



Educational Solutions

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ELL Students Make Significant Progress with My Reading Coach

An Interview with Becky Presley, Paraprofessional, Midland Academy Charter School, Midland, Texas
School Profile: 511 Students, Grades K-10, 66% Hispanic, 72% Disadvantaged, Title 1

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Students in our reading lab struggled with the other programs we used because they needed one on one instruction. This is especially true for Spanish speaking students who do not know the letters and sounds in order to understand the English language. My Reading Coach provides the individual instruction that helps our students learn to read, including ELL students.

I monitor about 60 students in the lab who range from 6 to 12 years old. The 1st and 2nd graders are on the program for 45 minutes a day, 5 days a week, and the 3rd graders and above use the program one hour a day, 5 days a week. Fifteen of my students are ELL.

Challenges for ELL Students

The ELL students have problems with vowels, the /j/ and /h/ lesson, and the /ch/, /sh/, and /tch/ lessons. For extra help with vowels I give them a hand written piece of paper in their progress folder with an A and a picture of an apple next to it; and an E and a picture of an egg. I do this for each vowel. As they work through the lessons, they look at this paper. We go over the vowels before these students go to their computers. I also use the My Reading Coach Teachers Guide to review vowels.

Comprehension is a huge issue for them. They can read a story, and it sounds pretty; but they don't understand the meaning of the words they are reading. When we read the stories, we talk extensively about what the words mean. I draw a lot of pictures to help them understand a word. For example, if the word is pier, I draw a pier over water.

ELL kids feel relieved that someone is going to explain the basics—this letter is A and this one is E. This is especially true for the older students because they are told to read what is in front of them, and they have no idea where to begin. **As they learn to read and spell words and earn a few certificates, they get excited. They become confident in their ability to decipher a word and read it.**

ELL students did not make much improvement using a sight reading program. Working with My Reading Coach, they learn why the word “back” says back. They are learning to decode and encode words. They also get a lot more practice because they continue working with the coach while I work with someone else.

Motivating All Students

Students lacked the motivation I expected the first semester I used My Reading Coach. After reviewing the My Reading Coach Newsletter, I learned how other teachers rewarded their students. My students now earn “dollars” to redeem prizes. I have a chart in every student's folder that lists each lesson. As

they master a lesson, I give them a star. For each star they receive a dollar. In the lab store everything costs five dollars. **The first semester of last year many students did not finish half the program by Christmas. This year most of them were three quarters of the way through by Christmas.**

Indicators of Improvement

For 3rd graders and higher passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills™ test is the ultimate goal for the year. ELL students struggle with this test because they just don't understand what they are reading. My Reading Coach is helping them read well enough to pass the TAKS test.

Kids brag to me that they made a 100 on their spelling test when they forgot to take their list home to study: They tell me, *“I made a 100 because of what I learned in here.”*

One ELL second grader still struggles in his regular class, but he is making great progress. **He tested at the 2% level on the My Reading Coach placement test in August, 2005. In February, 2006, he scored 66% on his first Review Activity. While he is not at grade level, he gained 64% points in 6 months.**

Two ELL Students Complete My Reading Coach

One third grader completed the program in 2 years. When she first came to me she looked at a word with tears in her eyes and said *“I can't read English.”* I explained to her that she just had to put the sounds of the letters together, and she would have a word. As she started to do that with the program, she was shocked. **She could read words; then stories; and this year she passed her TAKS test. She loves to read now.** She says, *“My Reading Coach helped me so much. I do things like reading and spelling that I didn't think I could do.”*

A second grader came to me on his first day in the lab and announced he could not read English. I told him he would be reading by the time he finished the program. He was a smart kid and progressed right through My Reading Coach. **In August 2005 he scored 16% on the placement test. In February 2006 (6 months later) he finished lesson 46 and scored 81% on his final Review Activity. He was put in the top reading group in his regular class.**

My Reading Coach gives ELL students a fighting chance to read, especially those who have decided they can't. The program teaches them the skills they need in a logical, organized way. They get an individualized program and a lot of practice. They learn from a teacher who does not make them feel stupid. If they are willing to work hard, they will learn to read English. As they succeed, their confidence and self esteem soar.

Hispanic Parents Are Learning English with My Reading Coach

An Interview with Lisa Garcia, Program Coordinator
Ocotillo Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona

School Profile: 375 Students, 96% Disadvantaged, 86% Hispanic, Title 1

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As a Title I school, Ocotillo is required to allocate a percentage of its budget toward parent involvement/family literacy projects. However, parents' work schedules and other responsibilities limited their ability to complete the ESL courses we offered using outside instructors.

The success of our ELL students who used My Reading Coach motivated their parents to want to use the program too. **My Reading Coach technology and our computer lab now make it possible for Ocotillo parents to learn to read and speak English on their own schedule.** We have provided a couple of designated workstations in the computer lab throughout the school day for their use.

Getting Started

Late into the first semester, Ana Garcia, the Parent Coordinator, came to me to report that the students were impressing their parents with the amount of English they were learning on My Reading Coach. She wanted to offer parents an opportunity to use the same program. Initially, 14 moms signed up to work on My Reading Coach. **Once we introduced the new Platinum edition with the directions and instructions in Spanish, we gained nine moms in January, bringing the total to 23.** Now we get participants by word of mouth only.

The Spanish version, with some brief training before they get started, makes it easy for our parents to succeed. They do not require extensive time from school personnel because they are able to monitor themselves.

The average time on the program for last year's class was 14 hours. Three of the 23 moms were teaching assistants who wanted to improve their language skills. They worked on their break times and after school.

Indicators of Success

Because they are improving their English reading and understanding of how the English language works, these moms are able to help their kids complete their homework.

They love understanding what their children are learning.

Ana Garcia tells me that the moms enjoy working on My Reading Coach. In the parent counseling group she runs, they ask when they can go on the program.

Four parents passed their review tests with average scores of 86%. Two reached lesson 20 in 15 and 16 hours; one reached lesson 32 in 17 hours; and one reached lesson 46 in 9 hours.

One mom scored 29% on her placement test in February. In May she scored 79% on the review test for lesson 20. She was on the program for a total of 15 hours. She used it different times and days, but she got in 15 hours. I think that is one of the strengths of the program.

Individualized Learning

We have 1 to 9 parents in the computer lab at a time. Working on the computer is non-threatening for them. They do not have a teacher testing what they know, are not responsible for homework, and are receiving a lot of positive reinforcement from the coach in their native language. Everyone is getting what they need at their own pace without feeling intimidated by high achievers in a classroom.

My Reading Coach is time efficient, easy to implement and very effective in helping Spanish speaking adults read and speak English. With the Spanish version they need very little monitoring; can work at their own pace; and recruit other parents with their success and enthusiasm. We are hoping to get our dads involved soon.

Research supports parental involvement for a child's academic success. Next year we plan a more formal introduction to getting the parents of My Reading Coach students to use the program themselves. This will help create a unified effort to improve academic achievement for our students. Of course, any Ocotillo parent will be allowed to use the program. My Reading Coach has become our family literacy project.

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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

MindPlay introduces My Reading Coach: Platinum Edition with an optional Spanish-language support module.

- It offers **either full Spanish-language instruction or Spanish-language directions** to help monolingual Spanish students learn to speak and read English faster.