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## Special Ed Elementary Students Make Significant Reading Gains in 90-Day Pilot

An Interview with Samantha Richardson, Special Education Teacher  
Palmer Leadership Learning Partners Charter School, Philadelphia, PA  
School Profile: 900 students; Grades K–11; 80% African American, 18% Hispanic;  
100% Disadvantaged; Title 1

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Thirty-five special education students were placed in a 90 day pilot program using My Reading Coach, RAPS 360 and FLRT—a fluent reading trainer from April through June, 2009. These second through fifth graders were screened by RAPS360 and placed on My Reading Coach because they were struggling with phonemic awareness. In 90 days students had an average gain of about 1½ years in their reading skills.

I worked with 30 students—kindergarteners through fourth graders. They were assessed at the pre-primer, kindergarten, first and second grade reading levels based on DIBELS, Qualitative Reading Inventory and RAPS 360. Most of their reading levels were very low. These students spent 45 minutes a day, three to four days a week, on My Reading Coach. Some of them eventually went on FLRT.

These struggling readers displayed behaviors that interfered with their learning. When they realized they were improving on My Reading Coach, these behaviors improved too. They had a desire to learn, were motivated to do the work, and were even reading more at home.

Students in grades 3 and 4 who were on k5 and 1st grade reading levels often felt a disconnect from the general education classroom instruction. It was difficult for them to follow along. On My Reading Coach and FLRT, they could see they were improving within the program; eventually they improved in the classroom too. Even my two kindergarten students with autism wanted to get on My Reading Coach. I put them on the program once I saw the results we were getting for my third and fourth graders. They liked it and would ask, “Can we do My Reading Coach today?”

### Examples of Student Successes

One third grader was reading at the first grade level before using My Reading Coach and FLRT. By the end of the 90 days, she was at third grade level. Now in fourth grade, she is highly motivated and is raising her hand in class. She is able to recognize her mistakes after seeing them on the error report and can correct them.

Another third grader would sit in class with a book open and not say anything. The feedback from the error report and the consistency of the program helped her improve her reading skills. Her participation in class also improved. Now in fourth grade, she answers questions and raises her hand. She will ask, “I do not understand. What exactly do

you mean?” This behavior is the result of the dialogues we had after every lesson on My Reading Coach.

A fourth grade non-reader could sing the alphabet, but he could not identify the written letters. By the end of the trial period he was recognizing his letter sounds, knew his vowel sounds, started to blend his letters and was blending his words. He was able to read a kindergarten book.

### Teacher Comments

One 4th grader was a behavior problem. When other students were too far ahead of his reading level, he acted out. Now that we understand his skills, we can make some accommodations to help.

A second grader filled the missing reading skill gaps using My Reading Coach. His second grade teacher, who also had him in first grade, now notices that his reading aloud in class and his writing have improved. He is scoring closer to the proficient level, instead of basic, on the practice tests for the second grade state assessment.

### MindPlay Programs Work

My Reading Coach was successful with my students in a short period of time because of its individualized learning approach. RAPS 360 targeted the problems, and My Reading Coach fixed a student’s problem as fast as possible and got him/her back into the regular classroom.

Success was also based on knowing when students were struggling. If 45 minutes appeared too long, I would take students off the computer and work with them on the expert sheets. I had a sticker chart and gave out prizes for every ten lessons. When necessary, I would set an attainable goal for a student in order for him/her to get a prize.

At the My Reading Coach student graduation, students wrote letters explaining what the program did for them. Some students shared: “I hated reading before; now I love it;” and “My Reading Coach helped me understand what I didn’t understand before.” Yes, special education students are struggling, but the achievement gap can be closed so much quicker with a program that focuses directly on their individual needs. In 90 days my students felt they were making significant gains. If they had a whole year on the program, I can only imagine how our state assessment scores would improve.

