

**Claire Darmstadter**

Hey everybody, I'm joined today by Marco Espinosa, Youth Program Coordinator with Escalera at Madison East High School. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

**Marco Espinosa**

Thank you, Claire.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, so it'd be great if you could first just give us a super broad overview of your linguistic and educational background and how you kind of ended up at your current position here at East.

**Marco Espinosa**

Sure. So for education wise, I went to school at Western Illinois University, and I got my bachelor's from there in foreign languages and cultures with an emphasis in Spanish, and a history minor. And so, for my education regarding, I guess, linguistics and second language, I've spoke a second language my whole life, my parents both speak Spanish, a lot of the time I'm the one that has to, or was still, you know, for things now still, and the one that has to translate a bunch of different things. So when I got to school, I kind of got curious in the Spanish department, so I primarily focused my education on Spanish, but also French and other things. And yeah, so I don't know, I took a linguistics class, I also studied abroad, and was able to work on grammar skills and things like that. So I would say pretty knowledgeable and I have a professor I still keep in touch with. She's a linguistics professor. So I kind of read into some of the stuff on my own time, and I did my capstone on, just like, different linguistic varieties across the country.

**Claire Darmstadter**

And I know you grew up in Illinois, like you mentioned. And so I kind of want to know, is it very different in Illinois? Do you feel like your community growing up was much different in their view towards multilingualism? Compared to Madison, was it generally supportive? What was that kind of like?

**Marco Espinosa**

So I actually was born and raised in California, and I spent a lot of time in California till I was 17, actually, and I can, I have the perspective now have three different places. And I think in California, you're kind of encouraged at a young age to go into a multilingual program. So for example, when I was in kindergarten, I was in a Spanish half of the day English half of the day class. And that way it was so I could do a dual immersion. I know that that was a thing that was offered at my elementary school up until fifth grade. And a lot of students took advantage of it. My mom pulled me out of the program, though, because she wanted me to not focus on Spanish. And she's like, you can learn that at home, whatever. We want you to focus on learning English, at the middle school level, if you required, you know, Spanish, assistance in the classes, it was still there. And same thing at the high school. But it wasn't offered anymore in high school. It was kind of like optional if you want to take the language or not. And then the attitude of Illinois, did high school there, I'd say it was there too. But they put the kids in an ESL

class. So it would be something like that. And then they'd also take some courses in English, I'm in Spanish would be half in half, which was also really cool to see that it's supportive. I would say Illinois has a lot less support than California. And I was surprised even here in the Madison School District to see that they have a bunch of like dual immersion programs from like, kindergarten all the way up until, you know, high school and stuff like that. So part of my job is helping I guess some of those students navigate, as they, you know, are working on getting a plan that works for them. So you know, how much support do they need, are they just got here and they don't know anything that's English, and they're at the high school level, or they've been here for a year or two and just need some support. So yeah.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

And so I'm really interested in your work that you do with Escalera and I think something that would be kind of interesting to unpack or talk about is how we celebrate different linguistic varieties and forms of speaking when we know that these students are coming to you primarily because they have homework and they need to have like really specific grammar attentiveness to all their papers that they're writing, and you want to celebrate all their linguistic abilities, but you also realize at the end of the day that they are in school, they're getting grades and their teachers are going to command a certain type or variety of English. So how do you kind of work with those two like competing ideas?

### **Marco Espinosa**

Yeah. So that's where the programming comes in. And Claire you know, you've worked with the tutoring portion of it or some of the one that we offer, so students have the opportunity to come in for tutoring and then it's either myself that can help them if they speak Spanish very specifically, or even just in general. You know, if they've been students here all their lives. We have the tutoring portion and the other part that, you know, does embrace all the different like linguistic abilities and skills and stuff like that is the Escalera program itself. So you know, with those workshops or with those panels or whatever it is that we're doing that day, it encourages them, you know, to speak in whatever language they feel comfortable in. I also present in English and Spanish. I did a whole semester in Spanish one time, because I didn't have any students that were English speaking right away. So we worked on those kinds of things. And then also, I made sure that in those programs, I incorporated things that would be like having them practice, you know, conversation in English and stuff like that. So it kind of, you know, the academic side is there. And then also the other part that is more like free for them to express themselves.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

And I know you're working in education, but maybe in a position that isn't as typical in front of the class leading a history class, for example. And so there's a lot of people that have incredible linguistic skills, but they don't necessarily want to be in front of the classroom teacher. So can you go out and talk about different opportunities that exist to engage with education, use your linguistic skills, even if you don't want to be a standard, you know, third grade teacher?

