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Fifth and Sixth Graders' Reading Improves Rapidly

An Interview with Sujata Phillips, Reading Interventionist
Youngblood Intermediate, Alief ISD, Alief, Texas Email: sujata.phillips@aliefisd.net
School Profile: 1091 students; Grades 5 to 6; Title 1
45% Hispanic; 35% African American; 79% Disadvantaged

A random sample of fifth and sixth graders was selected to participate in a pilot evaluation study using My Reading Coach. This treatment group included struggling and average readers. My students initially thought it was childish to sound out words. But, after taking the placement test, they were surprised at how much they needed to learn in order to improve their reading. In a few months their reading levels and fluency improved significantly. They soon loved working on the program.

The treatment group began on September 12 and consisted of 25 fifth graders and 25 sixth graders. Six Dyslexic students and two Special Ed students were included in the class. Students were pre-tested on the STAR Test. Most scores ranged from 2.5 to 4.0, and 10 students were reading on grade level. We continue to meet every day for 30 minutes.

Students Take My Reading Coach Seriously

Based on their review activities and individual interaction with me, students realized the program would challenge them. By the time they received their first certificate, they noticed their reading was improving.

The best part for them was "making mental images" using the My Reading Coach Expert Sheets to improve their comprehension. I had them read a My Reading Coach Expert Sheet and come up with their own mental picture. In the beginning I would do this with them every Friday. They were very creative and looked forward to these exercises.

Success with My Reading Coach

When most of the students began the program, they were reading books at the 3.0 reading level. After working on My Reading Coach only a few months, they are now reading books at the 4.5 level.

Their comprehension and fluency have improved. They read with proper pausing and inflection, and they feel more confident when they read. Their self-esteem has also improved.

One Dyslexic 5th grader would not read in class. She would stutter, stop and give up. After completing lesson 40, she now reads with more confidence, seldom making any mistakes.

One 5th grader and one 6th grader completed My Reading Coach in December. They accomplished 12 months growth in their reading skills in just 3.5 months, based on their STAR pretest and post test scores. Several students accomplished 10 months growth in the same time period. This is a dramatic improvement in their reading.

The classroom teachers want to know about the "rules." They ask me, "What is this 'Policeman e' doing in your classroom?" The kids talk in their classes and show their certificates. Other kids want to join my class; they want the certificates. They tell me, "We want to learn Double Duty Pronouns."

Challenging My Fifth and Sixth Grade Students

Once a month, I give each student a practice packet comprised of selected supplemental worksheets that accompany the program (e.g., challenge sheets #1 to #12). In class we discuss the topics included in the practice packet. They take the packets home over the weekend and return their completed work to me on Monday. I correct any errors, and we work on them the following Friday.

Every Friday I give them an individual quiz which includes the My Reading Coach rules, grammar and reading fluency. Each student gets to preview an advanced expert sheet. For example, if a student is working on lesson 21, I give the student an expert sheet for lesson 24. I ask them to identify all of the My Reading Coach rules. Then I give them grammar topics and ask them to read the passage identifying, for example, all of the verbs, nouns or linking verbs. They circle the examples and initial them for me. Then they individually read with me using the pausing techniques and correct pronunciation presented in the program.

Parental Involvement

Students take certificates home for their parents' signature and comments. I encourage the students to explain the rules they are learning. In that way, the parents know what their child is doing. I am getting positive responses from my students' parents. One parent commented, "My kid wanted to talk to me for 2 hours about My Reading Coach."

We assume fifth and sixth graders know basic phonics and grammar. They pass, but they are not retaining what they learned. **Based on my students' results with My Reading Coach, I think all first and second graders could benefit from this program.** Students who have been on My Reading Coach would enter the fifth and sixth grade with a good foundation in phonics, grammar and reading comprehension. They would be prepared to understand the intermediate reading levels.

I convey to my students that nothing is impossible to achieve as long as they keep trying. Their apprehension and fatigue have been replaced with a positive attitude about My Reading Coach. Both the students and I enjoy working with this program. Even I have learned some new rules!

