

# Students soak up Spanish

By Paula King  
STAFF WRITER

Julia Vehar proudly demonstrates her mastery of counting in Spanish. Upon request, the Camino Pablo second grader recites the numbers, "uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco" and so on.

"I know how to count in Spanish," Julia says in a matter of fact tone.

Julia was introduced to the Latin language at a Spanish camp held in Moraga's Hacienda de las Flores last week. In addition to learning counting, colors, body parts and some other basics, the children were shown the wonders of the Latin culture.

Through music, games, dances and food, the students were immersed in everything Hispanic. They played Mexican bingo, snacked on quesadillas and knocked down a piñata at an authentic fiesta.

Grade levels of the participants ranged from kindergarten through fourth grade at the morning time camp. Some were brushing up on their existing Spanish skills and others were being taught the language for the first time.

Charlene Zalesky's daughter, Zola, has taken Spanish after school at Camino Pablo and often practices through conversations with their Mexican housekeeper.

"It's a great opportunity for all different grade levels to come together," says Charlene. "It's a common activity to make friends."

The camp's curriculum was developed by Kids Into Speaking Spanish, an Orinda-based educational company that organized



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/STAFF

**SPANISH LANGUAGE CAMP** participant Rick Lomas takes a swing at a piñata during camp activities at the Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga.

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32 similar camps across the Bay Area over the summer. Preschool and after-school immersion programs are currently being developed in the Lamorinda area.

"Teaching Spanish is about more than the vocabulary," says owner Chris Clark. "We want kids to get excited about the culture. We want kids to know the Spanish language, but it's also a cultural program."

That's why 90 percent of their camp counselors are native Spanish speakers, according to Clark. The vocabulary is presented in a manner that focuses on activities

and having a good time.

Moraga resident Lily Wescott wants her son, Steven, to be introduced to Spanish at an early age. She said his generation needs to learn the language, since Californians live so close to Mexico and interact with Spanish speakers on a daily basis.

"I think there's a real need for this type of program after school for students in grade schools and also for younger children in preschools. It would be an asset for our children to learn Spanish and be bilingual," Wescott says. "It's a gift that we can give them."

On the last day of camp, the children created flags that represent all of the Spanish speaking countries in the world. They waved them through the air, highlighting the countries of Guatemala, Chile, Peru, Columbia and a multitude of other foreign lands.

Los Perales kindergarten Rick Lomas raised his freshly painted flag of Ecuador high above his head, showing everyone his artistry.

In unison, the group sang a song called "Buenos Diaz" for their parents. Smiles filled the room and the camp experience ended, but a lifelong appreciation of the Latin culture was just beginning.

To learn more about Kids Into Speaking Spanish, please call 258-5477.

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