

# Effectiveness Study Series

## Case Study #9

### Meadow Woods Elementary Orlando, Florida

## Buoyed by The Literacy Center, Bilingual Students Dive into Learning

When phoning or visiting Meadow Woods Elementary School in Orlando, Florida, the first thing one hears is the school's motto: "A safe harbor where all children can learn." This is no idle catch phrase, one soon discovers. Committed to providing the best learning environment possible, all of the school's teachers, administrators and support staff work hard to integrate appropriate new techniques and technologies.

Thus, when several LeapFrog SchoolHouse Literacy Centers were delivered to the K-5 campus in the fall of 2000, Meadow Woods' staff was first intrigued, then excited, by the new tools.

"They liked its focus on discrete skills and felt its curriculum was solidly grounded in national standards," recalls Jacci Hoskins, the school's Curriculum Resource Teacher. "The fact that the LeapPads® and such are so fun to use didn't hurt either. We knew the kids would love them."

### Bilingual Households Targeted

Purchased with Title I funds, Meadow Woods Elementary acquired three full Literacy Centers, one PreK bundle and two K-2 bundles, as well as extra LeapPads and plenty of special books for them. In total, 24 LeapFrog SchoolHouse devices serve "at least several hundred students" in kindergarten through grade two, as well as youngsters in preschool sessions held on the campus.

Responsible for implementing the Literacy Centers, Hoskins explains that one is used exclusively in ESOL, another is shared among the kindergarten teachers, with the third used in grades one and two. Furthermore, the kindergarten and first-grade teachers may each send home two LeapPads with students for the night – which was an "instant hit," she notes.

Almost half (49%) of Meadow Woods' 1,300 students are Hispanic, so the Literacy Center's ability to address their needs – learners for which English is a second language – is vital.

"It's one thing to teach children to read and write when they hear English all the time at home," says Hoskins. "It's quite a different task, however, when the home is bilingual, as so many are in this community." The LeapDesks™ and LeapPads supply these students with additional guided practice, featuring headphones, for example, that enable them to hear individual phonemes.

In fact, Hoskins uses the LeapPads with adult ESOL students, whom she teaches at night on the campus, for the same reason: So they can hear sounds pronounced correctly. "It helps especially with 'a' and 'e' vowel sounds," she explains, which are hardest for non-English speakers to distinguish. Adults find the LeapPad's unique technology appealing, she says, noting "they love it as much as the ESOL kids do, and those kids love their LeapFrog!"

### **Instilling a Love for Learning**

All in all, the hands-on nature of The Literacy Center's LeapDesks, LeapPads and LeapMats™ truly fit the culture of this Florida elementary school. "We have a vibrant campus," concurs Hoskins. "Yes, it's noisy and it might seem chaotic, but that just means there's a lot of learning happening here."

"Indeed," she continues, "one of our biggest goals is to instill in our students a solid love for learning." Such a thing may be difficult to quantify but is readily apparent to the naked eye. "You see the evidence of that everywhere on our campus."

At first glance, Meadow Woods comprises classic white "portable" classrooms, holding individual grade levels, with an average of 20 students per class. Looking closer, one also finds a well-stocked library-media center in which every internal wall is covered by a sea-themed mural, drawn and painted by students and staff. They also maintain a 55-gallon saltwater aquarium on the campus. This is an active place, where children and adults alike dive in, immersing themselves in the process of learning.

When a half-day inservice was conducted onsite by LeapFrog SchoolHouse on The Literacy Center components and curriculum last fall, nearly 20 faculty and para-professionals attended. Citing as especially helpful the demonstrations of how to integrate elements into regular class work, afterwards everyone was eager to get started, Hoskins recalls.

In practice, some teachers already structured their time around the notion of various "activity centers," into which students rotate throughout the course of a day. Of course, The Literacy Center certainly meshes well in this setting, so these faculty could immediately add its unique tools to their classroom's mix. Other K-2 teachers at the school integrated exercises, using mainly LeapMats and LeapPads, as a whole-class activity. Often, small groups would use a device together. In all cases, students seem to stay engaged with the materials, teachers tell Hoskins.

The Literacy Center's gentle guidance and interactive devices help us "fill in a love to learn in fun ways," says Hoskins. Almost everything a student does elicits some sort of feedback – visual, auditory or both – from the units. This reinforces the learning message, and also mimics the video games that kids know. Modern kids are accustomed to a very rapid pace, she points out, which tools like LeapPads can handle with ease.

### **Assessment Role to Grow**

Teachers usually mention the printable assessment reports provided by the LeapDesk when asked what they most appreciate about The Literacy Center, says Hoskins. Hard-copy specifics for a whole class or one student can be easily created on demand, enabling better planning by teachers, more productive meetings with administrators, plus enhanced communication with parents. "Those reports have meant a lot to our parents," comments Hoskins; "they like seeing details."

Moreover, Meadow Woods plans to train its teachers to use the LeapDesk assessments for gauging "readiness" for kindergarten and first grade. Initially these reports will be utilized informally within the school, but it will be interesting to see how they correlate to formal assessments mandated by the state.

Everyone involved with The Literacy Centers at this Orange County Public Schools' site seems "very pleased, overall" with their first year's results, Jacci Hoskins summarizes, and they look forward to more.

"The devices provide rote experiences by themselves," she explains, "thus freeing up teachers for more personal contact. Ultimately, it's the one-on-one interaction that benefits the kids most."