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Vo-Tech Literacy Program Includes RAPS 360 and My Reading Coach

An Interview with Linda Grim, Literacy Coordinator

Bethlehem Area Vocational and Technical School, Bethlehem, PA

School Profile: 1,126 Students; Grades 9 – 12; 33% Disadvantaged; 33% IEP

Email: griml@bavts.org

High school students in our district leave their home schools to attend either our morning or afternoon vocational school sessions. As part of the curriculum, we provide a literacy program for all students which has two primary goals:

- To help all students improve their state assessment performance
- To prepare all students to be successful in business and industry

As the literacy coordinator, my role is to teach a variety of literacy strategies to our teachers. They use these techniques to improve students' comprehension of written material in their vocational program areas. When I started last year, I was looking for something that would help us identify reading grade levels and skill gaps quickly and easily. After seeing the RAPS 360 and My Reading Coach demonstrations, I felt that I had found a solution to our literacy challenge. These MindPlay programs would not only offer remediation to our lowest readers, but would take any student to the next level of reading proficiency.

Ten disadvantaged students with IEPs worked in our 2009 summer program and participated in the MindPlay pilot program. The RAPS 360 diagnostic reports helped these students recognize their reading problems. The immediate feedback they received from My Reading Coach accelerated their reading skills. We soon learned that they liked working on My Reading Coach because their activities and reading levels were private. After seeing their engagement, we purchased RAPS 360 and My Reading Coach with grant money.

In September, 2009, 100 students were assessed on RAPS 360. The majority of them were reading below grade level. Most were reading at the 7th, 8th, and 9th grade levels. All of our eleventh and twelfth graders were below grade level. We discovered that at least half of the 100 students had problems decoding and understanding phonics; their spelling was lacking too. Their home schools were thrilled that we had a literacy program to offer their underachievers. They wanted their IEP and special needs students to receive the remediation My Reading Coach offered.

Right now we have approximately 20 students on My Reading Coach. The program is offered to students reading at 7th grade level and below. However, any student who is

interested in improving their reading skills is also placed on My Reading Coach. Students work on the program 15 minutes, three times a week.

In our school, we measure student success using the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) scores. The NOCTI test includes both "hands-on" and written assessments. Our students test high on the "hands-on" portion of the test and low on the written portion. Their low reading skills affected their scores. Since we have started using RAPS 360 and My Reading Coach, our state assessment and NOCTI scores are going up. (If students had more time on the program, I am sure their test results would be even better).

Outstanding Achievement: One tenth grade student was reading on a second grade level in September, 2009. He was on the program three times a week for 15 minutes. In December, 2009, he was on lesson 14 and reading at the 4th grade level. After students begin My Reading Coach, we have them write answers to specific questions in a journal. This student responded, "I want my vocational teacher to know how well I am doing in reading." He also wrote, "I am beginning to understand what you are teaching me in the classroom." The fact that he could put these sentences together tells me that he is now reading at approximately the 5th grade level. His confidence is improving, and his shop teacher commented that he is helping other students in class.

Literacy Program

Of our 40 teachers, half are part of the literacy team working to improve teaching techniques and student achievement. In our literacy program, we embed reading and writing strategies into all content areas. The teachers realize they can no longer blame a student's lack of ability as the cause for his/her not learning to read. Teachers know that they must find ways to motivate students to improve their reading and writing skills.

Many students are asking for help with their reading. When the teachers develop a strong relationship with them and use the MindPlay programs, student reading and achievement scores rise. We want all of our students to improve their literacy so they can meet the complex skill requirements being requested by business and industry today.

ESL Second and Third Graders Become Fluent Readers on My Reading Coach

An Interview with Evelyn Scott, Bilingual Reading Paraprofessional

Alamo Elementary School, Fort Stockton, Texas

School Profile: 475 Students; Grades K – 3; 85% Disadvantaged; 75% Hispanic; Title 1

Email: evelyn.scott@ssisd.net

Thirty-four second and third grade ESL struggling readers were the first students to work with me on My Reading Coach in November, 2007. The second graders continued working with me in third grade if they did not finish the program. These tier three struggling readers were assessed by teachers using the Texas Primary Reading Inventory. They were placed on My Reading Coach, and in approximately seven months, their reading skills improved significantly.

