

Claire Darmstadter

Hey, everybody, I'm joined today by Mandy Rios, 10th grader at La Follette in Madison, thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me today.

It would be great if you could start off by giving us an overview of kind of your educational experience and how that interacted with languages, and how you might want to use your language skills in the future.

Mandy Rios

Well, growing up, my education was really based around DLI, stuff like that. But when I first was growing up, my first language was Spanish. But as I grew up in school, and I was revolved around English speaking, people and stuff like that I had to adapt. And well, now I can't really speak Spanish, as well as I could. And well. Now that that's happened with the education I had when I was little, now I want to study it more and try to implement what I used to know and what I want to know, into my future education. I also kind of want to be a chef. And I feel like knowing Spanish and doing stuff like that could really help because they could let me go back to things about my culture and stuff like that. And they would let me travel when I travel around the world if I can. I'm trying to cook, so for other people, I can probably use the knowledge I already have from school, and stuff like that.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And I know you mentioned that growing up, you felt like you had that Spanish background, but then over the years through school, you kind of switch to being stronger in English. And typically, it's a little bit the opposite, where there's a really strong social pressure for individuals who grew up speaking another language besides English to assimilate to English. And it's always telling people that their accents are good enough, or that you need to be better with grammar, and there's a lot of negative connotations or kind of issues there. So do you feel like for you is almost the opposite, where you feel really confident in English, but it's like, oh, I'm not as confident in Spanish. And I feel like, I don't know, I don't always know exactly how to say what I want to say. And I really feel like I have a pressure to improve that or what does that kind of like for you?

Mandy Rios

Yes, it's kind of like that. I kind of feel bad whenever I have to talk in Spanish with my parents cuz some things I have to stutter and be like, *how do I say this in Spanish?* It's kind of disheartening for me whenever I have to do it, I do have a pressure to try and do my best and speak Spanish, by my peers or my family. But usually, I don't really feel anything like that.

Claire Darmstadter

And you mentioned that when you were younger, you kind of participated in those DLI programs. Do you feel like within those programs, there was an equal emphasis on helping you develop your Spanish and your English skills? Or is it more like we want to help the people who grew up speaking only Spanish get more English and the people who grew up speaking only

English or another language get more Spanish? Was there like an equal emphasis? Or is it kind of just like the "opposite" language that was the high focus?

Mandy Rios

Well, I think it's the second thing, but the thing is, well, I can't really remember much from my childhood, but I do remember that during elementary school, they would have a lot of classes with Spanish-speaking people. And they would teach us a lot about regional holidays from México and stuff like that, but overall, I feel like they didn't teach that much mostly because we were little children stuff like that. But the whole district was, yeah, it was really revolved around Spanish and DLI and stuff like that. And if someone who only spoke Spanish and didn't really speak English, they would have a special program for them.

Claire Darmstadter

And if I understand correctly, then after elementary school, I think you took a little bit of French classes. And I would imagine that was a very different experience from your growing up DLI program. So, are there some similarities or major differences between the two? Do you prefer one program over?

Mandy Rios

Oh, major differences because the classes I took were optional, but I wanted to take them. I think I took two or three years of French, but I couldn't really learn much because the classes were more. How do you say it? Leisurely? Well, I couldn't really learn much the teacher will. She was okay. The stuff she gave us to study and stuff like that weren't exactly the best. And well, yeah, I've been learning like, I just know a few words and that's all.

Claire Darmstadter

And sometimes it is hard, right? When you only have one class for maybe half an hour, 45 minutes, like two or three times a week, it's really hard to get like that high level of proficiency that you might have experienced with that DLI program. So looking at Madison, kind of in general, as a city, do you feel like it's very supportive of multilingualism and people who speak more than one language? Or is it sometimes like you feel ashamed or feel like you shouldn't speak Spanish? Or you shouldn't speak English? Or I don't know, what kind of vibe do you get from the wider community of the city?

Mandy Rios

To be honest, I actually think that Madison is really diverse, and does let us speak Spanish without having to be ashamed or anything like that. But it might be from the view I grew up in, with an actual supportive school and stuff like that. I feel like for others, it might be different because they had to go through racism and discrimination, even in schools or having a funny accent or even speaking Spanish. But for me, it feels diverse and stuff like that, mostly because of the places they have here and the reception they get.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And our last question, if you could just give us one reason why you think we should celebrate multilingualism as a superpower, so why it's a good thing. And you can answer in English, in Spanish, in a mix of both, or whatever you feel most comfortable in.

Mandy Rios

Pues, yo creo que el español es, well actually multilingualism is really great. I think it should be celebrated because it's an achievement not a lot of people want to do or couldn't get because either they don't want it or it's hard for them. And I think it's really good if you could speak more than one language, because not only does it show how much work you put into doing something, but it's also something that can help you in the future. Like, if you want to go work at a job or something like that. It could help on your resume. If you want to help someone if they speak a different language. It might be a language, you know, and stuff like that is really nice.

Claire Darmstadter

Sure, well, thank you so much for sharing your perspective. I know it's so valuable and others appreciate hearing what you had to say. So I hope you have a great rest of the school year. I know it's really hard with COVID, so hang in there, but thank you for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

Mandy Rios

Thank you.