

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I am joined today by Evelyn Montenegro, a student at Madison Memorial High School. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me. So it'd be great if you could just give us a very general overview of your educational and linguistic background and how you might want to use your language skills in the future, maybe in a career or something else down the line.

Evelyn Montenegro

I am bilingual in English and Spanish and also being bilingual helps a lot. And also when I'm when I figure out what I'd like to do when I'm older, probably what is in mind is a criminal defense attorney. And it would help me and future clients with both English and Spanish because you know, there's most people that just have English, and it's like a very good help to have both languages.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure, and so working in law, obviously, language is really important, as we say, you know, anything that you say can and will be used against you. So when thinking about how language may impact your clients a little bit, you talked about the value of being multilingual, but it would be great if you just kind of talk a little bit more about that. And do you feel like you've had help kind of developing your language skills in both languages, when it comes to legal terms, all those really specific things you need to know because it's really important to use super precise language and loss. So is that something where you've had exposure to already? Or maybe is it more like college or in another program down the line you'll have to learn some of that specific jargon and terms?

Evelyn Montenegro

Yeah, I've built on my both languages, because I had to pass an English class in seventh grade so I can be fluent in English. And I feel like I've built more and yes, in like college, I probably know more about the legal things like to develop in Spanish, which would help a lot.

Claire Darmstadter

And so as a native Spanish speaker, I believe you said you took some high school Spanish courses. Can you just talk a little bit about what that experience was like? Do you feel like the language you brought to the class was supported and celebrated? Were the teachers constantly telling you that there was a different form of Spanish you needed to speak? Did you ever feel like the teacher was kind of expecting you to help them by helping other students or like correct other people or kind of be the model Spanish speaker for the class?

Evelyn Montenegro

For me, personally, I've never experienced it, but I have a younger sister. Because there's two different types of Spanish classes that are just like the normal learning the Spanish and then there's a DLI, I'm in the DLI because I'm a native Spanish speaker. And then in like, that normal like learning you're learning from the Spaniard. Because my part of the family is from Mexico. So we use different types of words. Like, it's just sometimes some people are in the Spanish

class. And it's like what is happening, because it's something different from my native language. But for me, in my class, my DLI class, it's everyone from different places, you have it as well, and Mexico and everything, we all understand each other, which makes it like better for us.

Claire Darmstadter

And can you talk a little bit about how DLI works in the older kid level, because obviously, the younger kids, they're doing all the different subjects and there's kind of a mix of both languages. But of course, in high school, you're having different class periods, and you're kind of switching teachers and classrooms and stuff. So can you kind of talk about what DLI looks like for you at an older level?

Evelyn Montenegro

So we just speak Spanish, the whole class. And right now what we're doing in my class is a debate. So you're like, it's like an English language arts but in Spanish. And it helps you know more about the, like, more of the punctuation and stuff like that then other than just the basics of the like, *how are you today?* It's just like you because you already know in your head. So it's like more. You're already speaking it, but you're learning more at the same time.

Claire Darmstadter

You're developing more sophisticated language skills that kind of sounds like. Can you talk a little bit about how you feel about Madison as a city? Do you feel like it's generally favorable and supportive of people who may speak Spanish or another language besides English? Do you ever feel like people are shaming you or making you feel bad for speaking Spanish or what's it kind of like in the community?

Evelyn Montenegro

At times, it is like, you feel very welcomed. It's either how your Spanish is or how like, no matter how good or bad you are, they help you like the Madison community. And what I found in most of the MMSD schools is that they do support DLI and native speaking Spanish speakers, which helps a lot. Because my friend, her sister, she didn't know how to speak English, but they yet supported her to keep learning with her native language. But learning English, which was in a DLI class.

Claire Darmstadter

And so then finally, the last question is, as somebody who speaks more than one language, we tell little kids all the time that speaking more than one language is a superpower. So can you give me one reason, you can answer in English, you can answer in Spanish, you can answer in a mix of both, why we should see people who speak more than one language as having a superpower?

Evelyn Montenegro

Speaking two languages is like a superpower to many people, because you have the power of not just knowing one language, but both languages and knowing to understand, like, there's some points in time where you're like, oh, I wish I knew this language, or I knew this language.

It's just like you feel good inside to know that you know those languages and it's just like, it's either if you don't know it, or if you do know it, and you just like, want to learn more of it.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure, well, thank you so much. I appreciate you fitting me into your very busy school schedule, and I hope you have a great rest your school year.

Evelyn Montenegro

Yep, you too.