



December 2007

ESL Students from Africa Learn to Speak and Read English Quickly

An Interview with Anne Marquard, ESL Teacher; Jackson Middle School, Portland, Oregon
School Profile: 688 students; Grades 6, 7, 8; 18% disadvantaged

Email: amarquar@pps.k12.or.us

For the first time last year, our ESL students made adequate yearly progress in reading. Prior to My Reading Coach, the ESL students were not showing measurable gains in the state standardized tests. Because of last year's success, Jackson Middle School was able to meet and exceed Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements.

The ESL Administrator for Portland Public Schools, Diana Fernandez, has a progressive vision: She wants to help students learn English using proven scientific methods and the best technology available. Last summer she and my principal, John Danielson, asked me if I would consider using My Reading Coach in my classroom. I was excited to get started.

Fifty-three students worked on the program two to three times a week for 40 minutes a day. After being on the program 4 to 6 weeks, students became more confident. They volunteered to read orally; they sounded out words they did not know or understand; and their writing and spelling improved. (At <http://inside.esl.pps.k12.or.us/docs/pg/11986> there are audio samples of some of our ESL students reading.) These three success stories in particular convinced me the program works.

ESL Student Gets to Lesson 55 in Five Months

A sixth grade Somalian boy from Egypt entered our school in November, 2006, not able to speak or read English. He scored 22% on the My Reading Coach Placement Test; he completed the Final Review at 72%. He had a 50 point gain, 227% improvement, in 44 hours. In June, 2007, he was reading at the 4.5 grade level. The computer and program challenged him, but he never got frustrated. It was hard for him to learn the rules, but he did not repeat a lesson more than twice. His most difficult lessons were short vowel sounds.

He was silent in his other classes for the first three months at our school. Teachers thought he was not speaking or reading English. But, in my class he was speaking short sentences like: "Go locker; need pencil." In his third month on the program, he raised his hand in social studies; he read a paragraph aloud pronouncing every word correctly, except the word hieroglyphics. His teacher stormed into my classroom praising his accomplishments. She said, "I didn't know he could read so well, and he did not make one single error." The whole class was nervous for him and applauded afterwards. My Reading Coach gave him the skills and confidence to speak and read in class.

He is now a seventh grader in my advanced ESL class. He is working with more advanced writing skills, vocabulary development, grammar and comprehension. He is in sheltered instruction in seventh grade math and science; he can do the work as long as teachers help him understand the complex vocabulary.

Two Ethiopian Sisters Finish the Program

Two sisters, a sixth grader and eighth grader, came to Jackson Middle School last year. Both sisters received ESL instruction in another school for 2 years.

Sixth grader: In October, 2006, she scored 28% on the My Reading Coach Placement Test; her Final Review was 92%. She finished all grammar and comprehension with a 64 point gain, 229% improvement, in 38 hours over 4 months. She was reading at the 10.5 grade level. Her older sister in eighth grade was upset because she had more certificates and was exceeding her on My Reading Coach.

Eighth grader: In competition with her sister, this student began working on My Reading Coach in the morning before school and any time she could get on the program. In October, 2006, she scored 24% on her placement test; her Final Review was 93%. She was on the program 63 hours and completed all grammar and comprehension lessons with a 69 point gain, 288% improvement. She made her greatest gains during Ramadan. Because she was fasting for the month, she did not want to go to the cafeteria where she would smell the food. She used that time to work on My Reading Coach.

In our high achieving school, she was able to keep up with the eighth grade work load. She wanted to do everything everyone else did with little modification, but it took her more time because she read slowly and asked many questions. All eighth grade teachers voted and selected her to receive the Most Improved Student Award last year. Now, she is getting all As and Bs in high school. My Reading Coach and her determination have been instrumental in her success.

My Reading Coach Works

My Reading Coach documents a student's success and provides data that directs a student's learning. The teacher knows the specific skills a student needs to read. Not only does it indicate when a student is frustrated; it also lets the teacher know if a student is fooling around on the computer. With this feedback, the teacher can intervene immediately.

A classic problem for reading teachers is the fact that every student needs a different skill at a different time in his/her development. Some need lots of practice and some need only one lesson. Because My Reading Coach gives ESL students an individualized program; they can progress at their own pace. The program, the student, and the teacher succeed together. We now know that ESL students can meet and exceed AYP if they are given the right tools. My Reading Coach has allowed our students to learn to read and raise our school's academic standards.

