THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 5 – Episode 1

Language Matters with Kelly Thornhill

Ashley: Why is it so important that our children learn languages? Well, we're about to find out today. I am with Kelly Thornhill, who is going to tell us all about languages. She has an amazing company and she's going to tell us all about that. But first of all, a big, warm welcome from the Resilient Kid Podcast. Kelly,

hi, good morning.

Kelly: Oh, buenos dias! Had to start like that, right? Oh, buenos tardes, you

know.

Ashley: Depending on when they're listening,

yeah.

Kelly: Exactly, yeah. Oh, muchas gracias. Thank you so much. It's lovely to be here.

Ashley: Oh, honestly, so Kelly and I have known each other quite a while. We are in the same Kind of same membership group the MLC big shout out to Lisa Barry and all the other MLCs there.

So we've known each other and had conversations over time, haven't we? And I seen Kelly was putting some stuff out ready about her, Business. And I was just like, actually, that would be amazing to get you on the podcast. We've got summer coming up, you know, we're trying to keep the kids occupied. Yeah.

So tell me first, Kelly, why do you think it is so important that we get kids involved quite as, you know, as young as possible for me in learning different languages?

Kelly: Oh, wow, such a brilliant question, and it's just, there's so many, so many different answers to that. It's such an important, I mean, it's just such an important thing for children to be able to do on so many different levels.

First of all, as a young child, it's easier, it's generally easier for children to pick up another language, much easier than it is for us as adults. So, straight away, if a child is from an early age exposed to another language, they are starting to pick it up, and they're starting to tune their ear in and it becomes easier for them then, when they're older and into adulthood, to pick the language up again if they've, you know, if they've dropped off learning it, or to, you know, to continue learning.

It's kind of, starting learning it really at a young age sets the foundation, therefore, the future, really. Learning a language when you're younger doesn't feel like you're learning a language, doesn't feel like work, because there's, there's so many fabulous resources, so many brilliant activities for children to do.

It's just fun. It's just learning a language is just fun for them. Whereas when you're, when you're, when you're older it can feel a bit more of a chore, let's put it that way. Yeah Also, it triggers something in children's brains when they're learning another language, and it generally makes them more receptive to other children's differences.

It certainly opens up the world to them a different way, it helps them become more open minded to different cultures, different languages, different traditions the way other children operate, it being different to them is quite normal when you learn another language. On top of that, it's a fabulous confidence booster for children.

I mean, obviously, you know, with all the, everything going on with social media and, and the challenges us parents have, you know coping and handling and helping our children manage social media, it, you know, it's, you know, there have been negative effects of that on children on their, on their self-esteem, on their confidence.

And being able to speak or understand or at least be learning another language is a massive confidence booster for a child. Because they can see how much they have been learning. And if, you know, a child is next, can speak another language, let's say Spanish because that's my language. As a child that can speak Spanish standing next to a child that, you know, that maybe can't speak Spanish.

And then they are presented with a child who is Spanish, being able to communicate with that child. When the person, when the child's standing next to you maybe can't, it makes you kind of, the child, oh wow, actually, you know, I can do this, you know, I can do this, there's something that I can do that is quite special.

And I've learned to do it myself. And so it's a massive confidence booster for children.

Ashley: I think you're absolutely right. And there's a few things that you've just mentioned there that I kind of want to pick up on because I think it's really important and it's easy for us to, I mean, we could wax lyrical about this all day, I think you and I, but I think.

I don't want to brush over the importance of what you've just said. So I think for me, that appreciation of diversity, you know, that exposure to different languages helps us just, I guess, it's almost like clicking to what's different, what's out there. And because as well I know learning a language is not just about learning how to say good morning or good afternoon or whatever.

It's also that cultural aspect. You learn, you know, you're talking about Spanish. You learn about the culture of Spain and then also it might be South America as well because they speak it there or, you know, and I think that's really, really important to, for kids to have that understanding and the appreciation of the world is bigger than them.

