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Learning as They Teach

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Learning as they teach

When Tori Stannard '07 sits down to read with 9-year-old Cecilia, it's a toss-up as to who is learning more.

Stannard is one of 19 students from Linfield Spanish classes who are strengthening their Spanish skills while helping English Language Learners (ELL) with homework during Power Hour, an after-school program in the McMinnville School District.

With every book read, every math problem solved and every art project completed, ELL students are strengthening their English language skills, improving study habits and finding mentors in their Linfield tutors. ELL students look forward to the sessions every day, said Wendy (Levig) Autencio '88, a third-grade teacher and site coordinator for the after-school program at Memorial Elementary School. Their relationships with Linfield students go beyond the classroom, she said.

"Linfield students show up at soccer events because the kids feel comfortable enough to ask them," she said. "It (creates) a good bond."

Kathleen Fraser '02, volunteer coordinator for the after-school program, agrees.

"Not only are the students offering their Spanish skills, they're also acting as role models," Fraser said. "Elementary kids can have the college student role in their minds as something they'll want to do. That's important."

Power Hour is just one of many programs in which Linfield Spanish students provide language assistance. This strong commitment to helping others is encouraged by faculty members such as Violetta Ramsay, associate professor of Spanish.

"I've always thought that the one who gives is the one who benefits the most," Ramsay said. "Giving service to another is key if we are going to improve the world."

In addition to volunteering after school, Linfield students also translate during conferences and family nights. Their presence is part of a concerted effort by the McMinnville School District to bridge the communication gap between Spanish-speaking parents and the school, Autencio said.

"Parents of kids who are Spanish-speaking are shy to come in and ask questions because of the language barrier," she added. "But we've seen an increase in our Spanish-speaking families attending conferences. They're feeling safe and comfortable coming to functions at our school, knowing someone is here to help."

Using her language skills to

help others is the reason Stannard, a political science major from Logsdon, takes part in the program. Although she communicates mostly in English to help the children with their language skills, she sometimes explains elements of the lesson in Spanish so they understand it better.

"I really feel like I'm useful there. My skill is needed," said Stannard, whose Spanish has been strengthened by the real-world interactions with children who often speak faster and ask different questions than her Linfield professors.

Miranda Kenton '07, an elementary education major from White City, spends two hours each week in the schools.

"I can practice my Spanish skills and help in the community at the same time," said Kenton, who has a Spanish minor. "(The elementary students) think it's cool that someone is willing to talk with them in their own language. I tell them they're helping me, and they like that."

— Laura Davis

Tori Stannard '07, right, works with 9-year-old Cecilia Ramirez, a third-grader in the class of Wendy (Levig) Autencio '88, during Power Hour at Memorial Elementary School. Stannard volunteers two hours a week with English Language Learners to help children with their studies and polish her Spanish skills.

