

Stella Mocerì Seilo Webinar_with captions

0:01

Thank you, Carmi, for giving me this opportunity to share my personal, my personal journey with language and culture.

0:12

So I'm a child of immigrants.

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My parents arrived in Canada in the late 60s and my parents were, because they're deceased now, they were Italian from Sicily.

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My mother, she, she journeyed across the ocean, she journeyed to Canada, you know, with my dad and my two sisters at the time.

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And she didn't know I was, she was pregnant with me.

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So I, I'm the only one of my four siblings who was born in Canada and that was kind of a big deal growing up.

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My father kind of reminded me in, in a sweet way, you know, you were, you know, you're the LA Canadase.

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And it was, it was important for, for me to, I've been able to have that, that status, I guess, according to my, my Papa anyway.

1:07

So I grew up in a Sicilian household.

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And I mean, what I mean by that is my parents, they never assimilated to the Canadian culture.

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They never learned English.

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I mean, my father kind of had the broken English.

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My mom had a little less of that version of the broken English.

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So we spoke Sicilian and I spoke Sicilian.

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I think I spoke more Sicilian than English by the time I began kindergarten, you know, I, I knew, of course I knew how to speak English.

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I mean, I played with the, the neighborhood children.

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My sister was older than I was, so, you know, she already spoke English.

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So, so I, I, of course, I was familiar with English, but I, I, I don't think I was as fluent as I could have been, You know, I, I remember I didn't know my AB CS in English.

1:59

I struggled with things like that.

2:02

So and I, and I struggled being in a, in an English only environment.

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I think I felt very, very isolated and estranged.

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At least those are some snippets of, of memories that I have.

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And I do remember my parents say they, you know, they did their best, you know, as living in an isolated community because we never, we never lived in the Little Italy, you know, that that was predominantly near the Erie St.

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neighborhood.

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That no longer is what it once was.

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Back in the 70s and 80s.

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I think there was something like a white flight from there, right?

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They all went into the, the, the deep suburbs or faraway suburbs.

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Anyway, back in the 70s, my parents, we never lived in Little Italy.

3:05

So we were isolated from that.

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And I think that that also was difficult for my mom and I think it was challenging for my sisters.

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And I, I think what I'm trying to say is it may have may have facilitated a better transition from home to school, home to work.

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I don't know.

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Because just from what I gathered with friends who did live in that neighborhood, whose parents were able to talk to teachers in that Little Italy neighborhood who spoke Italian, right?

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And my parents never frequented my schools, the public school system where we lived well, for this obvious reason that what would they tell when they come to school and they wouldn't be able to interact with the teachers.

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But so my sister and I were kind of on our own in that respect.

4:05

You know, my I remember my mom saying things like, you know, did you finish your homework or please, you know, go, go do your homework.

4:12

But obviously it was hard for them to assist me with any of it.

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We never had any political or world discussions at the dinner table.

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Mind you, the dinner table was delectable.

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I remember having three amazing meals and it was just a beautiful.

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I remember having a beautiful childhood with love and warmth and laughter and colours.

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And, but our discussions, well, I mean, the discussions were between my father and my mom and my mother, I mean, and, and maybe some other adult who would have been there.

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I had my older sister who was may, you know, they would engage in conversation that I would only listen.

5:02

I very rarely partook in any of those discussions and they didn't have to do with any.

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They didn't talk about politics, Canadian politics for that matter, or any World News.

5:16

I mean, they talked about other things.

5:19

I don't know, old stories.

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My mother was a beautiful storyteller and I learned everything I had to learn about our culture and old Sicily through her folklore.

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I feel really blessed about that.

5:36

So, so by the time we, we moved back to Sicily, which was in the mid 80s, I was a young teenager while Sicily, Italy was a new land for me, but there were aspects of it that I, I had like a, you know, I had some, what is the word I'm looking for?

6:04

Like I had, I had an intimate relationship with, but you know, through, through my mother's stories, through, through the folklore.

6:16

So, for example, going to Sicily, yes, there was a culture shock, but at the same time, having to be having to meet my, my relatives, my Nona, my grandmother, my mom's mom and my aunts and uncles, my cousins and neighbors.

