



Educational Solutions

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Students with Dyslexia Make Outstanding Reading Gains

An interview with Zach Osbrach, Founder and Director of Einstein Montessori Academy

School Profile: 95 students; Grades 2-10; Cocoa, Florida

Email: osbrach@ems-cocoa.com

Students with reading disabilities are learning to read at the Einstein Montessori Academy in Cocoa as well as the Einstein Montessori School in Gainesville. Each school provides highly effective remediation for students with dyslexia and has the same basic instructional model. But, when My Reading Coach was added to the curriculum in the Einstein Montessori Academy for the school year 2006-2007, the students began to exceed the reading gains of the students at the Gainesville school.

I am the founder of both schools and currently the director of the academy, which is a private school in Cocoa. The school in Gainesville is a charter school with 105 students. It is the top rated charter school in the State of Florida and one of the top ten charter schools in the country according to the Center for Educational Reform.

For ten years I have been helping students with dyslexia learn to read with impressive results. Our program reaches the 20% of students who have problems mastering phonemic awareness. Most students who enter our schools are reading years below their appropriate reading levels based on the Woodcock-Johnson test. They have phonemic awareness problems according to the results of the Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test (LAC-3). We test their word identification skills, word attack skills, phonemic awareness and comprehension.

The academy in Cocoa has 95 students, and they all have symptoms of dyslexia. All of them use My Reading Coach in conjunction with the Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing® (LiPS) program. Students work on My Reading Coach 40 minutes a day, four days a week.

We have found that My Reading Coach works well with the LiPS program to help students master phonemic awareness. While the LiPS program requires an expert to administer, My Reading Coach allows teachers and parents to support a struggling reader.

Outstanding Results

Approximately 60% of the students in a given year complete My Reading Coach. We can see results after our students are on the LiPS and My Reading Coach for three to four months. Compared to their entrance reading levels and skills, the students demonstrate a 285% improvement in one school year. This level of improvement is measured

by their Woodcock-Johnson pre-test and post-test scores.

When students see that they can make gains in reading, it increases their self esteem dramatically. Previously, they just knew failure. After participating in our program, they are reading and succeeding in school.

My Reading Coach Works with Dyslexic Students

My Reading Coach has a very organized phonemic awareness approach from beginning to end. The originator of the program emphasized a phonemic approach and did it in stages: Students master sounds and words before going to the next level. It is different than the LiPS program; it uses real words and adds content, grammar and comprehension. My Reading Coach makes a splendid contribution to our reading curriculum. In my ten years of specializing in schools for students with reading difficulties, I find this to be the first computer program that is comprehensive. It works better than most curricula taught by teachers.

When educators use repetition alone to teach words, they usually do not know what is working and what is not. They do not understand language processing skills. If a student is not learning, he is not being taught correctly. A student does not need to repeat a word 500 times to learn it. The student needs to focus on and work through the problem using phonemic awareness. My Reading Coach is more than a repetition program; it targets students' disabilities and works with their strengths.

If elementary school educators took course work in language processing disabilities, they would better understand why kids cannot read. They would not think that a student is not trying or listening. They would learn more about the importance of phonemic awareness in helping students with dyslexia learn to read. Teachers would be better prepared to address the problem efficiently. I do understand that this type of extra training becomes a challenge in the public education system.

My Reading Coach was developed by a speech pathologist who knows why kids cannot learn to read. The program teaches students to understand how language works. Once they have mastered the basics of phonemic awareness, they develop the reading skills to succeed in school and begin to feel better about themselves.

Eighth Grade Struggling Readers Pass the State Reading Assessment
An interview with Derralee Johnson, 8th Grade Language Arts Teacher
Coakley Middle School, Harlingen, Texas
School Profile: 885 students; Grades 6-8; 85% Hispanic; 70% Disadvantaged; Title 1
Email: djohnson@harlingen.isd.tenet.edu

Our goal for using My Reading Coach with eighth grade struggling readers is to provide the foundations they missed as young children. These students may be ESL learners, have learning disabilities, or come from low socio-economic backgrounds. The bottom line is that they have not mastered reading. My Reading Coach gives them the opportunity to go back to the basics in order to improve their reading skills. I like this program because I know first hand that it works.