Outstanding Improvement for 2nd Grade Struggling Readers and Nonreaders

Interview with Barbara Dowling, Reading Specialist
Nash Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona
School Profile: 661 students; Grades K-5
98% Hispanic; 98% Disadvantaged; Title 1
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Fifty second graders are in a 2006-2007 pilot evaluation study using My Reading Coach. Students who scored in the bottom third of the second grade class in reading were placed in this pilot program. Reading level was based on scores from the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Students are engaged and earning certificates, even our non-English speakers (NES).

Our computer lab is located in a section of the library. We have 30 computers in a long row back to back and computers at each end as well. With my two groups of 25 students each, I "walk the track" constantly helping them get started, stay focused and remain motivated. They work on the program 40 minutes a day, 4 days a week.

Most students were 1 to 1½ years below reading grade level. Six NES students were nonreaders. The highest student was reading at the 2.1 reading level.

Student Accomplishments

We began the program in September. By the end of December most students were between lessons 24 and 28, with the exception of the NES students. Thirty-four students earned certificates for phonics lessons 1-20; 8 for 1-32; and 2 for 1-46. Thirty-nine students earned certificates for grammar lesson 1; 22 for 2; 2 for 3; and 1 for 4.

Students working on My Reading Coach were making improvements in their classrooms. Those who spoke English in school and Spanish at home were feeling more confident while participating in their classroom activities. Their writing has improved, and they are able to decode words when reading text.

The Special Ed teacher asked if one of her students was in my class. When I told her yes, she said "I could tell right away. He is always going to be a slow worker, but he is getting it. The connections are coming for him." She is seeing a strong improvement in his reading and writing.

One student with a BRI score of 2.1 took the My Reading Coach final review test in December. Unfortunately, he did not pass and will retake it again after reviewing the necessary lessons.

Students took the MAP test last week. Two students from Group B went up 30+ points from their MAP pretest scores (one is NES); and five went up 20+ points. No one in the control group went up 30 points; and 3 gained 20+ points. The breakdown for Group A students is not available yet.

One NES student who was on lesson 14 was helping a limited English speaker who was on lesson 21. I was not available because I was working with two other students on expert sheets. The NES boy on lesson 14 took the headphones from

Corporate Grants for Literacy Programs

Tips Shared by Jeffrey Adams, Psy.D.
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Woodbury, New Jersey
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Our 6th, 7th and 8th graders in the self-contained classroom for Special Education students were making significant improvement with My Reading Coach. We wanted to expand the program to the elementary school, but the funds were not available.

We did an on-line search through Google for technology grants in the area of Literacy. We found an opportunity through Verizon Communications. We were one of 13 school districts in the State of New Jersey to receive a Verizon grant. The \$10,000.00 will buy us two licenses for two elementary schools.

Two tips for getting a corporate grant:

- Most major corporations have grants available for literacy, technology, math, etc. The key is finding a grant with a mission statement that matches your needs. We believe we were selected because of our innovation, creativity and direct impact on student learning and growth.
- In the proposal, tell the grant provider what you are already doing. Then explain that with additional resources you will be able to do more. We were very clear in our proposal. We were trying to be proactive and intervene with at-risk students prior to classification and referral to a child study team. The goal was to remediate through the program so that children could remain in the regular education setting.

the other student, listened to the words, and began saying the sounds slowly—sounding vowels and saying the "ch" sound, pointing to the back of the chair. This is priceless.

Implementing the program

Once the students have a basic understanding of how to work the computers, the program explains how to proceed and takes them through it. This frees me to support 25 students at their own individual level.

Being able to get instant results from the different reports is beneficial. I am able to use the Intervention Report and know where each student is having problems. I just have to print the list of identified problems, go through it and make sure a student's specific needs are being met.

I would typically be working in small chunks of time with small groups. My Reading Coach allows me to work individually with students while the other students continue to work at their capacity through repetition. ELL students need to continuously listen to the sounds of the English language. With this program that is happening.

My students are making great strides working on My Reading Coach. This year I am excited because we are backing up the results with measurable data.

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