

Claire Darmstadter

Hey, everybody, I'm joined today by Rain Sparkman, a ninth grader at La Follette High School. 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 kind of your linguistic and educational background and maybe some ways you might want to use some of your language skills in the future if you do want to.

Rain Sparkman

So I first started learning Spanish in elementary school. First, I was in an English class, and then I transferred over to a Spanish one. I think that was like for first grade, maybe, I don't know, and then I continued with Spanish at Nuestro Mundo, and then I went to Sennett Middle School, and I did the DLI program there. And I'm at La Follette High School, and I'm taking Spanish classes.

Claire Darmstadter

And I know you mentioned that you started the program, maybe a year behind all the rest of your peers and with Spanish not being a language that you spoke at home, was it really stressful or overwhelming at first, when you really didn't speak the language to try to adjust? Or what was that first year at the school like?

Rain Sparkman

No, not really. I think it's because I was so young. It was easier to learn a new language, and I was more concerned with leaving the people from my other classes. Oh, yeah, it was easier to learn my language because we were still working on the alphabet and stuff. So yeah.

Claire Darmstadter

And obviously, this was a decision that your parents or guardians had to make, because obviously, when we're five or six, we can't really choose what school programs we go into. So if you'd have had the choice, would you decide to do this again? Or maybe would you have just gone the more traditional route? Or what's your view on the program in general?

Rain Sparkman

Now, I would have decided to do it again. Just because that's like, my life and what I've done, and like all my friends are, in a DLI program and yeah, so I would have decided to do that.

Claire Darmstadter

And do you think you're going to use your Spanish going forward in life? Or just kind of a high school, middle school elementary thing? Or how do you think these skills can help you down the line, potentially?

Rain Sparkman

For job opportunities, of course, communicating with different people. Also traveling, talking to people and yeah, just stuff like that.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And when you were in these programs, obviously, I would assume it's a very supportive environment around people speaking more than one language. But you feel like the rest of Madison as a city kind of reflects that attitude? Or is there maybe a more negative attitude towards individuals who speak languages other than English? Or how you kind of compare the two environments?

Rain Sparkman

From what I've seen, it seems like they're supporting people that speak two languages. Because of the DLI program, and other schools are having DLI programs so that kids can learn more than one language.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And at the high school level, the DLI programs are a little bit different than when it's in the elementary school level. So can you kind of talk about what your classes look like? What ones are in Spanish, what ones are in English, and how that all kind of changed as a result of COVID?

Rain Sparkman

Okay, so I have Spanish Language Arts. And history is also in Spanish. I think that's it. Next year, when -- since I'm in high school, now, they don't have us, they don't automatically put us in DLI classes. So next year, I'm not sure what the classes will be, I think world language or something.

Claire Darmstadter

And then with COVID has that been really difficult to adapt? Or has it been pretty easy or what has that experience been like?

Rain Sparkman

I know it's been harder for some people, but for me, it's been fine.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah I would imagine that for others, it's very difficult, but do you feel like there are certain areas where it's more difficult to engage? So, for example, speaking or writing, is it harder to do that online? Or is everything pretty okay, from your point of view?

Rain Sparkman

I think that some things are harder to do like communicating with teachers and stuff about pronunciation on words, because that's what our SLA class is about. So asking questions and stuff like that is harder to do.

Claire Darmstadter

And then one last question, just in celebration of multilingualism. And people who speak more than one language, we often tell the little kids that it's a superpower to be bilingual or multilingual. So can you give me one reason why we should celebrate speaking more than one language?

Rain Sparkman

Just being diverse and getting to know different cultures and celebrating everybody's different ethnicities and stuff. And that's really important to learn.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me and I hope you have a great rest of your school year!