I think that's really cool. And then also that confidence. It's an adaptability for me that you talk about where there's one child that, you know, might not be able to speak Spanish, but then a Spanish kid walks in and they can communicate. And I, you know, I've had experience of that. So I know sign language and I remember being in an airport in LA.

That sounds like, like I'm a jet setter. I'm really not. I was going South America to be fair, but it was, I was just literally. Transit through the airport. And there was Paralympics on, and there was a group of deaf tennis players. And one of the flight attendants. All the people who worked at the airport were trying to tell them something and there was just nothing, like, there was just like this barrier between I'm just talking to you and you can't hear me, how do we get this across?

And I, I was like a young, you know, I was, you know, 20, 21 and literally walked over and I just immediately turned to these deaf people and said, listen, I know a little bit of sign. Do you need any help? Are you okay? You know, because again, I didn't want to presume I just, and they were like, oh, thank God.

And I felt top of the world. Absolute top of the world, because I was able to help them. Was it perfect? Absolutely not. Was it because, you know, just like English and just like any language, you have accents. So, but I, I knew enough and they could understand me enough for me to be able to. Help them get on what was a really important flight.

Whether, if I missed my flight, it wouldn't have been a big deal. I was only doing a holiday, you know, but they were going to the Paralympics at the time and yeah, I just remember thinking, I'm so pleased that I learned that, you know, and that's just, that, that was sign that wasn't even like, you know, there's not as many people that, that speak Spanish or

there's lots more people speak Spanish than say something like sign language. But yeah, and it is so the confidence boost that it gives kids is huge, is really huge. So how did you get into it, Kelly?

Kelly: Well Like, like a lot, like many of us, you know, I did Spanish at GCSEs when I was younger, so I'm 47 now, and I did GCSE Spanish, loved it and then didn't really do much with the language for a while, and went to university, and after university I headed over to South America, and I spent 20 years in South America.

So a little, started off probably the same as many. Many language professionals do start learning it at school, really enjoyed it, loved the language. But my journey took me, you know, took me to South America. And in Venezuela, I, I did Spanish courses, intensive Spanish courses and I worked.

And I then moved over to Venice, to Colombia. So I was in Venezuela for a year and then I moved over to Colombia. I spent a year in Colombia. And then from there I was down in moved down to Ecuador, Taquito, where I lived for a year teaching English. And in all of these countries, as I kind of moved through them, apart, as well as learning the language, I'd take, I would take find myself a local tutor and take some intensive courses.

I also worked as well, so I immersed myself. You know, very much in the language. I made local friends. I stayed with local families and I very much immersed myself in the language. And then after Ecuador, I spent some time in Peru, six months in Peru doing the same. And then I headed down to Argentina.

And in Argentina, well, I stayed there for the rest of the time, really, 12, 15 years, something like that. And I lived in A place called Mendoza. Don't know if you're familiar with Mendoza, quite famous for the Malbec, the wine. Well I arrived there and I set up an English language magazine called The Great Vine, very quickly that took off and we were offering wine tours and developed the business into a wine, wine tourism agency, which I ran then for 10 years.

And you know, the business was mine. I was living in Argentina. I was running the business. And that's basically where I became personally fluent in Espanol from the everyday dealing with everything, you know, everything that's included, you know, that's involved with running a business. Actually I was doing it over there in Argentina, as well as you know, kind of preparing the guides and working with this, with the transport companies and, you know, the agencies in Buenos Aires and, and then back, you know, the agencies back in the UK.

So that's how I kind of, I became fluent myself in the language and learned the culture behind the language as well in all of those different countries. And then my children were born, I had two children in Argentina. Then we moved back to the UK when they were two and four. When I moved back to the UK, I was like, wow, okay.

