

Claire Darmstadter

Hey, everybody, I am joined today by Juan Hernandez, a freshman at La Follette High School who speaks Spanish and English. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me!

So to start us off, it would be great if you could just give us an overview of your linguistic and educational background and maybe some ways that you want to be able to use your languages in the future, whether it's a job or other opportunities.

Juan Hernandez

Well, I personally, as a kid, I thought like, the other languages weren't really going to help me in life. I actually saw them as a stress because I was like, I'm going to school having to do two languages, double homework. And in elementary schools, and what third grade was like one of my hardest years, because the teacher was like, really, really annoying. And like, she wouldn't stop bugging me, you know? Well, ever since it's like, well, fourth grade, I had a perfect year, honestly, like the teacher was really nice with me. And it's like, ever since then, I've actually like tried it at school. Like, yeah, well, because well, back when I was in elementary, I wanted to be an architect. And I was like, if I want to, like get clients, I need to learn how to speak both languages fluently. Now, it's like I think it was in sixth grade, or seventh that we had like a research about a career that we wanted to do in the future. And I saw that an architect, it can be really stressful. And like, I don't really like being under a lot of pressure. So then, like, the whole eighth grade, I wasn't sure of what I really wanted to be in life. But now, I've thought about it. And I've actually got inspired by my uncle. He has one he doesn't, it's not his company, like he works in a painting company. And he gets paid pretty well. And then I'm like, what if I open up my own painting company, as well as things like home repairs, in other words, going like, I want to get into real estate, and like invest in houses, buy them and then like sell them for profit. Like, that's my dream for me. And well, I think school like learning both languages is gonna help me a lot, as well as it can help other people.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. That is so true, right? Having that multilingual ability will really help you in that position. And I was also really excited to hear that you participated in the dual language immersion program here in Madison. So obviously, when you're five years old, you can't decide to participate in the program, right? Your parents or guardians kind of sign you up for it. So were you happy that you were put in the program? Would you choose to do it again, if you had the chance to what was kind of your feeling about that whole experience?

Juan Hernandez

Well, I would say it was fun nonetheless. Because as a little kid, I didn't really speak English in my household. I spoke it a little bit with my cousins, but it wasn't like — when I got to school, it was like a challenge. And as a little kid, I like challenges. And well, I made it through. And nonetheless, during middle school, it was okay, because it wasn't the best, but it wasn't the worst either.

Claire Darmstadter

In middle school, you also took kind of like a run-of-the-mill normal French class. So I would imagine that was very, very different from what you had experienced in that DLI program. So, did you like that experience? Did you really prefer the DLI? How did you feel about those two different types of language learning?

Juan Hernandez

Well, I mean, in DLI now I wouldn't really count as learning two languages because I know both languages. So in eighth grade, I decided to take French and well, I did learn some words, but I'm gonna be honest with COVID I actually forgot most of the words that I learned because we were only like, what, half a year and well, couldn't have classes anymore. Like, out of well. It was a fun class nonetheless, actually like having that struggle of like, learning how to see numbers in French, how to say hi. And then having quizzes like it was, I found it fun.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And looking at kind of Madison as a whole so outside of your school community, do you feel like Madison as a city embraces and celebrates people that speak more than one language? Or do you ever feel like in certain places or certain environments like you shouldn't speak Spanish because people are gonna judge you? Or how do you think Madison kind of treats people who speak more than one language?

Juan Hernandez

Well, me that I talk Spanish and English, I've never really had an issue with speaking both of my languages. Like, I feel like maybe other people do. I think Madison isn't really like a city that's like, really really racist. You know, like, I don't really think there's a lot of racism in Madison, like, maybe in some places, but I've never — actually actually did experience at once with a neighbor. But it wasn't because of that. It was because he was blaming my little brother for stabbing his dog or something like that, but we weren't really home from the day before? And well, that's the only experience that was like racist that I've ever experienced. That's been fine for me.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so maybe you know, Madison's a little bit smaller than Chicago, or Milwaukee or Minneapolis. We might not have the same level of linguistic discrimination. So it seems good that we generally support languages and people that speak more than one. So just to wrap this up the last question to kind of celebrate multilingualism and why we think it's important, can you give me one reason why speaking more than one language is a good thing. If you want to answer in Spanish in English, you can but whatever you want.

Juan Hernandez

Do you want me to answer in both languages?

Claire Darmstadter

If you want to that'd be great, but no pressure to!

Juan Hernandez

Alright, I'll answer in English first. I think I'm having to speak well, no, no, I wouldn't say having like — speaking two languages is like such an advantage in life. Because not only can help you get a job, but actually make you go into a higher position than as a co-worker that you have, you'll be earning a bit more maybe like any type of thing with like, any type of job that you can speak Spanish is like a window that they can open so they can get more clients. More business going. And yeah,

Yo creo que hablar español y inglés u cualquier otro idioma aquí en Madison es muy conveniente para muchas personas porque te puede abrir ventas a muchos más trabajos y también te puede ayudar a comunicarte con cualquier otra persona.

[I think speaking Spanish and English, or any other language here in Madison, is helpful for many people because it can open doors to a lot more jobs and also can help you communicate with any other person.]

Claire Darmstadter

Well, great, thank you so much. I appreciate your time. And I think others will really enjoy your perspective. So thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me and I hope the rest of the school year goes well, even though it seems a little bit difficult with COVID.

Juan Hernandez

It is, but thank you.