



April 2009

Adult ESL Students Improve Language and Reading Skills

An Interview with Cheryl Cradis, ESL Reading Teacher Walled Lake Adult and Community Education, Walled Lake, Michigan Email: CradisCurabet@aol.com

In 2003, I applied for an EL Civic Grant from the Department of Labor and Economic Growth which heads adult education in Michigan. This federal grant allowed me to set up a 15 workstation computer lab to teach English to non-English-speaking adults in the Walled Lake District. Before implementing this grant, I was an elementary learning disabilities and special education teacher in public education for 27 years.

Many of our students come from Iraq, Iran and Japan. They had learned about our adult education program by word of mouth or through our Walled Lake Community Newsletter. When they enter the ESL program, many speak only limited English and cannot read in their native language.

The first year, we leased 30 My Reading Coach pupil licenses. We liked it so much that in 2004 we purchased seven more copies and added a reading class in the afternoon. My Reading Coach and I provide the reading instruction. In 2005, we purchased five more licenses, and we completed the lab this year with three licenses. My Reading Coach has become one of our most valuable assets to teach these students to speak, read and write English.

Students are placed into our adult education program based on their reading scores from the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) test. We have 5 levels of ESL classes in the morning that run for 2½ hours, three days a week. The ESL afternoon reading program also runs for 2½ hours. The morning students have access to the computers once a week for an hour. We have also extended access to My Reading Coach on Mondays for “open lab” from 10:00 AM until 2:00 PM with a lab assistant in attendance. This lab time has great attendance.

To be in the reading class, they must all be proficient enough in English to be conversational, but they can be reading at any level and can also have learning disabilities. Students are usually in the reading program from one to two years.

My Reading Coach is the core of the adult reading program. Without this tool, I could not run a program of readers from first grade to above seventh grade. It is my classroom aide, my tutor and my basal reader.

Many students have finished My Reading Coach at this point in the year. Because their reading levels have greatly improved, they are moving into PLATO reading and other general education courses. In the reading class, I am able

to keep students past level 5 if they want to improve their reading skills. Some of the students who have finished My Reading Coach have elected to go back and re-work certain lessons that were troublesome. They might have had to repeat a lesson more than 5 times to achieve mastery.

Success for ESL Adult Learners

Three of this year’s students have gone on to community college and several have entered high school completion classes. One received his citizenship because he could now read English proficiently enough to pass the test.

One 50-year-old former school drop-out from the US entered our adult education program in January. He could not read well enough to get into our English classes, so he was placed with me, reading at around first grade level with zero decoding skills. Now, after three months on My Reading Coach, he passed a general education test at the 6.9 grade level and 400 GED level (410 is required for the GED test). He mastered 35 My Reading Coach lessons and achieved a 6.0 grade level in comprehension. Working in the “open lab” contributed to this phenomenal growth. His success surprised even me.

One 45-year-old student from Brazil began with me in September in the morning ESL class and in the afternoon reading class. She moved to the level 5 ESL class in December and remains in the afternoon reading class. This past fall she read a lot at home and has progressed rapidly. She will go to college.

Because of their reading success, student self-esteem is wonderful in my class. Many students have gone to college and gotten jobs. One student needed to pass a reading test to become a translator in Iraq for \$150,000.00 a year. She took my course and used My Reading Coach. In May of that year she got the job. Another student whose second language was French could not master the vowels or the “th” sound. He kept coming in for extra computer time, and one day he walked in and announced, “Cheryl, listen, I go the “th.” We all laughed!

Students receive certification when they are able to read, write and speak English at Level 5, based on scores from the CASAS Test. This enables them to be productive members of our society. Some students are motivated to achieve college level English reading scores. Students in our entire program love working on My Reading Coach. It has proven to be a valuable resource for them.

