



## Steady Progress for Special Education Elementary School Students

An Interview with Rachael Betz, Special Education Teacher, Longoria Elementary, Brownsville, Texas  
School Profile: 400 Students; Grades pre-K to 5; 100% Hispanic; 100% Disadvantaged; Title 1  
Email: [rbetz@bisd.us](mailto:rbetz@bisd.us)

My Reading Coach was recommended by the school facilitator and Assistant Principal. I currently use it with 16 first, second and third graders. These students include 11 Special Ed, 5 regular education and a regular education Dyslexic student. Fifteen of them are Limited English Proficiency. Our goal is to get students excited about reading. My Reading Coach engages and motivates them.

Through the Reading First Program, we analyzed the students reading skills. If they were not able to progress to the next tier based on their Texas Proficiency Reading Inventory (TPRI) scores, they were considered for My Reading Coach.

The students come to the Contact Mastery Lab and work on the program between 30 to 40 minutes, five days a week. **I have been using My Reading Coach 4.5 months, and all of my students are showing progress in their reading skills.**

When we began My Reading Coach, some of the kids had minimal phonemic awareness. They could say "c" and "t" but could not say the word cat. They had minimal fluency or comprehension; some were nonreaders. My Reading Coach placement test scores ranged from 0 to 70.

### Student Improvement

Nine students have received certificates; two students are on lesson 23.

Students are more willing to try to sound out words when I work with them individually.

Their teachers tell me that my students are listening and participating more in class. They speak English more often and want to read English.

Third grade teachers reported that all of the kids on My Reading Coach have improved. One 3rd grade teacher told me that the kids who were perceived as nonreaders are now reading. They are not at grade level yet, but they have improved.

One first grade teacher said three students in her class improved and three did not. When I checked the students' work who did not improve, I found that their reading skills had improved. It just wasn't showing up in the classroom yet. These students understand letters and words, but they lack the vocabulary and comprehension skills.

### Two Student Success Stories

A first grade nonreader hasn't gotten very far on the program. She is a Special Ed student with severe learning problems. She is also on another program for more severely handicapped students. She likes My Reading Coach and wants to stay on it, so I see her in my class twice a day. She started the lesson on "m, n, p" at 3% in November. By December, after doing the lesson over and over, she was able to get 100%. She was very proud of herself. **She has completed three lessons since November, and has gotten 100% on each of them.** She wears a hearing aid, and we have difficulty understanding her. Now, we are beginning to understand her better.

A Special Ed third grader with speech impairment and severe stuttering was reluctant to read orally or talk. **On the TPRI pretest he was reading at the first grade level; on a recent post test he scored at the 3rd grade level.** He is testing at the 3rd grade reading level even though he is only on lesson 18 of My Reading Coach. I don't think he can hear or say the words, but he is getting the concepts. My assistant and I were observing the students while they were working. We heard this little voice saying a sentence like, "The cat is running down the hall." We wondered who it was. We couldn't believe it was this third grader speaking without the stutter.

### Program Effectiveness

My Reading Coach is successful with my students because it allows them to work at their own pace without competing with anyone. It gives me an individual program for each of them. If they complete their individual plan, they are successful.

My Reading Coach is not going to work at the same pace and in the same time period for everybody. Previous programs we attempted to use did not adjust to the different learning rates of students. My Reading Coach does. Some students may be going at a snail's pace, but they are learning and improving their reading skills. Most are happy to get stickers on their chart for the lessons they complete.

I have worked with many programs. **My Reading Coach appears to have incorporated all the research based information of several successful reading programs and presents it in a student friendly format.** It is repetitious without being boring. My students are excited about working on My Reading Coach. I believe this program gives Special Ed students a chance to learn to read.

## Literacy Leader Praises My Reading Coach

An Interview with Donna Thacker, Literacy Leader  
Clairfield School, Clairfield, TN  
School Profile: 120 Students; Grades K-8;  
99% Disadvantaged; Title 1  
Email: [donnakt1@msn.com](mailto:donnakt1@msn.com)

In my role as Literacy Leader, I create the foundation for the K-3 early literacy curriculum, provide professional development for teachers, observe and give reading teachers feedback or model a lesson for a teacher. I do whatever I can to help the teachers in our classrooms teach students to read.

