

# Preparing Students for Success in a Global World

*By Karen deSampaio Ferraz, Buckingham Elementary School Teacher*



“I like learning Spanish because I learn new words and we get to do fun activities like pretending we are shopping in a grocery store while talking in Spanish,” explained Darius Smith, a first grader from Lisa Layton’s class at Buckingham Elementary School. Classmate Lukas Aulinskis sees another benefit as well. “I like it [learning Spanish] because if somebody doesn’t know how to speak English, you can help them,” said Lukas.

Teaching Beginning Spanish is new at Buckingham Elementary School. The elementary foreign language pilot program was implemented in September 2007, and is the first of its kind in our school system. Based on research, our school system believes that students are better able to acquire foreign language at the elementary level. In addition, learning foreign language helps students excel academically and prepares them for success in a global world.

Beginning Spanish is a “specials” offering like Music, Art, and Physical Education and is taught to Kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2 on a weekly schedule. Students in Grades 1 and 2 receive one 30-minute lesson per-week, while Kindergarteners learn Spanish in two 30-minute lessons each week. The focus in this course is placed on listening, comprehension, and speaking, with occasional opportunities for reading and writing.

Students at Buckingham Elementary are learning Spanish through music, games, repetition, manipulatives, and visuals – including using actual objects represented in the vocabulary that they are studying. This current instructional method is very different from the “traditional” approach to teaching foreign language, where the language was taught with straight verb conjugations and little opportunity to practice conversational skills.

Spanish class incorporates many multi-dimensional components. Our Spanish class, for example, opens with plenty of singing in Spanish; in fact, a new song accompanies each theme

which is introduced every few weeks. Three verses of *Spring is Here* (“*La Primavera Esta Aquí*”) was one of our most recent accomplishments.

Each lesson has corresponding objectives which state what everyone in class should be able to comprehend and/or say by the close of the lesson. For example, this week’s lesson was “Name five parts of a flower.” This lesson incorporated stimulating visuals such as a diagramed sunflower, as well as actual sunflower seeds to assist students in their drawing activity.

Spanish vocabulary is presented to my students in small steps. As students begin to understand a word or phrase, they will then produce it by saying it. This is the route to becoming conversational in Spanish!

Why should foreign language be offered on the elementary level? Interacting with a foreign language opens a window to the world, giving children the opportunity to experience a more global view of the world and to achieve their highest potential for success. In addition, learning a second language makes children more linguistically aware of their own language and consequently, helps make them better communicators.

Some readers may be surprised to know that being exposed to and learning one foreign language, even a “little bit,” makes a person more open to and confident to learn another foreign language. Buckingham Elementary School students taking Spanish are gaining valuable language skills and cultural knowledge. They are participating in a program that is on the cutting edge of elementary education.

Teachers at our school are very supportive of the pilot program. Kindergarten teachers Darlene Beall and Kim Marowski praised the program. “Not only are our students getting a jump start on learning a second language, they are learning to respect other languages and cultures,” said Beall and Marowski. “It is great to see our students attempting to speak with students whose first language is Spanish! We also love that our non-English speaking students are discovering that there is value in not forgetting their first language.”

Second grade students join first graders and kindergarteners in their enthusiasm for learning Spanish. Second grader Mackenzi Wagner from Ramona Smith’s class grinned and said, “My favorite part is learning to sing songs in Spanish.” Classmate Nyaire Purnell added, “I love Spanish class because I always wanted to learn Spanish!” Nyaire also explained that she believes that leaning Spanish is important because if she were to meet a new student on the student’s first day of school and the student didn’t speak English, she could greet them in Spanish.

Parents have also been pleased. “It is a good idea to start learning Spanish early,” commented parent Sarah Nock, mother to first grader Hunter Nock. “They [the students] are going to use Spanish more and more in the future.”

Not only do educators need to instill self-confidence in our young students for succeeding at new skills, we need to foster the ability in our students to communicate and reach out to others both linguistically and culturally. Offering foreign language at an early age affords the opportunity to achieve all of these goals. In our ever changing world, the need for learning foreign languages is inevitable.

If you have any questions about the Spanish pilot program at Buckingham Elementary School, you may contact me at 410-632-5300. You may also contact Diane Stulz, Coordinator for Instruction of Foreign Language.