

Parent & Me Spanish classes begin Tuesday

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Studies by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Applied Linguistics show that children taught a foreign language benefit in their overall school performance and in their problem-solving skills.

But the preschoolers in the weekly Parent & Me Spanish class at Ahwatukee's Brilliant Sky Toys and Books seem much more concerned about having fun than any future benefits.

Five-year-old Elise Gasson sings a song in Spanish, looking at her mother Carol to make sure she's singing too.

"My daughter is a little shy so it took some time for her to get into it, but she's participating pretty strongly now," said Gasson, a stay-at-home Chandler mom who believes children should learn about other languages and cultures.

"I think this format is very kid-friendly and the teacher, Miss Yolanda, does a great job of incorporating a lot of activities to keep the kids involved."

Instructor Yolanda Leon is an Ahwatukee mother of three currently working on her Ph.D. in Hispanic Culture at Arizona State University. She teaches Spanish at the Tempe Dayspring Preschool and Kindergarten, as well as other after-school programs.

"They don't know they're learning Spanish, they're playing. Its fun for them," Leon said. "It's a very interactive class, with the parents also involved."

The Parent & Me program was developed by Ahwatukee resident Martha Silva. She teaches adult classes throughout the Southeast Valley, including a Spanish Conversation Group that meets twice monthly at Tempe's Changing Hands bookstore.

Silva was born in Mexicali, the capital of Baja California, Mexico, to a Chinese father and a Chinese/Mexican mother. Although Spanish was the main language spoken at home, she also heard English and a smattering of Chinese. Her 11-year old daughter Stephanie, who is bilingual in English and Spanish, is now learning Chinese.

"There are a lot of advantages for children to start learning another language at an early age," she said.

For more information classes offered by Silva's Language Synergy Spanish Instruction, visit www.languagesynergy.com or call (480) 231-5649.

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