So, a bit of a culture shock. After having been abroad for such a long time. And I noticed that my children were, they were fluent in Spanish, you know, their first language. They were losing their language very quickly back in the UK, and so I took it upon myself to make sure that they maintained their Spanish and their culture, so I, I started, that's when I started Adventures in Spanish I started delivering local Spanish lessons to children in Cheshire, where I was living at the time.

And started to build a community of language learners around, around that. And it's just, it just went from there really. So I started with just a couple of classes a week, ten years ago, to today. It's just grown and grown and grown today. I teach over 100 students a week of all different abilities, all different ages, from 6 to 60, I'll say, actually.

But my main focus is children, and helping bring the language alive for children, and helping them make language learning part of their life rather than it feeling like a chore that something that they've just got to learn to pass an exam. And that journey for me has been really important for my own family making sure that they are still, that we are still immersed in the language, immersed in the culture, and that it's, and that it's fun.

Ashley: Yeah, and I think that's, that is so needed as well. I mean, there's a, just as you were talking there, I was thinking, wow, that's, you know, your experience and being over in Argentina and, you know, you can't, you can't buy that kind of experience and that immersion in the language. And that is absolutely beautiful.

But one of the things that kind of, I wanted to talk about as well, which I don't think a lot of parents, you know, they're. At primary we get told, you know, they might flirt with a little bit of French or a little bit of Spanish. Now my children went to two different primary schools, so one learnt French, one learnt Spanish.

When they went up to the same high school, they both picked that option because that's what they knew. And actually, the high school now that my youngest is at they've done it really well. They pick their language option at year eight. So they get an extra year of it. They're not switching between, unless they've chosen both languages, they're not switching between the languages.

They really hone in on ready ahead of like GCSEs. But one of the things that we did for my oldest is we've got a friend who's French and we went over to France. And we really try to, you know, get her, because it's one thing, isn't it? You know, and I always joke about their teacher, because their French teacher is Liverpudlian and he is brilliant.

He's really good. He makes it really good fun, but he hasn't got the same kind of accent, I guess you have, because you've been immersed in that, you know, in that culture and so, we used to go to like we went to France and we had our French friend gave her some extra lessons just so she could pick up because on the listening exams, there is that.

But for me, it was more around I need it to be fun. I need for you to enjoy it, not just oh, I've got my speaking exam or oh, I've got my listening exam or whatever, you know. But I think one of the things I wanted to touch on was I'm not sure how many parents understand the actual cognitive development that language brings.

So, and I've known this for a while and I kind of thought, oh, if I've got Kelly coming on, I will just double check all these. But so not only learning a language early helps, you know, the cultural awareness, that appreciation of diversity, the confidence building that we've talked about, but also it really enhances the brain function, like problem solving, critical thinking, memory, stuff like that.

So we're already giving our kids like a leg up. in that part, but also which I don't think, when we're talking about kids learning languages, whether it's for foreign or whether it's to pass your GCSE, is actually those kids who learn multiple languages often outperform other kids who only know one language in academic areas such as maths and reading.

It makes sense, doesn't it? Because it's those problem-solving skills. And I know that when I was learning to get married in Spain, and I think we've spoke about this before. So I had to get married in Spain in Spanish. And so I had to go, okay, what's the words that I do? Flick that over. Into Spanish, you know, and then say it, and then sometimes the other way as well.

And I just think, of course it enhances our brain function. Of course it helps us with those cognitive abilities. So, you know, yes it can be fun. Yes, we can get A-G-C-S-E in it if we're, you know, if we're at high school. But actually it really helps, and I've seen this. with the older generation as well. You know, I know you said you've got some of your students who are like 60.

It really helps slow down the decline of those cognitions, and it just makes so much sense. So, Kelly, what's, there is lots of, I think, particularly of my generation, where you get, oh, you're no good at languages. And I got told that for years and years, you're no good at languages. How do we encourage that narrative, A, to be dropped, and is it true?

