



Educational Solutions

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Special Education Students Pass State Reading Assessment

Interview with BJ Reese, Reading Coach Facilitator, Warren County Schools, Warrenton, Georgia
School Profile: 897 Students; grades 1-12, 98% African American, 90% Disadvantaged, Title 1
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I use the My Reading Coach program with Special Education students in grades 1 through 12 who have mild learning and intellectual disabilities. **Most of these students who took the Criteria Reference Competency Test (CRCT), our state mandated assessment, passed the reading section last spring.** Before My Reading Coach, these students averaged 2 and 3 levels below reading grade level. Most students passed the test by a few points above the cutoff, but a few scored 30 points above. This is a huge accomplishment for all of them.

Thirty students worked on the program from January to April 2006, for 40 to 60 minutes three to five times a week. When the students began the program, they were not able to comprehend what was read and could not decode or spell words. **If we asked the middle school students to write a 3 or 4 word sentence, they could not do it.** Most of the 30 students continued on the program during summer school and are still working with me.

Getting Started

Prior to My Reading Coach, we were using early primary level materials. These materials were not age appropriate for middle and high school students. The students were embarrassed to read. This situation led to behavior problems which were disruptive and frustrating for everyone.

As we began working on My Reading Coach, the older students were embarrassed to be seen wearing headphones. By lesson 13 or 14, students noticed their improvement and settled into the routine. Now, my students want to stay until they finish a lesson.

My Reading Coach

The program works for my students because it breaks down learning to read into small increments. These students need the repetition, individualized learning and immediate recognition and feedback My Reading Coach provides. One student said, *"I am going to miss this man saying great job."* Another asked, *"Can he see what I am doing? He just told me I could do better."* The Black Line Masters are great to use for reinforcing their skills.

I check the lesson plan reports and see what each student needs to work on. I began working with students individually, but now they are putting themselves into small groups and helping each other.

Progress for Middle School Students

Many of the kids say: *"Before I couldn't read the word if I didn't know it; now I can sound out a word."* *"Before I knew the word, but I couldn't say it. Now I can say it by sounding it out."*

Students who are struggling at reading level 2 or 3 get angry and don't want to read to me until they are further along. But, these same students will read to a peer who has reached a higher level. They have grown up struggling together. The struggling readers know their peers will recognize each other's improvement.

A senior wanted his younger sister on My Reading Coach because she stutters. His sister is 14 years old in the 7th grade and struggles with reading so severely that she didn't want to read in front of anyone. This student scored 39% on the placement test, has worked on the program for 66 hours; and is now on lesson 44. Her comprehension is at the 9th grade level and she has only 6 lessons left on the grammar portion of the program with a score of 93%. Recently she said, *"I could not read before, but now I am a smooth reader."*

One 13 year old student said, "This man is making me talk differently. He is saying sounds I never heard before." This student scored 63% on the placement test. He has been on the program 30 hours and completed the program at 95%. He is now reading above grade level.

One 7th grade student scored 26% on the placement test and began My Reading Coach at the 2nd grade level. This student struggled with the words "the" and "they." She was retained one or two years. After 63 hours on the program, she is now on lesson 44 and reading at the 6th grade level. She is so excited: *"I read the story, I read the question, I know the answer, but I am going back and find it to make sure."* She is proud that she has learned to check her work.

Another student began the program on lesson 12, worked 72 hours but is only at lesson 20 scoring 95%. He does not want to go to another lesson until he has mastered a lesson with 100% accuracy. He tells me, *"This man makes me pay attention."* His speech has greatly improved, even with new braces!

Teachers report that these students focus better and are able to search for information. The students have pride in themselves and are willing to read aloud in class. These students' computer skills have greatly improved, and they are able to follow instructions on the computer. My students are now able to work in groups and are willing to ask for help. These same students show more interest in school and ask teachers about their grades. **Some are making 100 on spelling or other tests for the first time.**

I am very excited. My Reading Coach contributed to our Special Ed students' passing scores on the reading section of the CRCT. Before, these students were embarrassed because they were so far behind; now, the students want the principal to hear them read! These students are succeeding. Seeing their peers learning to read, they know they will read, too.

