

**Claire Darmstadter**

Hey everybody, I'm joined today by Daisey Velazquez, UW-Madison senior majoring in Spanish education with a certificate in Chicane/Latine Studies, or Chicla as we call it. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me today.

**Daisey Velazquez**

No, I'm so happy to be here. Thank you for inviting me!

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, thanks. So I'm also a transfer and in Spanish and education and Chicla like you. So we have a very similar background. But we're a couple years apart. And I don't know too much about your past very well. So can you just give us a very broad overview of kind of why you're going into these programs and degrees and kind of how you got here to UW with your educational and linguistic background?

**Daisey Velazquez**

Yeah, of course. So I graduated high school in 2013 now, I think, and I actually went into culinary arts first. I have an associate's degree in culinary arts, and I was a sous chef for about almost two years. And then I took a hard look at my life. And I was like, I don't know if I could be in the kitchen 16 hours a day, for the rest of my adult life. So I decided to go back to school. And my sister works as a kindergarten teacher in Woodstock, Illinois, and she was able to get me a job in the district as a one-on-one assistant for a high school student. And I was like, well, I'll get my transfer degree, and I'll see what's next. And that while I was helping him out, I worked with him and with a Spanish classroom in general, and they're like, we just wish you were a teacher, like, you're amazing. Not to toot my own. They really encouraged me to pursue an education degree in Spanish, and they really inspired me to continue in this process. A big reason why I was leaning towards Spanish is I love the language, I grew up with the language. It's been in my family forever. And it's how I communicate at home and with loved ones. And I was like, well, what if I did, what if I did teach. So that's how I chose Spanish education. How I chose UW. I don't know. I applied to UW-Madison, University of Iowa and Northern Illinois University. And UW Madison was close to home ish, and accepted the most transfer credits. And I think that was the kind of seal for me to come to UW. But that's a short-ish overview.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And if I understand the UW programs correctly, they're kind of phasing out that like secondary language education program. So I don't know, have you been privy to any of the rationale of why that's happening? Or are you kind of feeling any effects of them kind of being at the end of it? Or what's kind of the situation there?

**Daisey Velazquez**

Yes, definitely. So when I got accepted into the program, or into UW, I wasn't told any of this, I wasn't told that the Spanish ed program was on the way out, and things like that. I had seen that they had a really good Spanish program and a really good education program sound like well, their Spanish education program must be great. And sadly, the language world language

education program is on the way out, like you said, it's turning into a master's program. So I do kind of feel like we were put on a back burner. So Francois, is what I know him as, was the director of the program. And this year, he is no longer as far as I know. And so there was like, a little bit of lack of leadership a little bit like loss, like I felt kind of abandoned, if that's the right word to use. But, Yanli Zhu, our supervisor has been amazing and supportive, and she tells us kind of, like, everything we have to know. But I also feel bad for her in a way because it's like, who's guiding you who's helping you? So yeah, it's been interesting definitely. I don't know much about the graduate program. Someone in our cohort was doing it as far as I know, but she ended up dropping out of the program. So I'm not sure I don't know any of the details or anything like that.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

And I think it's for me really surprising, because usually with flagship universities for different states, they kind of have the most programming available. And as a main kind of looking into all the different universities in the state, it's like, oh my gosh, wow, they are totally like outdoing UW-Madison, because they have all these language education degrees. And so it's a little bit surprising to me that we're kind of getting rid of these programs, but I guess, I don't know budgetary or whatever, you can kind of face challenges in different areas. So going a little bit back, you grew up outside of Wisconsin, so you kind of have the perspective of Spanish in different states, and then Spanish in Madison. So do you feel like between the different areas you lived Spanish is valued and treated in the same kind of way? Or just multilingualism? in general? Do you feel like on campus or just in Madison, there's a supportive attitude towards individuals who may speak more than one or a non-English language?