6:37

And who, who, who just shared, who showed, I should say, showed so much affection and welcome and, and enthusiasm and, and giggles because giggles, because I, I spoke my father's Sicilian.

6:58

What does that mean?

6:59

It means that my father's Sicilian, my father was born in 1923, his Sicilian and my mom's, I guess, but more, more of my father.

7:10

I think my mom used to say, oh, I don't say that word anymore.

7:13

Your father has an older version of that word, the old Sicilian, because Italy unified in 1860.

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So the, the standard language for Italy was Italian and it was dispersed throughout Italy through the educational system, through media, newspapers, you know, of course.

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And then when television came about on radio, of course it was in Italian.

7:42

So slowly but surely, especially to the educational system, Sicilian, the Sicilian language was put aside and and put aside or or in some respects maybe modified right.

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So people would because gosh, Sicilian is is the Sicilian language is a Sicilians part of their identity, part of my identity.

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But there was this overlying idea that Italian was maybe a better choice.

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So with, you know, in keeping the Sicilian language yet being able to kind of step out and step back in, I think is the only way I could explain it.

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They would modify some Sicilian words, modify or update.

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Oh, I hate to use the word update, change.

8:38

OK, So they would borrow the Italian word.

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So when I say my father's Sicilian, that's what I knew.

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That's what I was speaking.

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And I was made fun of.

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People would be, they would react, Oh my gosh, that's an old, that's an old Italian or sorry, that's an old Sicilian word.

8:56

And I felt mortified, right?

8:58

Because I'd, I'd, I'd talk and people would laugh at me and I'm like, OK, I'm doing something wrong.

9:04

This is embarrassing.

9:06

So for the longest time I was very careful and not referring back to those words and making sure I was using the modern day, the modern day, the the modified version, which was the Italian word.

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And so This is why people think that Sicilian and Italian are the same.

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Well, they're not.

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Sicilian and Italian are two distinct languages derived by Latin, right?

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Sicilian is a dialect of Latin, not of Italian.

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And the only reason why they sound the same today is because of that, you know, because of the reason that I just explained, that Sicilian people have acquired or have decided, OK, well, let's use the Italian word for, you know, let's change our vocabulary a little bit to to, to sound a little less Sicilian.

10:06

What does that mean, to sound a little less Sicilian?

10:09

Well, I guess to sound a little less ignorant, Yeah, Yeah.

10:14

That's, that's such a terrible thing to say.

10:16

I'm so because I'm I'm, you know, this is something that I just recently discovered that not many people like to admit to that.

10:29

I, when I, I went to Italy for two months and I and I talked to a few people, friends, family, strangers, and some people would admit to what I'm saying.

10:39

Yeah.

10:40

You know, they're admirers to speak Sicilian with certain people in public because they don't want to be ridiculed.

10:46

If you speak Sicilian and, and, and people don't necessarily know that you're, you're educated or you're, you know, you, they may suspect that you're not educated.

11:01

And that's who there's a stigma, right?

11:04

When you're not educated, you feel less than.

11:07

Isn't that just crazy?

11:09

But anyway, so, yeah, back in the 80s, I went to, you know, we went back to Sicily and I slowly but surely learned how to speak Italian because Italian was not my first language.

11:26

And while it wasn't hard, it was, it did have its challenge because, you know, there's a whole new grammatical structure that I needed to learn, you know, conjugating verbs and, and the modes, you know, and gender and number and all of this wonderful stuff and different ways of expressing oneself, which are different from the Sicilian, I suppose.

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And sometimes, you know, I'm not alone.

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There's people in Sicily sometimes find it a little awkward to go from Sicilian to Italian.

12:00

We sometimes translate.

12:01

You know, Pirandello even did that in his writing.

12:04

Verga did that in his writing.

12:07

These are Sicilian authors, scholars famous from Sicily, and when they wrote their amazing works, at least this is my opinion.

12:22

When I read some of the works, it feels like they've translated from the Sicilian to the Italian.