Like is it true first? You know, if you're, because I know for instance my, when we got married in Spain, they suddenly came up with a Bible reading that they needed somebody to do that was in Spanish, and it had to because it, it, was part of the legal agreement of you getting married in the church. And so my brother-in-law, we literally just went, there's, there's this passage.

Can you read it? As he walked in, like not, this is not the night before the morning of this was as he walked into the church. Can you read this? He did not know Spanish and he read it perfectly. He had no clue what he said, but his pronunciation

was amazing because growing up, he had had. Spanish and French, Japanese and German kids, students, all coming to stay at his house to learn English, to be immersive.

So he had the ear. So, is it true? Let's really look at that. I think it's a myth. I'm hoping you're going to tell me it's a myth, just because I spoke about this as a student. That if you, you know, If you're no good at languages, you're just no good, and that's it. Is that true?

Kelly: Oh, wow, okay. There's something I want, there's a couple of things I'd like to just respond to.

Ashley: Go

Kelly: on. And I'll, and I'll come back to it, which is hopefully going to answer that question. First of all, the, well you were talking about the benefits of a child learning a language, and you said, you know yourself, there are so many benefits. And the multitasking, I think, as well is one thing.

What happens when a child is learning different languages, is that, as a parent, I saw this myself in my own children, who are now multilingual, by the way, they speak Spanish English fluently Welsh fluently, and are learning French is that initially, they seemed to be behind their peers.

at school with what they were, with what they were learning, because we were learning it in both Spanish and English, and it worried me, if I'm honest. I was like, oh gosh, you know they, you're learning something in two languages, so it is going to take you a little bit longer, potentially, than a child who's learning it in one language.

I mean, that's just obvious. But can I just say to parents who have got children who are multilingual, who, or who are learning a second language, stick with it. Stick with it. It doesn't happen overnight. You might feel that your child, you know, we don't like to compare, do we? But you might feel that your child is, you know, a little bit behind their peers, but look at the benefit in the long term, which is what I'll get to in a minute, of what you're providing for your child.

And it's, and it's an absolute gift. To be able to give a child the gift of learning another language when they're young. It's, to me, I think it's one of the most

beautiful gifts we can give to our children, because of the effects it will have later on in their life, just like you said. You also mentioned immersion. Oh, I can't, I can't stress enough how important immersion is when we're learning a language. And it, you don't have to, you know, physically, you know, move to a different country. You know, I mean, I'll get to that in a minute, but you don't have to do that. There are other ways in the home you can immerse yourself in the language that make it feel that, that, that raise the level, I suppose, of the language that you are exposing your child to, and, you know, and ultimately exposing yourself too as well.

Things like Have some Spanish music on in the background watching some Spanish TV shows with your child. I've just got an updated one of my, my blog posts with my top 10 Spanish TV programs for children. You know, I'm not saying you have to put yourself, you know, put it, stick your child in front of their iPad to, you know, it's just.

Extra things that you can do. Spanish colour games. I don't know, you know, labelling things. There's just, there's lots and lots of things. I've got loads of tips on my, on my blog about things that parents can do with their child to help keep them immersed in the language in the home. And that kind of brings me on to the second part of, you know, of, of what we, what you were talking about there and, and how as an adult, how it affects us, you know, when we're older.

You can come at this in two ways. First of all, from somebody who's never learned a language in their life, trying to learn it for the first time. It's going to be challenging, of course it is. Of course it's going to be challenging. Or you come to it as an adult who's maybe learnt the language at school, and is, you know, refreshing and trying to see if they can remember what they learnt.

There's another element there as well, and that is family learning. So you've got a child who wants to learn a language, who you want them to learn a language. You used to learn it, or you want to learn it, well why not just do it together? You know, why not include yourself in their learning together?

And that's a really, it's very encouraging for a child when a parent is onboard with their language learning because they can see that it matters and it and it's kind of part of the family routine to be learning together. Okay, it is, of course, slightly easier to pick up a language when you're older if you've learnt it when you're younger.