### **Marco Espinosa**

Yeah. So there's a lot that I found out, you know, when I graduated college, I didn't really know what I could use my degree for, because I was like, This is such a weird degree, I don't even have like, you know, a bachelor's of, you know, people get bachelor's for business or whatever. So mine had, like, so much like, open to interpretation kind of thing. So yeah, I work in the school district, there happens to be that I work, you know, in collaboration with it, but not directly with it, either. I don't have any, like formal teaching, you know, like, no one taught me how to go in front of a classroom. It is kind of just, you know, feeling out what works with the students and what doesn't, and, you know, adapting your style to that. So I would say, yeah, there's an opportunity like this, you can also do the same thing I do at the middle school level at Centro Hispano. You know, you could help Centro Hispano also has, like, you know, lawyers and people that help older generations of Spanish speaking people find work, or if they come here from their home country, and they have a college degree, but it's not valid here, they try to help them also, like, you know, get evaluated for that you don't need to have, you know, some of those positions don't require a degree. And also, you know, there's the bilingual social worker at East too. That is a huge role. You're not directly in front of the classroom, but you know, you're speaking to parents in Spanish, you're speaking to students in Spanish, you're kind of a liaison back and forth. And I mean, at other jobs that I've worked before, I mean, you know, if I found typically if you work retail, or if you work, like grocery, sometimes it helps for you to speak Spanish, because you might be able to get yourself in a management position, if you do if you know, where you're at is, deals with, you know, workers who are primarily Spanish-speaking too, so I actually worked part time at Ross and I'm like, the front end area supervisor. And it's not anything special or anything, but you know, I get a little more paid because I speak Spanish. So there's a lot of different benefits, you know, to that, and just the different roles I'm in right now.

#### **Claire Darmstadter**

For sure. Well, thank you. Finally, our last question in celebration of multilingualism Can you give me one reason you can say it in English, you can say it in Spanish, a mix of the two whatever you prefer, why we should celebrate people who speak more than one language.

#### **Marco Espinosa**

I think it's just because it, we should celebrate people that speak more than one language because the more languages you speak, the more doors there are for you to walk through to walk in or there's more opportunity for you, you know, regardless. If we only speak English, then, you know, there's so many countries that speak English but yeah, you know, and you know, if you go somewhere else that doesn't speak English, sometimes it's a challenge, but if you speak you know, Spanish, there's all of Latin America, there's Spain. There's even a country in Africa that speaks Spanish. So, I think you know, it opens up your opportunity to communicate with more people, listen to more music, read more books, you know, watch more movies, and I think it gives you also — it becomes part of your personality. And I think when you speak more than one language, I think your personality also is reflected in like, you know, the way you necessarily speak in English and when you have to, you know, code switching is very important that's kind of what I'm trying to get at. You know, just if you're being professional in English, but you know, at home, that's how you speak to your family or even just for me myself, like, if I pray, I only pray in Spanish. It feels weird doing it in English. So you know, different parts of your

identity are tied to all the different languages you speak. So I think that's why it's, it's really important and we should celebrate multilingualism just because it's a great thing to have. And I think, you know, some people are born with it and don't realize how lucky they are until you know, they're older and you're like, oh, wow, I didn't know, just because I speak Spanish. I can do this. I can do that. So yeah, there's there's a lot I mean, you can go on forever, about the different benefits, but those are just some of my own, you know, that I've seen

**Claire Darmstadter**

For sure. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate all your perspectives, and from all different states and how that mixes it in Wisconsin. I think it's all super beneficial. And I will leave a link down in the show notes for the Centro Hispano website if people want to check out some of that programming, but I hope you have a great rest of your school year because I know it's very difficult this year.

**Marco Espinosa**

Thank you Claire, you too!