Student Commitment and Teacher Creativity Help Two Eighth Grade Students Learn to Read

An Interview with Kelly Miller, Reading Teacher for Special Education Population
Kenmore Middle School, Arlington, VA
School Profile: 761 students; Grades 6, 7, 8; 42% Hispanic; 55% Disadvantaged; Title 1
Email: Kelly.Miller@apsva.us

During the 2005/2006 school year two of my eighth grade students learned to read using My Reading Coach. The commitment these students demonstrated by staying after school four days a week for a whole year speaks volumes about the effectiveness of My Reading Coach. In 2006/2007 we expanded the program to include any sixth, seventh or eighth grader who wanted to work on the program. Six students showed up consistently during an after-school tutorial.

Two Eighth Graders Learn to Read in 2005/2006

These two eighth graders were encoding at a K-1 level, and their reading comprehension was poor as a result of their weakness with decoding. These boys were intelligent; but they were struggling with reading and writing. They could not read aloud and could not write simple sentences. They walked with their heads hanging low, shoulders humped over and were disruptive in class. One was an English speaker, and the other was a native of El Salvador.

They began working on My Reading Coach after school two days a week, 45 minutes a day. Soon they were on the program 4 days a week, 1½ hours a day. At the end of eighth grade, the English speaking student passed the Virginia World Geography SOL (Standards of Learning/state assessment), receiving HS credit in middle school. The ESL student began reading at home for practice; he received the eighth grade award for perseverance. Both of their academic and social successes were the direct result of working on My Reading Coach.

Their teachers commented on their academic growth and noticed a difference in class: They were able to use their voice to decode words in books and on the board, and they participated more in class and had more confidence. Teachers were able to understand the simple sentences they wrote. Their body language was positive and their disruptive behavior stopped throughout the school. This was a huge success for them and My Reading Coach.

Last year they came back to visit me and commented on the fact that the program works. While they worked on My Reading Coach, I might hear them say, *"This old man is annoying and the program is boring; but the program really helps."* Once they felt successful, they kept coming back for more. They knew My Reading Coach was teaching them to read.

Expanded Program – Creative Learning Activities

During our one hour after-school tutorial, I have a 5 to 10

minute introductory mini lesson before students go to their computers to work on My Reading Coach. While providing them with a snack, we may:

- Play a game: "read my lips" or speed read the consonants.
- Learn about counting syllables.
- Learn the big words/word rules that the Coach doesn't get to (phonemes, graphemes), also closed words (cvc, vc patterns).
- Go over one page in a packet called "Cheat Sheets" that I created. It is filled with all of the rules that students use as a reference when they are working independently at the computer.

Once they are on My Reading Coach, I walk around the room and help them. I try to bring the multi-sensory aspects of what they are learning into real life by using colored chips on phoneme/grapheme mapping paper, songs sung for vowel sounds, or shaving cream to help encode/decode words in isolation. With the shaving cream, I spray it on the table, and the students use their fingers to draw the word in the cream and mark up the word with decoding rules. Multi-sensory teaching provides visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile experiences simultaneously in order to enhance memory and learning. Multi-sensory instruction is valuable when it comes to teaching struggling readers.

We gather for approximately five minutes at the end of the class for closure activities to reinforce what they are learning on the program. I might go over three, four or five syllable words and have the students decode and read them. I might ask the students to wrap up what they are doing and share the rule they are working on or something they learned that day. They share aloud, and all the students listen to each other.

Students are successful on My Reading Coach because they must repeat lessons until they achieve 100% mastery. Our students often avoid experiences that may cause them embarrassment. Because they can manipulate the program, work independently and are engaged in direct instruction, they begin to understand the encoding/decoding rules.

The program has so much to offer, but additional components need to be provided by the teacher. It is important for teachers to know the rules and teach along with the Coach. My Reading Coach and the teacher make a significant difference to non-readers and struggling readers. Students buy into the program because they truly feel successful as they learn to read.

Happy Holidays from MindPlay!

Tip to share in the newsletter? Want to brag about your students? Have a question about the program?
Something you would like us to change or improve?

Get answers to your questions or send your tips to mail@mindplay.com