### **Daisey Velazquez**

That's an interesting question. I grew up in Elgin, Illinois, there's a big Latinx population. And so, like, you'll go to the grocery store, or grocery stores around here, and there will be produce from Latin America, there's whole grocery stores and strip malls that are in Spanish and stuff like that. And on campus, if we see everything is in English, like the grocery store for students, like Fresh Market doesn't have a lot of international foods, even though we have a huge international student population. As far as, like, for me, the foods I grew up with, we're not accessible on campus. Like, I think I've used this example before in different scenarios, but limes here at the grocery store, like 10, for \$1, limes are an essential part of our food, and limes in Madison, it's like 80 cents a lime or \$1 a lime, I don't know. And that's a very small example. And maybe doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. But it's definitely something you notice coming from a community that there is, I think, in the church I grew up with, eight Spanish mass is offered on a Sunday. And I'm not even aware that there's a Spanish community at the church on campus, so the Catholic Church on campus. So it's just interesting to see that shift, right? Like, oh, I can access anything I want. Food, dance groups, music, literally anything in Spanish where I grew up, and then going to Madison, which I was told was so liberal, so progressive, so inclusive, so this and that, and not seeing that as much. So that's my opinion.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

And you came to the university kind of with a little bit of a non traditional background or kind of that transfer experience. And it's very hard, especially right now, this is like my first here, like oh, my gosh during COVID, like, that's not fun, either. But what have been some ways that you've kind of found community among individuals with similar backgrounds linguistically, ethnically, culturally, have there been ways that you've been able to try to overcome some of the issues or the disadvantages that come with transferring in?

### **Daisey Velazquez**

Yeah, like you said, transferring has been hard. I'm an older student. And so I didn't live in the dorms. So I didn't form that camaraderie a lot of people do form coming in as a freshman. And so it has been really hard and I think my first semester or two I struggled a lot, just making friends and getting to know people and stuff. But I think the Chicla program was one of my biggest helpers, with like, just being able to talk to more people and even if I don't have super close friends on campus, I have those people that I'm like, *Oh, I know that person*. Like I can say hi to that person, I can have a conversation with that person. The Thursday luncheons with Chicla. I think we're one of my greatest memories on campus. Hearing other people's stories and being able to share my story and eat delicious food has been amazing. Sadly COVID hit and that was kind of all taken away a little bit my last year at the university but they definitely helped a lot. And I also did have to work a lot. So I found friends and stuff through work, I worked at UW catering. But I did feel like I missed out on experiencing like extracurriculars. Like being a big part of the LSU or the Multicultural Center as a whole. I didn't really spend much time there. So, and looking back, it's like, oh, well, that would have been nice to like, go to, like, general body meetings of different groups and stuff like that. But yeah, overall work and Chicla were the things I connected through to other people.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

And now you are in a student teaching position, which is a very different form of connection this year with everything being online as somebody who's going into language education, and it's really important to be in person and talking and conversing. How has that been? Has it been absolutely horrible, hasn't been manageable, like what is going on there?

### **Daisey Velazquez**

Student Teaching has been a whole experience, I don't know how else to say. So I started practicum. Last year and we did the whole year. So I was in a second grade DLI classroom. And it was amazing. I appreciate and love my students now also. But it's a different bond when you're in person, and you see everyone and you talk to them every single day and things like that. And so we were kind of -- come spring break that lockdown, we went virtual, and second graders had a hard time. We didn't have synchronous class with them. So you would make weekly and try to have people interact with them. But it was really, really hard. And then middle school last semester, I student taught. And at the beginning, it was like not a lot of kids turn on their cameras. But once you build that bond, more kids started participating, more kids started talking, more kids started turning on cameras, and then it feels a little bit more like a normal classroom. Definitely still very challenging technological issues, connectivity issues, everything that you could think of, so more and more classroom stuff with kids not participating doing work,

