

Workshop teaches languages to tots



Edmee Rodriguez/Sun Photo. Owner and director Maria Salazar, second from right, parents and toddler students participate in a Spanish class at the Language Workshop for Children.

Six children ages 20 months to 3 years watched **Maria Salazar** sing about animals in Spanish while they sat in tiny chairs next to their mothers. One by one each child took a toy and together the class sang los animales names before they said adios and hopped up to play with a colorful parachute.

Salazar, owner and director of The Language Workshop for Children, said this type of full immersion language learning coupled with other activities helps children remain engaged in class.

Michelle Fox said she enrolled her 22-month-old son, Cooper, at LWFC to learn Spanish because of the increasing Spanish population and so he would have an advantage in his future career.

"We needed to start him at an age where it will be effective," Fox said. "And everything I've read is that the earlier the age, the better, and immersion is better."

Fox said Cooper has attended three sessions and now prefers counting in Spanish at home.

Salazar uses a combination of games, mime, songs, arts and crafts, music, movement, and visual aids with repetition to help students retain the new language. It is called the Thibaut Technique and is the work of LWFC director and founder **Franzoi Thibaut**, according to the New York web site for LWFC.

Ashley Shores, Olathe, said her daughter **Berit** is doing remarkably well. Sept. 18 was Berit's second session, but Shores said Berit, 23 months old, already speaks Spanish at home.

"She doesn't speak in class, but at home she likes to sing before she goes to bed and she loves the finger song, so I'll hear her in her bed singing that," Shores said.

Parents are given a workbook and CD for their children, which both Shores and Fox said their children listen to often at home.

"She loves music, so that's what's been great about the CDs, she'll listen to them constantly and it's not me speaking Spanish, so she hears the accent," Shores said.

Shores said hearing a native speaker is also what drew her to the workshop and she liked that Salazar has been involved in education for many years because her parents owned an English speaking school in Colombia, South America.

"I have always been involved with education, seeing (my parents') efforts to teach foreign language to children. I always wanted to do something similar here in the U.S.," Salazar said. "I did some research and found Language Workshop for Children. They've been around for 35 years. They have the experience and knowledge in techniques for teaching foreign language to young children, but they also offer materials."

Salazar said it is not sufficient to be a native speaker – technique is very important.

"We don't want them to be in their heads and translating," she said. "We don't want to use a list of vocabulary words and have (students) translate them because they are going to forget them later, very easily. We want them to associate those words with objects and meaning."

Salazar said the technique is educational, but done in such a way that children have fun and do not realize they are learning.

"It's a play group approach," she said, "but each week there is a technique and a curriculum that we do."

The Language Workshop for Children, 11648 W. 135th St., Overland Park, offers classes for children 6 months to 9 years. Children up to 3 years old are accompanied to class by a parent and private lessons are offered to children over the age of 9.

Every student receives materials to use at home to help reinforce what they are learning.

When the workshop opened August 2007 only Spanish was taught, but beginning in October students now can learn Chinese.

"We started Chinese because of the growth of business that is emerging from China," Salazar said. "We foresee that Chinese is going to be very important for children here in the U.S. to learn."

To find out more, visit The Language Workshop for Children, 11648 W. 135th St., Overland Park, or go to www.kidsclubkc.com.

For more information about LWFC and the Thibaut Technique, visit www.thibauttechnique.com

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