing soon but we did it last year and it was so much fun so we actually just collaborate a lot and we support each other a lot that's good I love it I love having a foreign language Department I've never been part of one uh-huh it's always been me only that's so everywhere I've taught it's only been me teaching and that's that that was my department you know and I didn't like that now I did have one time where I had I taught in a place where we had Latin a Latin teacher and now that was nice but it was you know

Keith: as a Catholic I know a little bit of Latin I have the book where it's on Latin on one side English on the other so I can try to go back and forth but what support can parents offer the kids that makes just a huge difference

Sra Konz: they could come here to support their kids when they're presenting I've had that happen at oh yeah we have invited mm-hmm some of the parents would come and kind of check their kids out you know and then like and record them and posted yeah but that's I guess that's one way for the cultural fair they could come also at home I like when my students tell me hey I you know my mom is helping me do this recipe you know and I'm like ah that's great because I have to approve their recipes before they actually make them that's why I won't have two of the same one so yeah that's another way they can help them create things you know for Spanish class I think those are what school oh I didn't think I'm right now

Keith: that's fine is there a question that I haven't asked you that you kind of hoped I would

Sra Konz: one thing I do just one last thing something that's been in my heart for a long time is and this is not dealing with particularly teaching but but teacher support you know I think teacher turn their turnover and and just just the teachers new teachers here you know need a lot of support you know what I mean mm-hmm well not only here but it anywhere when you start a new job I think we need a

better support system for teachers you know I think it's a very overwhelming when you start teaching whether it's a high school middle school or elementary I just think you need a lot of support

Keith: so what would that look like

Sra Konz: well here in smiths station we have a teacher not teacher support group but it's a new teacher orientation type of group that we do and I love it I love being part of it I think it keeps teachers here because they know that they have the support you know other than teacher mentor we actually meet you know other than with their mentor we meet as a group and ask them hey how you doing you know we give them doughnuts we give them orange juice

Keith: bribery is what I'm hearing yeah

Sra Konz: but but I think that you know I've heard a lot of good things about it you know they'll tell me hey I love that you guys have this because it makes you feel like I'm okay you know it makes me feel like I can come to you for anything and I think that we need a you know just a system in place in each school like that you know I think that that would how does it cut down on teacher turnover and I think we need that

Keith: I work at central office and so we have before school starts the those are a couple of those PD days before the students come in and so the first one of those all the new teachers traipse up to the central office and sometimes you get that thousand-yard stare by lunchtime because they're they're being hit with all the information from HR and then there's all the information from technology and on and on but then they get those the next couple of days in the schools and I think that they get a better sort of thing here

Sra Konz: yeah we kind of break all that stuff down here and we kind of just help them with the whole process you know what to do when when are the deadlines you know what you know sometimes they'll ask me like what is this for me like what do I do with this and we actually help and if we don't know we'll find it you know we'll find out for them so I think I think that is a great system to have I think I mean it's been very positive - you know positive feedback I'm saying from the new teachers here they're like oh my gosh you know that that this is a great program I wish this was everywhere and you know and it's not only me it's miss wimberly and miss knott really us three we just kind of kind of run the that group and I love it I love being part of it and I think it's a great support system for our new teachers and to guide them

Keith: well Mrs. Konz Senora Konz you've been very generous with your time and I really appreciate it and we tell everybody just to continue to be awesome because your awesomeness helps make Lee County as a whole awesome when we really I appreciate it take care

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