Our Reading First grant requires that we devote a minimum of 90 minutes a day to core reading instruction. We use the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to assess their reading skills. Our goal in Reading First is for all students to be reading at grade level or above by the end of third grade. Money from the Reading First grant was used to purchase My Reading Coach as a supplement to accomplish this objective.

### Literacy Centers Use My Reading Coach

My Reading Coach was included as a part of our classroom literacy centers in August, 2006. **Teachers were not using these centers prior to My Reading Coach. Now, when students go to the computer station, the coach on the screen gives them their own personalized lesson.**

At these classroom literacy centers, students are on My Reading Coach 20 minutes two to three times a week. A student's time on the program is determined by their grouping and the discretion of the teacher. Students in K-3 began My Reading Coach in August. They are getting certificates and their reading skills are improving.

The teachers use My Reading Coach to assess students' problems and monitor their progress. If a student has a problem with decoding, the program identifies the specific decoding skill to be addressed. This helps the teacher plan individual and small group instruction.

### Fourth Grade Student's Reading Improves

When we first got My Reading Coach, our major push was K-3 students. Every student now has access to this program. A fourth grader came to us in August. She was struggling and behind the students who were in the Reading First group. We could not identify her issues. Her fluency was not good although she knew sight words. We put her on My Reading Coach and found that she had serious decoding issues. Her teacher is addressing the identified issues using the program as a guide. She is receiving two tutoring sessions a day. Her reading and fluency are improving.

The more information we have, the better we can meet the student's needs and reach every child. My Reading Coach gives detailed information about a student's reading difficulties and guides individualized instruction for them. **My Reading Coach is an important tool we use along with DIBELS and diagnostic testing to determine the best interventions for a struggling reader.**

## 10th Grader's Amazing Reading Improvement

Chapin High School, El Paso, Texas

Stephen is 17 years old. He likes hanging out with friends, listening to music, and playing video games. Stephen was a struggling reader. He still has difficulty concentrating at times, but he doesn't let that get in his way. He is motivated and committed to improving his grades and his life.

Stephen was placed on My Reading Coach because he was part of the 10th grade reading class chosen for a pilot evaluation study. **He gained 6.2 grade levels in his reading skills in four months on My Reading Coach. Based on his placement and final review tests, he went from a 4.8 to 11th grade reading level.** He took My Reading Coach seriously and worked hard; his persistence and enthusiasm paid off.

### Stephen's Comments:

Once I began working on My Reading Coach, I would enter the classroom, get on the program immediately and work through the breaks. I did this for 90 minutes a day three days a week. The Sound/Vowel/Stick strategy helped me recognize new words and remember old words I forgot how to spell. Now, I can break down words like the dictionary spells them. ***"Breaking down words so I can say them properly--that is the thing that helped me the most."***

I know my reading has improved. I recognize and understand more hard words. When I see a word, I can spell out all of the letters. I remember the beginning and endings of words like "caption." I now understand what is going on in a story at the beginning instead of waiting until I get closer to the end. I am getting between 80 and 100 on spelling tests. It is easier for me to write a story and have people understand what I am saying.

**Prior to My Reading Coach I was getting 50's and 60's on classroom assignments and tests. Now I am getting 70's and 80's, even 90 in my classroom work.** I had to retake my physics and chemistry class. After completing My Reading Coach, I got more determined and started working harder. On my last progress report, I got 70's and an 80.

I have some ideas that could be added to the My Reading Coach computer program: A game of hangman where students guess the words after receiving beginning and ending letter clues; some background music to see if that would help students work better; and a short video on something to do with school or fun after a student receives a certificate.

I would recommend My Reading Coach to other students: *"If they would actually try instead of thinking it was stupid and boring; if they would actually concentrate and think about getting their grades up, it would help them a lot."*

**It feels great knowing that I am improving my life. I want to become a train engineer, but now I also want to get a job in computers and go to a technical school.** I feel more confident. I know all I have to do is get a little more focused and work harder. I was stunned by what happened with My Reading Coach. I would like my brother and sister in middle school to work on the program at home. They could also improve their reading and grades.

## Help Us Help You!

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](mailto:mail@mindplay.com)