

# Balanced Literacy at eb

## An Overview

The reading and writing program at Ecole Bilingue de Berkeley is based on a balanced literacy approach. What is balanced literacy? It's an approach to language arts instruction based on a balance between several different factors. First, it's a balance between reading, writing, listening, speaking and word work. Second, it's a balance between whole language and phonics instruction. That means that children learn to read and write by reading a variety of real books and also by looking at the parts and sounds that make up words. Third, there is a balance between whole group instruction (when the class is reading or writing all together), small group instruction (when the teacher is working with a group of students with a similar instructional need) and individual instruction (when the teacher can conference with students one on one). Fourth, by implementing the components of balanced literacy, there is a balance between the responsibility of the teacher and the responsibility of the students. This is accomplished by providing opportunities for modeled, shared, guided and independent reading and writing.

What are the components of balanced literacy? The first four components are modeled reading, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading or reader's workshop. Modeled reading is when the teacher reads aloud to students, modeling fluent reading and facilitating comprehension discussions. Shared reading is when the teacher and students are reading a text all together to create support for readers of all levels and learn about various reading skills and strategies together. Guided reading is when the teacher meets with a small group of students who are reading at a similar instructional level. This allows the teacher to differentiate for students who progress in reading at different levels so that above grade level students can be challenged, below grade level students can be supported to advance to grade level standards and on level students can progress as well. Independent reading is done during reader's workshop when students can choose their own books, practice the skills they have learned while the teacher conferences with them one on one.

The writing approach in balanced literacy uses the same structure of modeled writing, shared writing, guided writing and independent writing. Modeled writing is when the teacher is writing for the class, shared writing or interactive writing is when the teacher and class are writing together and guided and independent writing can take place during the writer's workshop. Writer's workshop allows students to practice writing a variety of genres, working on the process of writing which includes brainstorming, drafting, editing, revising and publishing while the teacher meets with small groups and individual writers.

Another component of balanced literacy is word work which encompasses phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, grammar and vocabulary. This is when students learn about letters and sounds and how the parts of words and words fit together.

How does balanced literacy work in an immersion program? Because the balanced literacy approach is focused on the student, it is a perfect method for an immersion classroom. Based on their language proficiency in French or English, students' literacy skills will progress at different levels. With a balanced literacy approach, teachers can differentiate for the needs of individual students. Some students might be reading at a higher level in French or English but their individual level will guide the instruction in both languages. In this way, students can build their literacy skills in each language at an appropriate pace. Students will have an opportunity for whole group, small group and individual instruction in both languages. In addition, the balanced literacy approach has been shown to increase gains in vocabulary development and oral language, two skills that are vital to language acquisition.

If you have more questions about balanced literacy, please contact Maggie Schoon, Instructional Coach and English Curriculum Coordinator, at [mschoon@eb.org](mailto:mschoon@eb.org). You can take a tour of the wonderful resources we have at EB to support balanced literacy or schedule a time to view balanced literacy in action in a classroom.

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