

Learning Spanish through art

La Casa de Esperanza supporting bilingual learners via hybrid class

By Ashley Haynes
ahaynes@conley.net
262-513-2681

WAUKESHA — Just a glance at La Casa de Esperanza's art classroom doesn't reveal anything out of the ordinary. The walls are filled with construction paper, tiny pairs of hands and visual aids, basically everything you would expect to find. However, a few minutes into an art ses-

sion, you'll soon realize that students aren't working in the average art class. Thanks to a newly integrated concept, students don't just go to art class. They go to Spanish and art class at the same time.

The idea was spearheaded by a La Casa teacher who realized how students naturally learned language through hands-on work.

"I try to use the technique of art so they can relate it

to the lessons," said art teacher Diana Mercado. "We're just integrating concepts in Spanish."

Right now, Mercado's second-grade students are learning about the farm, something every grade school student does. She starts by introducing the names of animals and objects in English and then switches to Spanish.

Art projects are then used to better solidify the concepts in the students' minds as Mercado progressively speaks more and more Spanish to them.

On Wednesday, her second-grade class created a farm animal puppet while following directions in Spanish, a notable accomplishment since Mercado says only about one third of her students come from a Spanish-speaking background. She says the art projects help students "a lot because they're creating all the time and having conversations."

She said the students are a big support system for one another, and often help when one of their peers is stuck. The difference from the start of the year to just a few weeks in is palpable.

"When you first talk to them (non-Spanish speakers), they're like 'What?,' but you point it out to them and they figure it out pretty quickly," said Mercado.

The consensus among students who did not know much Spanish before starting at the school is that while it was scary at first, they now know enough words and phrases to use at



Ashley Haynes/Freeman Staff

Victoria Sanchez, a La Casa de Esperanza student, shows off her finished farm animal puppet. In her Spanish through Art class, Spanish is incorporated into everyday concepts. The group is currently learning about the farm, or "la granja."

home and in the community.

"I was most nervous about writing (in Spanish)," said second-grade student Stanlee Heinen, adding that he's pretty excited now to know more than one language.

La Casa de Esperanza provides a traditional-based academic program in English to ensure that every student has proficiency in the language. However, students becoming bilingual is an important part of the school's goals. So in addition to the Spanish through Art class, bilingual staff members are on hand at all levels of the school. Spanish through Art is seen as a good starting point for students because the structure of the class is fluid.

"La Casa continues to have high quality children's education programs along with providing critical services to the community," said President Anselmo Villarreal. "With the help of our supporters, staff, and committed board members and donors, we will continue the journey to helping others achieve their dreams."



La Casa de Esperanza students Lailani Escobedo (front) and Scarlet Gonzalez work on creating puppets in their Spanish through Art class.



La Casa de Esperanza students in the class.

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