Elementary Special Education Students Succeed on My Reading Coach

Interview with Deborah Urich, Special Education and ESOL Teacher,
Bramlett Elementary, Auburn, Georgia

School Profile: 830 students, Grades k-5, 35.7% Disadvantaged, Title 1

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During the 2005/06 school year, 34 of our Special Education students had the opportunity to work on My Reading Coach. Large and small group reading instruction does not always work well for students with special needs. My Reading Coach gave them the individual instruction and attention they needed to learn to read. Their success was evident in the Special Education resource room, the general education classroom, and in the results on our state mandated Criterion Reference Curriculum Test. **Sixteen of our 20 third and fifth graders passed this required test.**

Thirty-four Special Education students worked on individual laptop stations. From September 2005 to the first week in May 2006, they used the program 30 to 45 minutes a day, 5 days a week.

Students loved the privacy that wearing headphones gave them. They enjoyed the positive feedback from the Coach. I could often hear them repeating his words, *"You did well"* or *"Stupendous."* Knowing that the Coach required them to return to a lesson and repeat it until they got it right motivated students to persevere even through the most difficult tasks.

Individualized instruction in the areas of visualization for comprehension and strategies for improving oral reading fluency also motivated students. I think creating a picture in their mind to correspond with the written words on the page helped improved their comprehension. At first, my students needed to be led through this process. Then, before long, they started incorporating this valuable comprehension technique into all areas. They learned to apply this strategy in chapter books during Silent Sustained Reading time and in other content areas, as well.

Success with My Reading Coach

Classroom teachers reported that these reluctant readers were raising their hands and volunteering to read orally in the general education setting. Parents relayed stories of their children requesting time to read instead of watching TV or playing video games. Success breeds success!

Several fourth grade students, pre-tested on the Kauffman Test of Education Achievement (KTEA) in August 2005, made tremendous progress by the post-test in April. One improved from the 18th percentile to the 58th percentile---an increase of 40 percentile points in 8 months. Two others, a student with Autism and another with a Specific Learning Disability, improved 26 percentile and 38 percentile points respectively.

One student with Cerebral Palsy, who had been home-schooled previously, started My Reading Coach in the 4th

grade. After some adjustments enabling him to sit at the computer, he completed the first 20 lessons, and improved his reading comprehension score on the KTEA from the 1st percentile to the 18th percentile. For the first time ever, he was independently reading beginning level books.

One 4th grade Asian student received services from both Special Education and ESOL programs. He was the only student to complete all 61 lessons during that school year. He was exceptionally talented applying phonetic skills to decode and encode simple and multi-syllabic words. By the end of the school year, he had not yet mastered the review test for lessons 1- 61, but he was determined to continue working diligently in the fifth grade, until he mastered that final review!

My Reading Coach Benefits Special Ed Students

My Reading Coach gives our students the consistent repetition they need and a thorough foundation in phonics.

The lessons are sequential, and if they make errors, they know that Coach will not let them continue beyond the next lesson. Retention of all previously taught skills is essential for mastery scores on all the review tests. This long-term retention is especially important when teaching students with Specific Learning Disabilities. My Reading Coach activities ensure they retain previously mastered skills before progressing to the next lesson. The program holds them accountable, and the teacher management options make monitoring students' progress easy.

The comprehension strategies are outstanding. We can actually observe how the ability or inability to make mental pictures impacts comprehension of what students are reading. If they cannot create a picture in their mind that reflects the written words on a page, we walk them through the steps in the process. For example, when we discuss a "tan fan", I ask them to imagine a fan—it could be a ceiling fan, a hand fan or another type of fan. I tell them to paint a picture that matches the words. Next I add words such as, "The tan fan is broken" and ask them to describe the picture now. Eventually I explore other "tan fan" possibilities: A "tan fan" is cheering at a baseball game. I help them discover that different words should create different pictures. I explain that if they continue to change the picture to match the words, they can better understand what they read.

My professional goal is to create life-long readers of every student with whom I come in contact. I strive to impart the joy of opening a book and escaping into it. My Reading Coach has aided me in this endeavor by providing the necessary reading tools to meet our Special Education students' individual needs. This program can benefit all those aspiring to this same objective.

Help Us Help You!

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