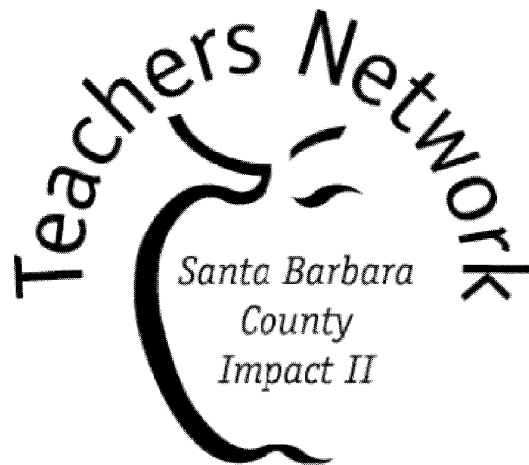


# School Site Pen Pals

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2006 Project Grants  
Santa Barbara County Education Office

## School Site Pen Pals

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**Description:** This project involves a class of English language learners and a class of Spanish language learners. The goal is to enhance communication between these two groups and further the development of both oral and written language. Our classes were both at the same school and the same grade level (seventh and eighth graders) but this project could be adapted using different grade levels at different schools.

**Materials:** There were no special materials used. We did use computers for typing letters and we did use self made bingo games.

**Activity #1:** We paired up students in the two classrooms and then informed the students that they would have a special pen pal and would be writing a letter of introduction. The students wrote in the language that they were just beginning to learn. We asked students to describe themselves and write about what they liked to do . The letters were then distributed by the teachers.

**Activity #2:** Students were required to write ten questions to ask their pen pal. We emphasized questions about family, since we had recently been learning family vocabulary. Also, they could ask their age, their likes dislikes etc..Questions were turned in and edited for spelling and grammar and then rewritten by the students.

**Activity #3:** Students met and interviewed each other, writing down the answers. The two teachers and a aide helped with vocabulary and took photos of the student pairs.

**Activity #4:** Students wrote up their interviews in paragraph form, the photos were added and the final copies were displayed. They could also be made into a book form for next years students.

**Activity #5:** For an end of the school year celebration we got the pen pals together and played bingo with student made bingo sheets from vocabulary we had been learning. We also had snacks.

**Follow -up Activities:** This project was a year long project, we had the students meet about three times with organized activities, although students could certainly meet more often if time allows.

We did find that it was necessary to have a game or project that students could work on together, such as bingo or interviews. At the junior high age, these students who were from different countries and backgrounds did not naturally strike up conversations and keep them going. We did use some of the activities described in the HighPoint, Basics a Hampton Brown publication, which is district adopted.

**Extensions:** Any games that involve some basic vocabulary could be played when the two groups meet. The book Play and Practice by Anthony Chamberlin and Kurt Stenberg, published by National Textbook Company is a useful resource for games which practice and enhance new vocabulary. If the pen pal project were to be applied with younger children, one could use basic board games, songs and read alouds as activities. We did find that having a pen pal from a completely different “clique “ helped each student to break out a little bit from his or her comfort zone and get to know someone that normally he or she would not get to know at all, even though they may walk by each other in the hallways every day. Although we have a great emphasis on academic standards let us not forget the import social role that school plays in the life of a child.

I do feel that this project would also be successful with students of two different age groups, such as a group of lower primary native English speakers paired with an older group of English as Second Language Learners, or two primary classes from different schools.