# My Reading Coach Contributes to Reading Gains for Title 1 and Special Education Students

An Interview with Pamela Allen (Title 1 Tutor) and Christine Victor (Special Ed. Tutor)

Maple Elementary, Chardon Local School District, Ohio

School Profile: 277 students; Grades K-5; 17% Disadvantaged; Title 1

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In June, 2009, every single third grade student passed the Ohio Achievement Test (OAT) in Reading. I doubt this would have happened if our struggling readers had not received an extra boost from My Reading Coach.

In January, 2009, sixty students (Title 1 and Special Education) were placed on My Reading Coach. Students were on the computer program a minimum of three times a week, for 30 minute sessions, from January to June, 2009. Several students were first graders; but most were second through fifth graders. Students were placed on the program if they had an IEP for reading, were at risk of not passing the OAT's, were recommended by their teachers and/or had low grades. Students were at least one reading level below their grade level according to DIBELS and other diagnostic assessments. Some older students were two and three reading levels below their grade.

## Student Improvement

**Pam (Title 1 Students)** – Most of my students quickly achieved the phonics certificates for lessons 1 through 32 and the grammar set 1 certificate. Several even got grammar set 2 certificates and began the comprehension portion of the program.

**Christine (Special Education Students)** – All of my students completed lessons 1 through 20. It did take them a little longer because of their need for repetition, but students mastered about 25 lessons by the end of the year. Two first graders passed the review test for lesson 20. One second grader made it to a comprehension lesson by June.

A first grader came to me without any concepts of print and could only recognize a few sight words. With tutoring from me and My Reading Coach, she was 100% at benchmark for oral reading at the end of the year. Her reading improved 1½ grade levels. Most of her improvement occurred while she was using My Reading Coach.

The biggest level of reading improvement appeared to be with our first graders who began My Reading Coach as non-readers.

Students read with less frustration because My Reading Coach gave them a good foundation in phonics and grammar. They learned the different phonemic and grammar rules and could recognize them in their regular classroom. Oral reading improved as a result of the decoding skills they were learning. One fourth grader's oral reading increased 1½ grade levels.

## Special Education and Title 1 Students

In the fall of 2008, 5 of 38 third graders (3 Special

Education and 2 Title 1) did not pass the reading OAT. After getting the extra help on My Reading Coach, they passed the OAT in June, 2009.

Both Special Education and Title 1 students enjoy working on My Reading Coach and can actually verbalize their own successes. They report that it is fun, and they like the positive feedback, the check marks, the comments, the certificates and the monthly recognition from Mrs. Kathleen Sawyer, our Principal. One second grade student loves the fact that he feels "grown up" because he uses the keyboard to spell things and doesn't "just click on the mouse."

## Summer School Reading Program – Pam

Twenty-eight students from the district (k – 5) attended a three week summer reading program that featured My Reading Coach. Grades k – 2 met from 8:30–10:15 AM, and grades 3 – 5 met from 10:30 AM–12:30 PM. The majority of the time students received one-on-one instruction from My Reading Coach. As part of the culminating activity, students walked their parents through the many facets of the program.

Many of the lower primary students completed about 20 phonics lessons; fourth and fifth graders completed about 35 lessons. They all made significant gains. One fifth grade student achieved more than one year's reading growth in three weeks and nearly completed the program.

## Students Benefit from My Reading Coach

**Pam** – My Reading Coach helps students feel safe because they can get the repetition they need without teacher intervention or holding up the class.

**Christine** – My Reading Coach repeats and re-teaches the skills students missed in the classroom, especially for the older students who would not normally be exposed repeatedly to phonics at the intermediate levels. Repetition on the computer is more exciting than going over the same thing with a tutor. Students like the immediate praise, and they love the certificates.

At Maple Elementary School there are many variables that help struggling readers become fluent readers. When students practice their reading, get help from parents, teachers and tutors, and use My Reading Coach, they have a much greater chance of success. The progress students made on their individual student reports last year was amazing. But, one student said it best: *"I really love My Reading Coach. It is fun. I like that it tells things that I already learned, but didn't get it that much, and it helps me understand."*

## 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](mailto:mail@mindplay.com)