

Spanish teacher targets children at an early age

BY CAROL MARSHALL, STAFF WRITER



Late one morning last week, 12 toddlers gathered in the basement of a Plymouth church. They took off their hats. They took off their boots. And they tried for a few minutes to sit still, until they got the cue that it was OK to start singing and dancing.

"So many niños today!" said Jennifer Manriquez, greeting her young students with smiles and hugs. The students began to clap and sing the Welcome Song before the day's lesson, which was Feliz Navidad.

Even though the children — age 18 months to 3 years — didn't know it that cold morning, what they were doing could be invaluable to them in the future, according to one student's mother, Plymouth Township resident Beth Ineson. The children are taking classes from Manriquez, a Canton resident, who teaches Spanish to toddlers and preschoolers and their parents.

It's Manriquez's goal to give the youngsters the knowledge base they need to grow up bilingual.

"It's important in the world we live in," Ineson said. "Most people in the world communicate in languages other than English, and our second language in this country really is Spanish. Even if it's just to be sensitive and compassionate to others, knowing how to speak Spanish is valuable."

Ineson's 2-year-old son, Jack, has been in the classes since he was 10 months old. Her 15-month-old daughter has now joined big brother in the classes.

Manriquez started teaching classes three years ago, when her daughter Emily was a baby. A former high school Spanish teacher who is raising her own children in a bilingual household, she recognized the value of teaching language to very young children.

When she first started teaching, her classes met in her Canton living room. But they grew so fast and became so popular, she started renting space in a Plymouth Township church.

Recently, Manriquez has expanded the scope of her classes a little further by producing a video, "Bilingual Fun, Spanish for Children."

"I never expected this to make a lot of money or any-thing. I mostly wanted to do it for my students to use as a learning tool at home. But it's been really taking off. It's selling very well," Manriquez said.

The key to success for her students is repetition at home, which the DVD helps students to do.

"If it's reinforced and repeated at home, these kids will grow up bilingual," Manriquez said.

The video is the first in what will be a series of videos, structured by theme, just like Manriquez's classes. The first video focuses on colors, numbers, animals and action verbs. They, like the classes, include music and interactive activities.

Classes are held at the First Baptist Church of Plymouth. The cost is \$100 for nine classes. For more information, visit online at www.bilinguafun.com.