12:26

So I, I mean, I'm just, you know, these are things that I'm kind of exploring in my own research.

12:32

So I'm just kind of throwing things out there, maybe prematurely.

12:37

So anyway, so here I was a teenager in in Sicily and it was amazing, was one of the most amazing and and kind of devastating times of my life.

12:50

Isn't that insane?

12:53

But it's true.

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Very, very impactful.

13:01

It kind of delegated the rest of my life.

13:06

So I feel very thankful to my father.

13:08

He gave me the chance to to be born and grow up in Canada for some years, so many, many years, and then be able to go back to our homeland and get to know my parents and my culture very well.

13:28

Well, you know, fate had it had its way and and I eventually made my way back to university in Canada with the intention to get a degree in teaching and then go back and teach English in Sicily.

13:43

You know, my parents were there and and family and and so my idea was to do that.

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And then I met my husband and my destiny changed things.

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My I ended up moving to the United States.

14:01

My two sons were born here.

14:02

Groom, they've been raised here so I, you know, kind of go in and out in and out of with different identities.

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You know, I identify as an Italian from Sicily, born in Canada, went through most of my educational system in Canada, but my heart is in Sicily.

14:31

But I live in the United States with my husband and my sons who were born and raised here and, and now I finished my PhD here in the United States and I work here and, and, and I live here.

14:50

So who am I?

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I'm still trying to figure that one out, but I, I've actually come to terms with the fact that I'm, I'm not any of those things and all of those things.

15:03

I'm not 100% and from Sicily.

15:08

Of course I'm not 100% Canadian and of course I'm not 100% American, but I'm I have pieces of all those different identities and I've come to terms with that and that's totally fine.

15:26

And I what what this experience has provided for me, at least in relation to my research that involves

teachers who teach emerge of bilinguals, newcomers or students who who have a home language at home, is that I can identify with those students.

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And I can impart to those teachers not only my personal story and experience from the side of the students and their families.

16:05

But you know, as a professional, I could provide some guidance and you know, some, I guess some, some some knowledge, some scholarly knowledge, which I'm very proud of.

16:26

Thanks again for giving me this opportunity to share my research ideas and my personal journey.

16:31

So this next audio recording connects with the previous one in which I shared my personal journey with bicultural language and identity.

16:41

My research interests and area of expertise lie in curriculum and instruction and bilingual and bicultural education.

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My focus highlights the significance of integrating resources, understanding, and attitudes into teacher training and professional development to support emergent bilinguals effectively.

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This emphasis on catering to the needs of emergent bilinguals is essential for promoting their academic achievements and overall growth in educational environments.

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Some strategies for meeting the needs of emergent bilinguals are teachers talking with other teachers, developing an understanding of their students backgrounds, fostering connections with students and their families, and recognizing students native languages as valuable assets within the classroom.

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This holistic approach promotes a sense of inclusivity, pride, and belonging among newcomer students.

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I am interested in continuing my research and contacting teachers to participate in empirical research.

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The goal is to provide them, the teachers, with pedagogical knowledge that will help empower newcomer school students for academic and social success.

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One way to do this is through a study abroad program that I have been invited to launch based on my original research.

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This program will allow US teachers completing a master's degree or educational specialist certificate to travel to Sicily.

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The program aims to facilitate interactions between these teachers and K through 12 teachers in Sicily who also teach Arabic speaking students.

18:41

My research study found that teachers experience Paolo Freire's heightened consciousness, or *constinci sasail*, when they engage in teacher interactions.

18:55

Some examples of *constinci sasail* are into cultural learning, teacher reflexivity, and a reduced sense of isolation through interactions with other teachers.

19:09

In summary, researchers can play a pivotal role in inviting teachers to participate in empirical research that aims to equip them with pedagogical knowledge to empower their newcomer students for academic and social success.

19:29

I hope you found this discussion on empowering teachers to support newcomer students valuable and insightful.

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And, and I guess that's pretty much it.

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And I'm so happy I was able to to share this with you.

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Honestly, I'm I'm profoundly thankful to you.

19:47

Karma, you're the best.

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OK, thanks.