

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I am so lucky to be joined today by Riley Swope, a student at St. Mary's College in Indiana, but originally from Sussex, Wisconsin, majoring in Speech and Language Pathology with minors in Spanish and ESL. Thanks for taking a couple of minutes to chat with me.

Riley Swope

No problem. I'm very excited for this conversation.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so first, can you just give us a super broad overview of your educational and linguistic background and kind of what you're thinking of doing with all these degrees down the line?

Riley Swope

Yeah, for sure. So like you mentioned, I'm studying a speech and language pathology with two minors in Spanish and ESL. And I guess the thing that really got me interested in the field is just my experience through high school. So I worked really close to my SSLP in high school, and I got to see firsthand kind of like the work she did, and I just fell in love with it right away. So I was like, *Oh, this is something I definitely want to do*. And then I've been learning Spanish since high school also. And I think it's just an amazing language. The Spanish culture is super cool. And I've always like been gravitated towards that I wanted to continue my Spanish learning through college. So, and then what gravitated me towards ESL was my freshman year, I had an internship in Park City, Utah, and it was just like a summer school program. And here I kind of, I would say, like, 93% of my students that I had, were all Spanish speakers. And I'd say a handful, I think around like five students, English is their second language. So they're still trying to learn the language. And there it was tough for them to think in it every day.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, and so with that SLP background, you have more of that really science-y view of language. So do you think that really helps you get a really good understanding of language and how it works? Or is it sometimes like very specific, very niche and you're like analyzing how the kids are talking, rather than just like focusing on teaching in general?

Riley Swope

Yeah, that's a really great question. So I'm actually in this semester. I'm in a phonetics class right now. So we've been learning the IPA. I had some knowledge over it, but it's just now we're just really going in depth. And it's actually super cool. Because instead of like there being like, are like six vowels in English language, there's actually like, way more so like, I think there's like 14, so it's really cool that like, each sound has a symbol, and I feel like it's very similar to Spanish where like with the vowels you kind of just like, say its name and the English language, it's more difficult because, yeah, there's a bunch of like, allophones and all that kind of stuff.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah. And then growing up in a suburb of Milwaukee, do you feel like you experienced a lot of the linguistic diversity, or is it more concentrated in the heart of the city, so you maybe didn't really experience what that was like as much?

Riley Swope

Yeah, for sure. I think about this all the time. I feel like in Sussex it's a pretty white community, we did not have a lot of diversity compared to other neighborhoods. So I feel like that's one thing I feel like I missed out on like, when going through like my schooling which was just like, it was always surrounded by like, majority like middle class like people the same race like me. Definitely going in to the city, it's definitely more diverse. I feel like it would have been a completely I would have had a completely different perspective and like way of growing in that kind of stuff if I went to school like in like downtown Milwaukee.

Claire Darmstadter

And of course, in Sussex, right? There are some people who speak languages other than English. So when people were speaking in other languages, do you feel like that was viewed positively? Was it very accepting and supportive of those individuals? Or within your own community was it not a very strong supportive vibe of people who speak more than one language?

Riley Swope

That really depends. I feel like it's just people who could speak more than one language, they just didn't, they would literally just speak English because, like, that's what everyone else speaks. So I guess like being out in our community, it was like, I guess like I'm saying like more in like the school setting. Even in the grocery store or the library.

Claire Darmstadter

And so you've talked a little bit about your experience learning Spanish later in life in high school. And it was, you know, I would imagine a pretty run of the mill program, of course, you know, the teachers are great and you talked about being able to connect to that other individual in the school. But it can be really hard to learn a language later in life when you're only having contact in class for 30 minutes a day. So was there a lot you had to do outside of class? Was there anything that you would really like to see different about the way your school district or school approach language learning?

Riley Swope

Yes. Oh my gosh, yes. I feel like okay, in high school, we had honestly, the best Spanish professors, or teachers, they were so amazing, so much fun, and like we wanted to learn, and it just made learning Spanish into something really cool. So that really helped with my, like me wanting to continue with learning Spanish. The only thing is our school really focused on just reading and writing, and kind of like, pushed to the side, like the listening aspect, and especially speaking. So now that's like, definitely what I have a harder time with is the listening and speaking part. And I feel like that's. So I feel like that's one thing I wish is that they would hit more on like the four domains.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah. And so you did have a little bit of experience to kind of get that immersion experience to Spanish. You were one of the kids who was part of the COVID study abroad situation last year. So

can you talk a little bit about what that was like, maybe what you did get out of it, despite only being there for a little while?

Riley Swope

Yeah, so being in Spain, was just absolutely amazing. Because it was the time like, it's the time where, like, the time where I could fully immerse myself in the language and feel like I'm actually like, getting something out of it, versus like, classroom settings here. It's like, where we only speak and really do the work in the classroom. So like, 50 minutes a day, I'm doing Spanish. So like, just that difference of being immersed all day in the Spanish. So definitely going home was pretty disappointing because I couldn't get that to continue. So that was pretty frustrating to just go back into that cycle of reading and writing again. And skipping out on the listening and speaking aspects. So I guess. So it was hard for me to manage just since I was so sad for not being in Spain. But I guess like, after a few months, I'd say during the summer I was ready to get back into it. So I started watching Netflix shows and just having the subtitles down. And then also on runs or walks, I would listen to Spanish podcasts just to get that listening in. And then I guess like in my everyday kind of just like thinking, I try to think all in Spanish, like, you know, like whatever is going on in your mind, just like try to think in Spanish instead of English.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah it definitely requires an intentional effort. So finally, in celebration of multilingualism we tell little kids all the time that speaking more than one language is a superpower. So can you give me one reason you can answer in English, in Spanish, in a mix of both, whatever you want, why it's a superpower to speak more than one language?

Riley Swope

Oh my gosh, literally, I love this. This is — whenever that question comes up, I always say if I had a superpower it would be to be able to speak every language of the world because it just like opens the door to so many opportunities, so much communication, it's just like amazing to think about just like how you can just like go into a culture and just be able to communicate with the locals just like that, that would just be amazing. So, but for kids who do speak two languages, there are so many benefits. Not only like, like their identity of having, like two cultures into languages, but also like the beneficial factors of like, how their brain is wired and works and it's just like so different from mine because it's just, it's just things in the one way of English.

Claire Darmstadter

Yes, I agree. It's way more cool than flying. So, definitely my preferred superpower of choice. Well, thank you so much for tagging with me. I really appreciate you taking a couple minutes to share your perspective and I hope you have a great rest of your school year.

Riley Swope

Thank you. This was absolutely amazing. I loved all your questions, and I felt like they related a lot to me. So thank you for like, engaging with that.