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Spanish teacher implements new technique

Ahwatukee teacher expands course to meet the demand

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When it comes to learning Spanish, Sherry Anderson is all about *necesito* and *quiero* - as in "I need to learn Spanish and I want to learn Spanish."

Anderson, a pilot for United Airlines, has given up taking Spanish courses at community colleges because she said she is learning the language better from a private instructor, Martha Silva.

Silva, who lives in Ahwatukee Foothills, teaches key phrases first, then nouns.

"It's great to know your days of the week or months of the year. But after you say 'hello' to somebody, you need to tell them what you need or what you want," said Anderson, who lives in Ahwatukee with her 10-year-old daughter, Samantha, and her husband, a pilot for US Airways.

Three years ago, Anderson went to central Mexico with Silva and their daughters.

All four wound up taking Spanish classes, even though Silva, a native Spanish speaker, wanted to learn how to teach Spanish.

"Instead of vacation, I ended up taking the class and learning something new," Silva said.

Her long-term goal was to teach conversational Spanish once she returned to Ahwatukee.

In November, she started teaching a small class of seven friends to see if her new methods worked. Their feedback encouraged Silva to expand the course this semester.

She will offer two 16-week courses - one for beginners, the other for more advanced students - beginning Tuesday and Wednesday.

"It's conversation and it's very to the point," she said. "My friends like this way much better" than traditional Spanish classes.

Her students have ranged from pilots to dentists.

Each has a different reason for wanting to learn Spanish, Silva said.

"Some people want to communicate with other people who speak Spanish, but others want to learn just for personal growth," she said. "They are so anxious to learn a new language and culture."

For Sandra Hazelrigg, an Ahwatukee mother of five, her reasons are purely practical.

She and her husband, a doctor, are moving to Panama as soon as they sell their home.

The couple had lived in Brazil, where people spoke Portuguese, and Hazelrigg quickly found out it was "sink or swim" if she wanted to communicate with her maid

and her three adopted children.

The couple also wanted their two biological children to learn Spanish when they came back to the United States.

That's when Hazelrigg realized she needed to learn the language formally herself.

"Kids pick it up so fast, it's depressing," she said. "Their brains are like sponges and mine is like a petrified rock."

Although Hazelrigg has taken community college Spanish classes, she said she became frustrated because she never felt like she was learning the language.

"With adults, (they) need a lot of repetition. You always have to be reviewing and repeating things," she said.

Hazelrigg has tried to reinforce that idea during nights in which she encourages her family to speak Spanish and Portuguese only.

The drill is part of Hazelrigg's philosophy to encourage cultural diversity whenever possible.

"All our friends with children are trying to make sure their kids grow up in a diverse environment," she said.

Hazelrigg said having children who speak the language also helps remove the stigma of trying to master a new language.

"The hardest thing for adults is they're embarrassed to make mistakes whereas kids aren't," she said.

Sherry Anderson agreed, saying daughter Samantha "learns so much better than I do."

But that seems to be changing. After her first class with Silva, Spanish phrases seemed to roll off Anderson's tongue.

"We were actually making baby sentences from the start. I was so enthused because I've struck out so many times.

"I could say the words but it wasn't sticking," Anderson said.

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