



Using songs, games and commands, South Knoll Elementary School teacher Rebecca Pina has begun teaching her first through fifth grade classes Spanish. The students learn how to speak, write and form short sentences as they learn the language.
Battalion photo by Penny Sue Menefer

Consol elementary teaches Spanish

By BETH CALHOUN
Rebecca Pina calls the roll. One by one, the children answer "Aqui" or "Presente." It's the beginning of another class at South Knoll Elementary School in College Station. But this class differs slightly from the usual reading, writing and arithmetic. These first graders are learning Spanish.
"Como estan ustedes?" Pina asks. "Muy bien, gracias," the class replies.
The average first grader can count Spanish to 20, name eight basic colors, say goodnight to mom and dad, and good morning or afternoon. A average fifth grader can write short sentences.
Pina teaches first through fifth graders, about 700 of South Knoll's students. The largest classes are the second and fourth grades.
The classes consist of songs, games, commands and repeating words or phrases after Pina.
The program began three years ago after parents were surveyed. The item the parents said they wanted was the introduction of some foreign language at the elementary school level.
Pina, a Texas A&M graduate, has taught at South Knoll since the program began.
"I believe it doesn't hurt to take

two languages simultaneously," she said. "The only time Spanish interferes is when students haven't grasped the concepts of one language yet."
Pina uses four communications skills to teach: understanding, speaking, reading and writing.
"At first I start with sounds, never letting them see the written words," said Pina. "Once they associate words with pictures or specific meanings, then they see the written words."
Most first and second grade classes are just fun.
"It's especially hard with the younger children because they have such a short attention span," she said. "That's why I'm constantly going on to something different."
Third and fourth graders learn more words. They also begin writing.
Fifth graders learn even more nouns, verbs, adjectives and get into grammar. And they're required to write five original short sentences about themselves.
"This way, they have to recall all that they've learned," said Pina. "It's at this level that they begin to think in Spanish."
Pina said her classes are taught Spanish as a second language only. The children aren't expected to speak it fluently.

Pina said she likes working at South Knoll because the parents are interested in their children and, consequently, in the school.
"With such a bad stigma on Spanish-speaking people, I was afraid of negative feedback," she said. "But it's fun for the children, so the parents don't mind."

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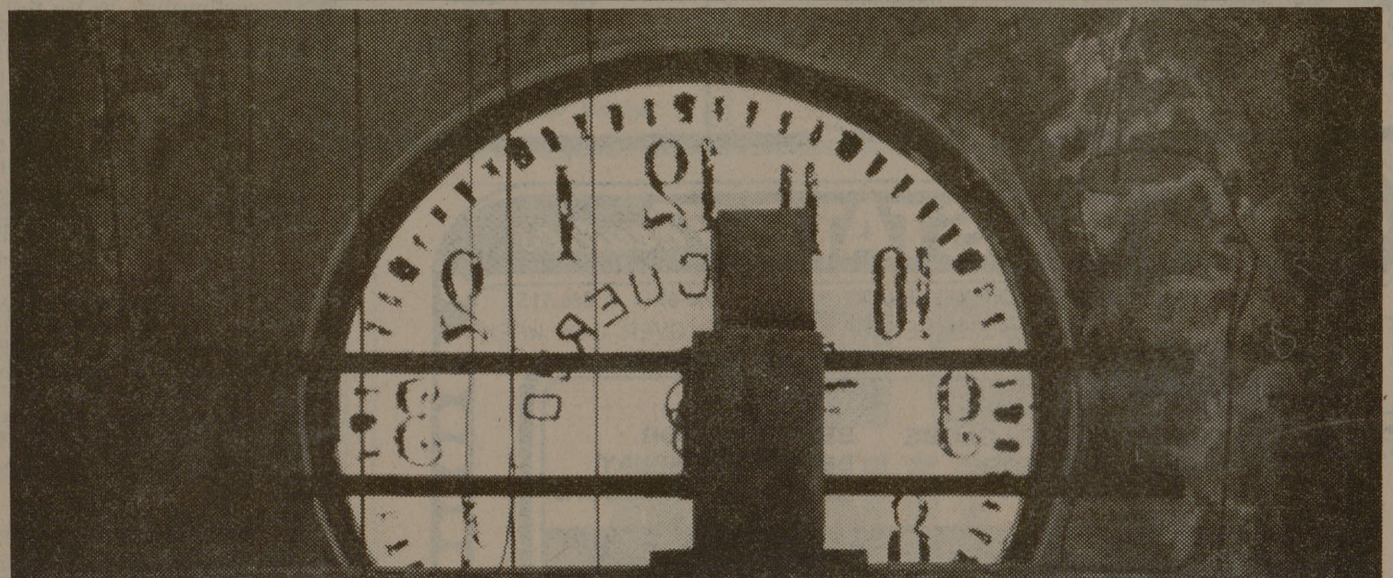
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