The second graders were reading at first grade level and below. They had no comprehension and no fluency. Some had never read before, and their oral reading was very slow. On the My Reading Coach placement test, their weakest activities ranged from 9% to 50%. Their review test scores in May, 2008, ranged from 70% to 100%. They worked on My Reading Coach, including the expert sheets, for 30 to 45 minutes a day, Monday through Friday. The students who are still with me as third graders are now reading at the 4.0 and 4.5 reading grade level according to their My Reading Coach review tests.

In our Accelerated Reading program, students read material categorized according to color dots. In second grade they began the AR program with a reading average of .5; those still on My Reading Coach in third grade are now at a 5.5 reading average. Some got all the way to the blue and white level where paragraphs were getting longer; the words bigger; and the vocabulary harder.

Their word production and pronunciation improved. They read words they had never seen before as well as broke down long words into syllables and spoke them correctly. They learned to read faster and understood what they were reading. Their self-esteem improved because they felt more competent. Students even felt comfortable enough to read a book aloud to an adult and to the class. Now they walk down the hall with a book in their hand. Classroom teachers tell us that they have never seen a program give their students such big reading gains.

Outstanding ESL Student Achievement

One third grade student was struggling with phonics, comprehension and fluency. He began My Reading Coach in November, 2007, and finished in April, 2008 (45 minutes, five days a week). He began at the 3rd grade reading level. In six months he took the comprehension review test and was reading at the 5.5 reading level. He was the first to

finish all of the lessons assigned to him and did not want to stop the program. He is now in fifth grade and is a straight "A" student.

One second grade student started My Reading Coach as a non-English speaker and reader. He was on the program from November, 2008, to May, 2009 (45 minutes, five days a week). In that time, he went from being a non-reader to reading fluently at the second grade reading level and received his phonics certificate. He moved away from Alamo Elementary the beginning of third grade and did not complete the program.

My Reading Coach is successful for our ESL students because we quickly identify any student who is struggling and put them on the program. They develop strong skills and habits as young readers, especially in comprehension, fluency and pronunciation. My reward is to see these students flourish in reading. I want them to know that someone is there to help them become fluent readers.

Student Letters to MindPlay

Student One: *DEAR READING COACH:*

THANK YOU FOR TEACHING ME. I LEARNED A LOT NOW. I LOVED READING COACH. IT WAS SO FUN WHEN I WAS IN READING COACH. THE TEST THAT I TOOK WAS KIND OF HARD AND EASY BUT IT WAS FUN. I ALWAYS GET A LOT OF CERTIFICATES AND IT IS YOU THAT TAUGHT ME. AND I THINK THAT I GOT A LITTLE SMART WELL A LOT SMARTER. YOU ARE THE BEST. THANK YOU FOR TEACHING ME AND DON'T FORGET THAT I LOVE READING COACH A LOT. I FINISHED DECEMBER 16, 2009 WITH A READING GRADE EQUIVALENT: 5.0. I AM GOING TO GET A CERTIFICATE AND A TROPHY.

Student Two: *DEAR READING COACH:*

THANK YOU FOR THE READING COACH PROGRAM THAT I WAS IN. I LEARNED WRITING AND READING AND NOW I DO BETER IN MY CLASS AND I THANK YOU FOR EVERY THING THAT I LEARNED IN THE READING COACH. I FINISHED THE PROGRAM WITH A READING GRADE EQUIVALENT: 4.0. I AM IN THE 3RD GRADE NOW. I AM HAPPY BECAUSE I FINISHED THE READING COACH PROGRAM AND THAT I GOT A CERTIFICATE AND A TROPHY.

Help Us Help You!

Tip to share in the newsletter? Want to brag about your students? Have a question about the program?

Send your comments and questions to mail@mindplay.com