or whatever it may be. But we did get to form that connection, and how the program is set up right now, then we switch, right. So this semester, I'm at a high school. And it's kind of like starting over. It's like, okay, please talk. Okay, just please turn on the camera. And it's been really rough. I think maybe we're getting there. But it's been, I think we're starting our fifth week. And it's still really hard to get students to participate. No student turns on their camera, I think I have one in five classes. So that's about 100 students. And I get one or two a day. And then also, just with time and stuff, we only see them two hours a week, per class. And in a normal school year, we would get them maybe an hour a day, 50 minutes a day. So it's a lot different than instruction and how you said like teaching language online is so different. Because although yes, they can interact with the chat, and we can see language being produced through the chat, learning a second language is communication, right? It's that it's the verbal, and we're not seeing it a ton. So it's really hard when kids are like, *Oh, well, I want to better my pronunciation* and it's like, okay, well then open your mic. And, like, I just need you to talk. So that's been a very challenging part. The pronunciation aspect of it. And the speaking part of it in class, we can see everyone and how they're doing and how they're progressing. And it's been really difficult on virtual.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, I am very glad that I'm hopefully two years separated and I may not have it as rough. And so when you're a student teacher, it's a little bit uncomfortable, I guess, like power dynamics-wise, because you feel like you don't have the power in the classroom. You don't have the authority, but at the same time, you're the one who's in the classes and you're learning some of the more I guess contemporary ideas related to your field. So whether it's Spanish, or any languages, like gender inclusive language, or it's like comprehensible input or all these different theories that some of your like partner teachers may not have learned in their program. I mean, they could still be learning it now, but you have that, like hands on contact experience with it. So do you feel like you're able to bring some ideas that you learned in the classroom into your other classroom? Or is that kind of uncomfortable sometimes?

### **Daisey Velazquez**

Yeah, definitely. I think with my high school, CT. He's younger, he graduated a few years ago, I want to say less than five years ago from UW-Madison. So I think our teaching philosophies line up and a lot of ways, more like content-based learning, more you like everything we learn in class, right? However, in the middle school, I am truly grateful for my CT and that experience, but she did have some of the older theories of learning, you know, drilling, the grammar and verb charts, and all of the ways that I learned French or I was taught French. I'm not fluent, so maybe not learned. But, but a lot of those older ways of like, okay, grammar, grammar, grammar, and I'm like, *Okay, can we play a song?*, okay, like, let's do this or that. And, well, she let me do whatever I wanted, like, obviously, she helped me produce stuff like that, but she was very supportive of exploring new ways of learning and, and acquiring language. So it was definitely helpful. I think another part of it. They tell us, right, like, interpreting language, not just translating all the time. And it's so much harder when you have this much screen to produce something, right. So with a language, I had a student say, like, we don't really understand your use, you use too much Spanish. But then with a program they say you have to use 90%,

Spanish and this and that. And so I think it's been a lot more of that translation, a lot more different things that in theory are great, right? 90 to 100% Spanish in the classroom and all these different theories. But in practice, you definitely have to adjust, like sometimes you just have to tell them that *leer* means to read. But yes, back to your question. Sorry, I'm rambling a little, but I think we've had overall in my teaching experience, a good mixture of like, what actually works in practice, and what theories I've been able to bring in and apply. So I think it's a good mix to see like, okay, we're heading towards what we're being taught, while still seeing how students are reacting to it and such.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, I think it's so important right? To take the kind of theoretical stuff we learn in class and put a little dose of reality because sometimes what you do in a lab, what you do in a controlled experiment doesn't always work out. And like you said, students have to transition, you can't just say, okay, the best theory says 100%, Spanish, we're going to do that if they've been used to 20% Spanish. And so it definitely requires a lot of outside factors. So just to wrap us up, in celebration of multilingualism, can you give me one reason if you can boil it down to one, why we should celebrate and view speaking more than one language as a superpower? And you can answer English or Spanish in both whatever makes you feel most comfortable.

**Daisey Velazquez**

I think the reason we should cherish and appreciate language multilingualism is it's communication. It's life. It's how we talk to loved ones. It's how we meet new people. It's how we connect, without language without communication, like, how would we run the world, right? So I always think of it as like, you can express yourself in a whole new world, you can meet a whole new world of people. So I think that's the beauty of language and multilingualism, just that humanity aspect.

**Claire Darmstadter**

For sure. Well, thank you so much. I know self-serving wise, I've learned so much and I really enjoyed this conversation, but I think other people will as well. So I really appreciate your time. I know you're super busy and thank you and have a great rest of your night.

**Daisey Velazquez**

Thank you so much. It was so nice talking to you.