



THE Literacy CENTER

An interactive multisensory curriculum



Case Study #15

Western Avenue Elementary
Los Angeles, California

Increased Parent Participation in the Learning Process Improves Results

“Confidence comes from knowing you know,” asserts prekindergarten teacher Grace Bohannon, who stresses esteem building in her classroom. The LeapFrog SchoolHouse™ Literacy Center, she says, gave that experience to her students, allowing them to learn through self-reliance.

Bohannon teaches in the School Readiness Language Development Program (SRLDP), which is hosted at Western Avenue Elementary and nestled in the heart of South Central Los Angeles. The Title I charter school serves about 1,000 children from prekindergarten through 5th grade. The school’s population is almost evenly divided between African Americans and Latinos with virtually all students coming from economically disadvantaged homes. For Bohannon’s four- and five-year-old students, her classroom is a place they can come to and feel good about themselves.

Using Title I program funds, Bohannon’s class was one of eighteen SRLDP classrooms that adopted the Literacy Center in the Fall of 2001. As soon as she received the materials she went straight to work creating inviting learning centers for her students, using the LeapDesk™ workstations, LeapMat™ learning surfaces, and LeapPad® units. Her young students took to them right away—and stuck with them. “Usually with new things, the novelty wears off,” Bohannon notes, “but they continually gravitated to the LeapFrog SchoolHouse products.” When offering reasons for her students’ continued attraction to the products, she credits The Literacy Center’s tools in addressing multiple-learning modalities (students are “seeing, hearing, touching”) and the opportunity it gives to children to learn in a motivating, self-directed manner.

English Language Learners (ELL) Have Fun with English

More than half of Bohannon’s prekindergartners come from homes where Spanish is the primary language. According to Bohannon, language is not a factor for her students when it comes to understanding how to use The Literacy Center’s technology components. She feels learning about the components is “basically simple for them.” In Bohannon’s experience, it is maturity, not language, that is the key factor in determining if students need extra support before achieving greater independence.

Within The Literacy Center, the LeapPad® classroom learning system is a favorite among all the children, including the ELL students. The LeapPad unit effectively teaches children, especially the ELL students, “the rudiments of language ... the vocabulary, and the sentence structure.” It also provides needed repetition. Many children choose to work with the same books over and over, rendering the words more and more familiar to them each time.

Engaged In and Out of the Classroom

Like their children, parents are drawn to The Literacy Center components as well. In the beginning of the school year, Bohannon met with parents to introduce The Literacy Center and its bridge to the home environment, the LeapPad system. Parents were impressed with the unique and engaging technology. Bohannon explained that the LeapPad unit would be sent to each home every two weeks. “The parents wanted to help their children develop language skills in a fun way, but they weren’t quite sure how,” says Bohannon. “They didn’t want paper-and-pencil drills. This really helped parents encourage their children to read.”

Bohannon has learned that about 85 percent of her students’ parents have a high school degree or less, and many parents report having three or fewer adult or children’s books at home. These two factors alone indicate their children are at risk for developing a below-average reading ability. The “home connection” plays a critical role in addressing some risk factors. “This program,” Bohannon says, “puts books in the home.” And because of the LeapPad unit, the books become accessible to all families, regardless of reading ability or English proficiency.

The Literacy Center does more than help parents support their children in the home environment, however. As part of the SRLD Program, parents volunteer to help in the classroom twice a month. Because LeapFrog SchoolHouse™ products are so easy to use, parents feel secure using them, and employ them creatively. During free-choice time in Bohannon’s class, one parent called up children individually to play a LeapDesk™ workstation game she created. She invited children to press the letters of their name and trace each one as it lit up on the writing pad. After tracing each letter, the children excitedly assembled the letters in order to spell their names, showing a sense of pride in their accomplishment.

Parents Participate in the Learning Process

The parent who organized the LeapDesk workstation activity used her volunteer time valuably and had great fun doing it. This parent, like many parents in the class, was an English language learner. Despite her unfamiliarity with English, she effectively engaged the children and reinforced academic lessons using the LeapDesk workstation.

Even though children can work independently with the LeapPad system at home, many parents choose to work together with their child. For Spanish-speaking parents, time spent with their children also allows them to reinforce and develop their own English vocabulary.

English- and Spanish-speaking parents alike are able to successfully use the LeapFrog SchoolHouse products with their children. “We have people coming in to help who may not feel comfortable with school. Maybe your experience with school wasn’t positive. Maybe you feel like you’re out of place. Maybe you don’t feel highly educated yourself,” remarks Bohannon. “But LeapFrog is non-threatening. You don’t have to be highly skilled to help out—you don’t even have to speak English!” The components’ ease-of-use allows parents, who otherwise might be excluded from classroom engagement, to be involved.

“Speaking for myself, as well as for the children and their parents, we were all extremely pleased with The Literacy Center,” Bohannon concluded.