Twenty-nine struggling readers who failed the 7th grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading exam were in my 8th grade reading computer lab. These students began the program in October, 2007, when many were reading at a second or third grade level. They worked on it 45 minutes four to five times a week, and while some completed the program reading on a 10th grade level, others reached a 7th or 8th grade level, and some progressed to a 5th grade level.

Amazing Accomplishments

The TAKS test measures minimal skills, and if they do not master these skills, they are not going to be successful in school. When the TAKS Reading exam was given on March 6 (six weeks earlier than the previous year), 21 of my 29 students passed it. Five more students passed the retake test given on April 30, bringing the total to 26 (90% passed). Based on the results of these students' previous yearly scores, it is likely that all of them would have failed TAKS. This is phenomenal growth.

When these students began my class, they could not pronounce words or sound them out. As they progressed on My Reading Coach, students went from stammering, reading jerkily and having difficulty understanding the texts to reading with fluency. They no longer stopped for every little word, and they understood what they were reading. They continued to do well in the higher lessons even as the words became more difficult. It was incredible to see the difference, especially as they began volunteering to read out loud in the classroom.

Three students have completed the program. They started the program as low 2nd and 3rd grade readers and progressed to the point where they passed the TAKS. They were excited and gained confidence because they had never passed it before. One of them wrote on my board on the last day of school, "Thank you for helping me pass TAKS."

Two students received a commended score on the TAKS, which is the equivalent of 96 or above. To go from not ever passing the TAKS to Commended was a wonderful experience for both of them. They were quite excited and proud of their accomplishments.

Four ESL students really worked hard on My Reading Coach, and they passed the TAKS. The two ESL students who did not apply themselves did not pass; they did not want to learn English.

Several of my students passed the 8th Grade TAKS in math. The math exam primarily consists of word problems. I believe they passed because they were able to comprehend what was written and apply the skills taught by their math teachers.

Out of my 39 low socio-economic students, 35 (90%) passed, and the majority of them worked on My Reading Coach. Parents of these students often work two and three jobs and do not have time to work with their kids and encourage them to read. My Reading Coach provides an avenue that affords them that opportunity, especially because it makes it equitable for all students: Students start off doing the same thing, and if they work at it, they succeed. It is a great program for these students.

My Reading Coach Works

In our initial pilot program several years ago, we placed a group of 8th graders who failed the 7th grade TAKS on My Reading Coach. Out of that class 95% passed the 8th grade TAKS. We reviewed their TAKS scores in their high school freshman year, and 95% of them still passed. This is not a fluke. The program does help them, and it completely changes the way they read and improves their chances of success in high school.

This program goes back and re-teaches students all of the things they have not learned. Teachers in the higher grades do not have the time to do this. Participating in this program allows students to work their way through the individual gaps in their reading skills at their own pace.

One of the biggest problems today with low readers is that they cannot picture what they are reading. If they cannot picture it, they cannot comprehend it. The comprehension sheets that come with My Reading Coach ensure that students understand what they are reading. Because I want my students to use their imaginations, I work with them to visualize what they have read from these sheets. For example, in the piece that says "Dan kicks the can" or "Dan hit a van," I ask them what Dan looks like. I have them describe his physical attributes such as how old they think he is as well as the color of his hair or shirt. These seem basic to well rounded readers, but to these kids, it's difficult to do. As they get further along, I might ask them what a building or store looks like. They learn to associate mental pictures with what they are reading. This approach to reading comprehension is one of the strengths of the program.

My Reading Coach helps our students because they receive basic reading, language and comprehension skills. When students go back to the beginning, they are building their foundation for reading. That makes this program so effective. Our students are making tremendous progress in their reading and school work as well as their self-esteem. My Reading Coach has been incredibly successful!

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