



# THE Literacy CENTER

An interactive multisensory curriculum



Case Study #10  
Huie Elementary  
Forest Park, Georgia

## Diverse ESOL Students Improve Skills

The Literacy Center had arrived at Huie Elementary in September 2000, but the inservice was not slated until October, several weeks later. This was not a problem for Devon Schultz, the English as a Second Language (ESOL) teacher at this ethnically diverse K–5 school; she inserted the batteries and “was off and running,” she says. Much of The Literacy Center’s ‘how-to’ was “self-explanatory,” she recalls. She credits The Literacy Center teacher’s manual for helping her to lay it out very clearly: “You just open the book and it leads you through it.”

Schultz still participated in a full day of inservice, led by LeapFrog SchoolHouse™ reps on campus, and she feels it was valuable. It stressed the sequencing of the curriculum, and walked everyone through each component. “We had several hours set aside for hands-on use, which we normally just don’t get a chance to do with new technology,” says Schultz. “Usually, we go from ‘here it is’ directly to ‘now use it’ without getting any experiment time. So it was great to have that opportunity to explore with The Literacy Center.”

### Discovering a Versatile Tool

Located near Atlanta, Georgia, Huie Elementary was built in the mid-1960s, and then modified to support a growing population. Today, this Clayton County Public School serves nearly 750 students. About 60 percent of the students are African American. About 20 percent are Hispanic and 5 percent are Vietnamese. Less than 5 percent of the students are Caucasian.

Schultz is the school’s only ESOL teacher, so it is no surprise that one classroom is reserved for her and her students. The Literacy Center technology components remain set up there all the time on a large table that is usually surrounded by students. Each class period, lasting 45–50 minutes, a maximum of 11 ESOL students come to Schultz for tailored instruction. Grouped mostly by grade level, students are generally “eager to learn,” says their teacher, a characteristic she happily exploits.

For the first few weeks, Schultz utilized The Literacy Center with entire classes by integrating its exercises into lessons. This formal introduction helped her students familiarize themselves with the various components and their real purposes. She also let students independently explore with the LeapPad® classroom learning system, the LeapDesk™ workstation, and the LeapMat™ learning surface.

Now, she employs the whole-class teaching approach occasionally, when appropriate. For example, first graders at Huie Elementary use a reading series in which a section is devoted to rhyming, so Schultz includes related exercises in her instructional plan that includes The Literacy Center. Much of the time, however, students will go to the big Literacy Center table on their own initiative. “I don’t have to keep prodding them,” she says.

“They are self-directed and internally motivated,” Schultz observes about her students’ independent use of the LeapPad® systems and other learning tools. “That’s because they are experiencing success first hand, and of course, that reward makes them want to continue.”

Students thus spend a majority of their time with The Literacy Center in self-guided study, a format that allows Schultz to focus her attention on certain high-need students or a time-sensitive situation. “It frees me up,” she agrees, “but keeps them busy.” Youngsters can go to The Literacy Center’s special table any time they’re not busy during class, and are especially encouraged to go there at the end or beginning of the class period to engage themselves productively.

“The [Literacy] Center works especially well in helping manage the transitioning between classes,” says Schultz. Those scheduled “slices of chaos” are the number one complaint of teachers, she notes, who are supposed to finish up one period and prepare for the next while being deluged with questions by both incoming and outgoing students. The LeapPad systems, especially, keep many of those ‘tweeners’ busy until it’s really time to go or to start class. She says, “It’s a buffer for me and fun for the kids—win-win all around.”

## **Repetition and Practice Are Effective**

Routine use of the LeapDesk workstation for assessment gives Schultz the details she desires about her varied students, enabling her to pinpoint the exact skills, letters, or sounds that need more practice. “That is very cool,” she admits, saving her a “fair chunk of time” in compiling reports needed for ESOL programs.

“My ESOL students need to hear a word or letter at least 75 times before they know it,” says Schultz, adding that repetition is good for improving enunciation too. The LeapFrog SchoolHouse™ interactive learning tools elegantly take care of this repetitive practice for all students in a fun and engaging way.

In addition, The Literacy Center seems to benefit those without any English skills—true non-speakers—particularly well, even if they are older students. Schultz saw “notable changes” using The Literacy Center, for example, with a group of third, fourth, and fifth graders who had no English skills at all. And Richard Scarry’s book title for the LeapPad system has been especially good for Schultz’s Vietnamese students. “Their native language has no /s/ sound and this title features lots of plural words and incorporates all the basics—numbers, colors, etc.,” she elaborates. “We have used it with great success.”

Indeed, all of Huie Elementary’s ESOL students made “pretty great strides” for the 2000–01 academic year, for which the new Literacy Center “can certainly take some credit,” says Schultz. “Considering that these students are no older than fifth grade, they have shown great maturity when working independently with The Literacy Center,” remarks Schultz. “They may start off with exercises that they know are too easy”, she explains, “but then they quickly get bored and will voluntarily move up to harder tasks. It is actually the challenge that holds their attention, not the technology alone.”

“It’s been very interesting to see how these kids handle the self-directed nature of the process,” says Schultz. “They are more disciplined than I actually expected.”