Of course it is. Of course it is. It's a little bit like, I suppose, riding a bike, you know. You learn how to ride a bike and you don't ride it for ages and it takes you a while. You're a bit wobbly but you get going in the end, you know. You but I think it's about having the support around you that you need and keeping a positive attitude, because it's very easy to say, oh I'm no good at it, oh I've been trying to learn for ages and it's just not working, I'm too old, I was never too good at languages, I'm sorry, but for me they're just excuses.

I mean, I do think that they're just excuses. And it depends what level of perfection you're aiming for in your language learning. We have to kind of set realistic goals, I think, for ourselves. Do you want to be fluent in a month? Or, you know, well that's a little bit unrealistic. Do you want to be able to maybe communicate a little bit better when you go on holiday next time?

Or do you want to, you know, be learning the language because you want to support a child? I think, you know, keeping it, keeping it real and keeping it relevant and, and definitely , keeping it realistic, I think are the three, three keys for us as, as adults to learning, you know, to learning a language.

And you mentioned immersion. And one of the things that I found, I started to do last year, I launched Immersion Trips. So, for my, for me, myself, you know, I perfected my language, being immersed in it, and for 20 years in Argentina, I mean, not everybody has that opportunity, Ashley, right? So what I did is I combined now my love of language and my love of travel, of course, as well as my experience of running a travel agency in Argentina, and I now run Spanish Immersion Trips.

As something for my students to be able to go and put everything that they're learning into actual real-life practice with people, you know, with native speakers in Spain. So, if parents get the opportunity to travel at some point to Spain with a child, I mean, that's absolutely definitely the best way for them to tune their ear in, practice, and get that confidence boost that we need.

Ashley: And I think that is so, so important. I mean, you know, I, I truly believe that my brother-in-law had, we have, had he not had the experience of lots of Spanish students come, you know, talk, teach him a little bit, but actually hear their accent rather than, you know, just a teacher. I don't mean just a teacher.

Please don't.

Kelly: No, I know what you mean. Yeah.

Ashley: You know what I mean though, but, but an English person that has learned it. And, and actually he, for him to just pick that up, that was years later. You know, we're talking probably 10 years later and he's been able to do that because he's had that experience.

So immersion is so, so important. I think absolutely. And yeah, really that is exciting and we'll under the in the show notes, we will put all of, I've just had a quick look at Kelly's blog around, children TV in Spanish, and that is really cool. So I am going to have a look at that.

I love a bit of Dora the Explorer, but there's lots more on there as well. And actually I get really excited, so I'm not fluent in Spanish. I used to be a lot better than I am, but again, that's because I've not practiced. And it would be really cool for me to get back into. So I'm kind of like now going, oh, I wonder if there's a podcast, I can listen to that, you know, that might do both for me, because I wouldn't be able to just like kids TV.

I might be okay. Some words, but actually just things like that and, and just bring that element of fun back in, you know? So that is super cool. I love that. And if you, you know, I will put the links to the blog underneath and obviously Kelly's website and where all the links that you can capture. But also as well, if you are thinking about taking an adventure with your children and they're learning Spanish at the moment, we'll, we'll actually put that link in the show notes as well, Kelly.

Have you got any kind of tips for us getting started or maybe putting a little bit of fun back in? So like one of the, one of the things that we have planned over summer with my kids With Finn, he's gonna, he's learned Spanish is we're going to do tapas night. My French friend, I'm very lucky, is also speaks Spanish, so she, we will invite them around as well.

So that, that, you know, we are trying a little bit of Spanish, we'll put a bit of Spanish music on, so just kind of. You know, help bring a little bit of fun back to, oh, I've got homework to do or whatever. What can we do to either, if they're getting started, if you're an adult like me and you want to start a new language, or if we want to put a little bit of fun back in, particularly for our teens, I think, who are learning languages.

Any tips?