Two Third Graders with Disability Labels Noticeably Improved Their Decoding Skills

Computer-Based Phonics Instruction Study by Lisa Cadwallader, Special Education Teacher Jeffco Public Schools, Denver, CO
Email: arling81@hotmail.com

The Denver Public Schools Literacy Block combines a teacher led mini-lesson, guided reading groups and independent reading to teach students reading skills. The district-directed schedule of topics for mini-lessons addresses literary concepts, but does not incorporate enough phonics instruction for students whose decoding skills are below grade level. My research project, conducted in the fall of 2006, investigated whether My Reading Coach was effective for increasing students' decoding skills. The results indicated that two third graders with disability labels who worked on My Reading Coach improved their decoding skills more than two regular education students.

Two of the three third grade students completed my study. One boy had a learning disability (LD) label in reading and one boy had a speech/language (SL) disability label. Their decoding skills were assessed using the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT) Word Attack subtest. The placement test in My Reading Coach was also used to target the unique learning needs of each student.

The treatment students received 40 minutes of decoding instruction four times per week for 40 instructional sittings in a resource setting. They worked 20 minutes on the My Reading Coach computer program while the special education teacher was teaching other students and available to troubleshoot. The other 20 minutes was spent in a small group with the special education teacher using the MRC Blackline Masters. A control group of two students (one female and one male) from the regular third grade classroom was assessed after 40 instructional sittings.

Post Test Results: (WRMT-WA subtest)

Treatment (two students with disability labels)

1.9 to 3.4 (1.5 grade level gain) (w/LD)
2.2 to 5.0 (2.8 grade level gain) (w/SL)

Control (two students without exceptionalities)

3.4 to 4.0 (.6 grade level gain)
3.8 to 4.0 (.2 grade level gain)

The treatment students with disabilities outperformed the control students. The level of improvement for the SL disability student is noticeable. It suggests further exploration for computer-based literacy instruction with this population. Students with learning disabilities might benefit from more time with the program and/or teacher. While the study was small, the results indicate that My Reading Coach and its Blackline Masters can be an effective instructional tool for decoding instruction. It was exciting to see these two students make impressive decoding gains in such a short amount of time.

Reading Skills Improve with Online Support for a Young Adult and Second and Third Graders

**Marianne Arling, Program Director
John Corcoran Foundation
Resources, Training and Mentoring
for Literacy Programs**
Email: dmarling@coyotenet.net

A 23 year old student had been in special education programs throughout public school. His family had been told he would never be able to read. He purchased My Reading Coach and worked with it independently at home. In addition, I tutored him online. As he began to understand how his mouth formed sounds, his decoding skills improved significantly. He was enrolled in a bible study class and wanted to be able to read well enough to participate. He improved his reading skills and was able to read the long words in bible study. We were both thrilled. My Reading Coach helped him become a reader!

Second and Third Graders

For three years I worked with a program funded by a grant from the State of Colorado to help second and third grade students improve reading skills. The Colorado Online Virtual Academy (COVA) involved 60 students each year. We ran the program from early October until late April. All students enrolled in the program were reading below grade level. Students with the weakest reading skills were placed on My Reading Coach. We sent the CDs to their homes, contacted parents monthly and monitored student reports to make sure students were working at least two to three times a week for a half hour. We provided instruction for any problem areas.

Each year these students gained 1½ to 2 years growth in their decoding skills. One year, COVA improved its standardized test scores by ten percentage points for third graders. We got a lot of parent appreciation too. They had never seen a teaching method like My Reading Coach.

I am a special education teacher who has worked with remedial reading programs for over twenty years. I know that some students will not be able to read using traditional or phonics approaches to reading instruction because they cannot hear sounds well enough to match them to symbols. My Reading Coach gives them a "lip reading" skill that teaches them how to get their mouth to form sounds when they see a letter. The more they are able to do this, the more the decoding skill sets into their minds.

The MRC Blackline Masters are very effective. If students use the software program, they learn how to pronounce sounds from the Coach. But, paying attention to the Coach's mouth is receptive learning. To be sure that they are forming words with their mouths and pronouncing sounds correctly, they need to have someone listen to them.

I have never seen a more completely computerized remediation program. It provides training for teachers as it provides remediation for students.

Help Us Help You!

Tip to share in the newsletter? Want to brag about your students? Send your comments to mail@mindplay.com