

The Bulletin

Spanish in the Elementary Schools Continues Community Impact

Jonah Barber
Senior Staff Writer

On any given weekday on North Pleasant Street, you might see a procession of College students heading toward Oberlin's Eastwood Elementary School. Wearing bright red t-shirts with the words "¿Hablo Español, y tu?" emblazoned in yellow on their backs, student educators in the Spanish in the Elementary Schools program enter kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms to teach Spanish for 40 minutes. Hailing from different linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical backgrounds, teachers in the SITES program share a common goal of cultivating informed, interactive Spanish language teaching in Oberlin schools.

Kim Faber, head of the SITES program and professor of Hispanic Studies and Applied Linguistics, wrote the Review about how SITES began.

"In fall 2004, I first began training Oberlin College students as language teachers," Faber wrote. "I discovered not only Oberlin students' keen interest in language teaching, but also the tremendous benefits the experience provided them."

After a pilot program in the fall of 2005, SITES has since expanded to encompass pvtre-K through fifth grade, and at points has grown to include nearly 50 active Oberlin student educators. Prior to SITES, Oberlin City Schools only offered world language instruction in high-school; however, after the implementation and expansion of SITES, the district was transformed into an International Baccalaureate district, the first district in Ohio to offer IB for

grades K-12.

Within a SITES classroom, every minute of instruction is planned, resting on the backbone of Faber's EDUA 301 Language Pedagogy course teachings. At its core, the program fuses Oberlin College with the broader community, utilizing a world language to foster connection. SITES instructors are taught to view language as social and participative and to meld their approaches based on the students and not on rigid grammatical frameworks. Through the semester-long course, Organic World Language workshops, and weekly lesson planning meetings, SITES instructors experience a breadth of pedagogical training that they can tailor to their classes' unique needs. Faber noted that both elementary school students and undergraduate instructors learn from the program.

"Participation in SITES not only allows Oberlin students to develop their teaching skills, it also allows them to learn firsthand about the U.S. public school system, to work in the local community, and to acquire important professional skills," Faber said. "SITES places students in a unique role, that of a student and an educator, inflecting their own strengths, styles, and cultures into their leadership as teachers while in a constant state of reflection and learning."

Fourth-year College student Jimena Granados, one of two SITES program assistants who serve as student liaisons and coordinators for the program, has been heavily involved with SITES since her first semester of her first year. Aside from a lifelong passion for becoming a teacher, Granados felt motivat-

ed to play a more active role in SITES due to her background.

For Granados, culture and language are often inseparable, and her Spanish background directly informs her pedagogical perspectives. The SITES model allows for instructors to bring their own histories into tried and true methodologies.

"I saw a lack of representation of people like me in the program," Granados said. "I didn't see a history of Latinos in SITES."

Fourth-year College student Andrea Luna, the other SITES program assistant who has also been an instructor since her first year, shares Granados' emphasis on culturally-informed pedagogy.

"We talk about even the slides that we use: who we're showing in these images and who is being represented," Luna said.

Central to the philosophy behind SITES is that anybody can speak Spanish — there is no specific identity or background that precludes you from learning a new language. In this way, learning Spanish serves as an equalizing, unifying force between Oberlin College students and students in the community.

"[SITES] is a way for me to get to know the community," Luna said. "Those moments where I can connect to the students are really important, or even just seeing their growth [over the year]."

Faber's pedagogical practices and the process of planning, teaching, mentoring, and reflecting demands a high level of commitment, yet as Granados, Luna, and the 24 other instructors in the program know, all it takes is one student saying amarillo or yo quiero la pera for the first time to make it all worth it.



A poster created by Kim Faber for SITES instructors.



Sydney Garvis OC '18 assists students during a Spanish lesson.



SITES instructors play a circle game with students at Oberlin Elementary School.

Photos courtesy of Kim Faber