Kelly: Yeah, absolutely. Lots of tips, but I'll just give you a few.

Ashley: Yes, because you can go to Kelly's website for more tips. Her blogs are fantastic. But, just a couple of tips as we finish the project.

Kelly: Okay, so I always, one of the biggest things that I always, I can't stress enough. is to search out your local connections.

So your local Spanish connections, pretty much like what you've just said there, Ashley. So, wherever you live in your local community, do you have a Spanish tapas bar? Do you have a, I don't know, a Mexican neighbour? You know, is there a family from Colombia, for example, that lives nearby? You know, anything, any kind of Spanish connection that you can find.

Make, connect, connect with it. Yeah. That's definitely something that I would suggest and, and to try and, you know, meet up with other people who are also into, you know, jumping on your, you know, the same kind of language learning journey as you. It's funny that you should mention keeping the language alive over the summer, Ashley, because there's a massive gap now of six weeks where those children that are, have been learning are going to, you know, not do anything for six weeks.

Some of the, those, you know, older children that are preparing for GCSEs next, next year will be like, oh gosh, you know, what do I do? But also a way to keep it fun. So I've actually, just yesterday it should be going up on my blog this week, I think. I'm launching a Spanish Summer Language Challenge, which is, I mean, it's, it's something that that parents can do independently, it's something that you can do with your child, it's also great for teens.

And it's 31 days of a different language challenge each day. So that could be, and it ranges in ability, so, for example, one day you might be challenged to write a postcard in Espanol. You might think, you know, crikey, I don't, I haven't got enough Spanish for that. Well, you know, don't worry. Another day, it would be you know, sit down and, and design your dream holiday to a Spanish speaking country.

You know, just something each day, all the way through August, that keeps that connection with the language alive and that doesn't involve you literally just sitting down going through books, which I think can sometimes be a bit boring. So my, you know, my top tip is just try and keep it alive and do a little bit every day.

Ashley: That is, that sounds perfect for us as a family, but also absolutely brilliant. We will We will also talk when we finish podcast about popping that into the resilient kid group as well, if you want Kelly, because I think that'd be so useful for a lot of families. I'm a big one for a little bit of work every day, and that is not because I want to be Miss Trunchbull, but what I have noticed with a lot of children is they go back in September, they've had the whole summer off, they go back in September, the oil is just not there.

And it takes till Christmas for them to get back into that school mode. Whereas actually, doing a little bit, you know, even if it's max 30 minutes a day, not every day, but a few times a week to just keep that, that would be, so that falls in perfectly with that kind of theory. What I just want to say as we finish, Kelly, is You have mentioned that kind of language journey and reaching out to those people who are on a language journey with you, or, or maybe that are, say, Spanish or Mexican that would love to teach you stuff or just, you know, for them to be able to speak and stuff like that.

But actually, I think it is so, you know, we started off, why is it so important? And actually, I think to come back round to that, for me is, this is not just a language journey, is it? This is a lifelong journey, because like you say, if you learn a little bit when you're smaller, as you get older and you go back to it, it's a little bit easier.

But also just the benefits from brain health, the benefits from confidence, like this really is a lifelong journey, isn't it, learning a language?

Kelly: It really is, and I think it's just a beautiful thing to be able to do, to share as a family and let's, you know, make the world a more tolerant place ourselves by bridging that cultural gap and learning a language that is different to English.

I mean, what more can we do, really, for the world, you know?

Ashley: It really is a gift. And it has been a gift to have you today, Kelly. Thank you very much for joining us. Lovely to have you here. Thank you very much.

Guys. Everything will be in the show notes as usual you can subscribe to the listeners lounge, which is our little podcast platform.

If you sign up there, you'll get all the extra tips and tips that Kelly was telling us about, but we will absolutely put her links in, so go and check her out. Thank you very much. Muchas gracias.

Kelly: Oh, thank you so much, Ashley. Muchísimas gracias.