

Claire Darmstadter

Hello, everybody, I am so excited to be joined today by Karen Haygood, founder of Creando Languages here in Madison, which happens to be the school I work at. Thank you so much for taking a couple minutes to chat with me!

Karen Haygood

Thank you so much

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so first it would be great if you could just give us a super general overview of your educational and linguistic background and how you ended up opening your own school.

Karen Haygood

Yeah, so I majored in Political Science, Latin American Studies, and Spanish. I have been working with kiddos since I was 17 years old. When I came to the United States, I started working with a school district in Janesville as an ELL assistant. And through my own experience working with children, I had a passion to be able to help them explore more language and celebrate language, culture, and diversity here in Madison. So that's why I was inspired to open Creando.

Claire Darmstadter

And are there any specific philosophies or pedagogical methods that you ascribe to? So how do you kind of balance structured versus less structured time and languages and play and all those things?

Karen Haygood

Yes, so Creando was founded with the five-sense learning approach. It is focused on centering the child, but also integrating instead of separating language and culture. So what we do, in terms of other philosophies that are our main goal is to create a community of learners that learns from and loves each other in a mixed-age classroom. So we want them to be immersed in the language 90% of the time. And then we have a more structured learning time in the morning when we explore the language and culture in skills that they need when they go to kindergarten through the five senses with dance, music, cooking, sensory activities, science, outdoor exploration, and the afternoon is more chill and relaxed for them with more free time to play.

Claire Darmstadter

And so especially in Madison and Milwaukee, it's pretty common for kids to participate in DLI programs that start in kindergarten or first grade. But our program actually begins when the kiddos are toddlers, maybe two or three years old. So can you talk about why it's super important to have exposure to bilingual education when they're really young?

Karen Haygood

Yes. The earlier you can start the better. When they are little, they are like sponges. So our main goal is to immerse kiddos early on. To be surrounded by the language and culture and make it part of their life. So when they are really young, everything is the same. So when we are talking about language — so most of them start when they are two. So they have most of their native language already, and for them they are learning another way to say it. So compared to when we work with kiddos at our Exploratorium after school, they know they are learning a language, and for them it is more like I'm not sure anymore. So the earlier the better. It's easier, it comes faster, it becomes more part of their life, there's not rejection. It's also just a magical time, it's just natural.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And so many of our Creando families and just more broadly, families in DLI programs don't speak Spanish as one of their primary languages at home. So how are these families able to support the linguistic development of their children kind of outside of school hours? So is the focus more on just building their general metalinguistic language skills in English and then kind of let school take care of transferring the Spanish part, or would it be good to read Spanish books and learn some Spanish vocab even if the parents don't necessarily speak the language? or how can they support their kids best?

Karen Haygood

Yeah, so at least one parent in 50% of our families do speak Spanish. So for the other 50%, what we do is we created a Facebook group where we share resources, we have a newsletter we send every month with things they can do at home. We have a newsletter squad where they can learn about ways to incorporate the five senses with Spanish. They're all very interested in how they can support raising their children bilingual. They're always asking what they can do at home. But most of the kids are with us every weekday, all day long, so families can support with books and other activities, but I think we are the primary resource.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, for sure. And so within our little Creando family, we're in a little bubble where everyone's very supportive of multilingualism. But we also live the other half of our lives in the greater Madison community. So do you feel like Madison is pretty hospitable to people with multilingual abilities, does it kind of depend what language you're talking about, or where we are in the community?

Karen Haygood

I think Madison is pretty supportive. I always meet people who are excited to learn about Creando, or excited to learn more about Spanish. When I was in college, I did see some divide of where you're from, who you are. But I think in general, people are very eager to build community and support each other's backgrounds and culture.

Claire Darmstadter

So you know, it's a very exciting time to be in Madison, we have a lot of student groups that are involved in a lot of activism. We're also expanding our programming. So can you talk about why you decided to open a new center, kind of how that's going to change how we operate here? And if listeners are interested in following along or perhaps even enrolling their children as students, how can they learn more?

Karen Haygood

Yeah, so we have a very unique approach, and part of the reason behind our expansion is to reach more families in the Madison community. We want to be able to expand Creando's goal of celebrating language and culture with everybody that we can. So the number one place to go is Instagram. I think families can see what we do on a day-to-day basis. We also have our website and our Facebook.

Claire Darmstadter

Yes, I will leave links to all of those below. So we tell little kids all the time that it's a superpower to speak more than one language. So can you give me one reason, you can answer in English, in Spanish, a mix of both, whatever you want, why it's a superpower to speak more than one language?

Karen Haygood

I have to think about that, because there are a lot of reasons I could give! I think it just really opens the door to learn about everybody else and to celebrate everybody. Being able to make connections with people through language and being able to celebrate everybody's unique language and culture and everything is beautiful.

Claire Darmstadter

Yes. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate all your time. We're very busy right now, so if there is any noise in the background, it's little kiddos playing and learning and having fun, but thank you again for telling all of us about Creando!