

UFS Kindergarten Teacher Nurtures a Sense of Freedom

Sarai Nieves has been the West Class (Kindergarten) teacher since 2007 when she joined the UFS community and brought with her a wealth of experience and continued study in early childhood education.

Immediately upon entering Sarai's classroom, you can see the connection she has with her students. The classroom is alive with children who are very busy in their learning, working together in an atmosphere of creativity and respect.

Sarai draws from many life experiences to create a meaningful curriculum. Mostly she looks to her everyday life experiences with children and families - "the play, the comments and conversations."



"I believe a classroom has to nurture a sense of freedom," says Sarai, "freedom to think, speak and act - and to give voice to even those ideas or realities that make us uncomfortable."

Her life experiences help to shape the curriculum in Sarai's classroom; however, it is her understanding of the Quaker testimonies and progressive education theories that influence her teaching philosophies.

"My [teaching] philosophy is grounded in the idea that teaching is about change. Being a progressive teacher means being an advocate for change. Progressive education is about education to change the status quo. I feel that the Quaker testimonies represent to me a set of beliefs that ground me in working toward examining my life and my world, as does progressive education. Grounding me in what is most important which means looking beyond the obvious, asking questions and working toward change."

Inspired to be a teacher from the start, Sarai explains she "always wanted to work with people in a dynamic and meaningful way. When I learned that I could work with children and make the classroom and the educational experience what I want it to be, rather than what it seemed to already be, I tried it."

"After spending a few days in a classroom with young children, I was hooked. I enjoy the level of thinking and creativity that we have to engage in when planning and creating experiences for children."

Sarai holds bachelor's and master's degrees in early childhood education, and has done doctoral work in curriculum and teaching with an interest in early childhood, urban education and multiculturalism. She holds certification in early childhood and elementary education.

Sarai is bilingual and enjoys making the Spanish language and cultures a part of the classroom experience.

Before coming to UFS, Sarai taught at Brooklyn Friends, Bank Street, Head Start, Beginning with Children, and, briefly, at River Valley Waldorf School.

Sarai and her husband, Bill Hoblin, have twin sons and a daughter- all students at UFS. They reside in Pipersville.

