

English Language Learners: Boosting Literacy Achievement

Current research provides guidance about how to most effectively teach literacy to this varied population of learners — whether in English-only classes, dual-language programs, or other variants. Of primary importance, the research makes clear that “reading” is not one simple capability. It is a complex task that requires children to master two separate skills: recognizing (or “decoding”) the words and understanding what the text says. Furthermore, ability to understand written English and write in English is intertwined with proficiency in spoken English.

Middle School: For teachers working with English language learners, the middle school designation may be particularly problematic. A middle school ESL classroom, for example, may contain children of similar age but with great diversity in English language fluency. Teachers encountering such a situation may find it useful to create lesson plans that encompass both a whole class and small group model as well as to provide language frames for students to support academic conversation.

SUCCESS AT BERRY

English Language Learners (ELL'S) at Berry Elementary School (K-6) in the South Bay Union School District make up 50% of the school's population. Since the school is only two miles from the Mexico border, most students that attend Berry have had no English instruction prior to starting school.

The school, under Paul Bloomberg's leadership and a Literacy Support System consultant, has boosted the achievement of ELL's in just three short years.

- From 2008 to 2010 English learners made a 26.9% gain on the California Standards Test (CST) in English Language arts.
- Furthermore, from 2008 to 2010 English learners made a 30.9% gain in mathematics on the CST.

Berry Elementary attributes these gains to the following five things using both a *whole class* and *small group* model:

1. Every lesson at Berry is a language lesson where academic vocabulary is emphasized and practiced by the students throughout the lesson. Student read, write and use the words emphasized in academic conversation throughout the lesson with a partner or triad.
2. Teachers teach writer's workshop for 45-60 minutes every day. This is the time where students learn to be writers.
3. Phonics and word recognition are systematically taught and assessed multiple times during the year. Reading comprehension is also assessed every 6 weeks through benchmark assessments.
4. Note-Taking is an emphasis at Berry. Teachers engage students to take notes throughout the learning and in each subject. Students must write summaries for their notes daily.
5. Teachers collaborate bi-weekly to plan rigorous lessons and use data to make instructional decisions. The principal, teachers and students make 6-week goals that connect to 6-week benchmark assessments in ELA and Math.

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