

I'd Rather Read than Play my Xbox

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I'd Rather Read than Play my Xbox

We were thrilled last month when one of our students said, "I'd rather read than play my Xbox." The value of reading is clear. Reading pervades much of what we do. In the spring of 2009, our learning community decided to emphasize the teaching of reading for all our high school teachers, regardless of the teacher's content area specialization. The Alliance for Excellent Education validated our emphasis when their brief, *Teaching for a New World*, called for all high school teachers to have "the capacity to teach adolescent literacy skills regardless of the content area" (Miller, p. 4).

The Rose Academies are a system of public, alternative education high schools in Tucson, Arizona. Our students reading below grade level are often "drop-ins," who have not experienced school success in traditional systems.

Professional Development

Faculty are being developed as Teachers, Educators, and Coaches (TECies). All teachers learn methods

- traditionally used only by reading specialists;
- to identify and address learning conditions, usually only considered in special education; and
- to develop the student's how to learn (H₂L) abilities including thinking abilities, innovation, and creativity.

Reading Diagnosis

TECies learn how to administer an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) for each participating student. In addition to IRI results, TECies get a rich picture of student needs by using further data from student performance on the AIMS, Arizona's mandated state-wide test which includes

a section on reading; other indicators of academic performance like coursework; and a case study put together for individual students. Based on all this data, TECies diagnose what the individual student needs to improve reading and how to customize strategies to reach the student's reading goals.

Effective Strategies

Individualized strategies, such as choral reading, the ACE Reader software program, inclusion (Venn diagrams) student-made flash cards, develop a student's

- comprehension,
- vocabulary,
- fluency, and
- word recognition.

The student has ownership of the process by committing to reading improvement and setting goals for each area of improvement. TECies spend five to fifteen minutes each day, one-on-one, with a student. A Test-Teach-Test format is used. A pretest is administered; brief instruction is given; and then students see immediate results on a post-test. A student works with the TECie, and independently. Weekly progress is charted, and the student and TECie have a regular, weekly meeting to review progress. Goals and objectives are reviewed and revised based on effectiveness of strategies.

Promising Outcomes

We are very excited about the preliminary results of our pilot reading program. The number of students in this first cohort is small because our learning community is still mastering the system. Still over half (57%) of participating students who retook the state-mandated test passed the reading section. All of the students who passed are non-majority, and most are female. Research indicates these are demographic groups disproportionately experiencing

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negative effects of state exit exams (Viadero, 2009). Even though we focused on reading, most of the students who passed the reading section also passed the writing section.

Reading Categories on State Mandated Exam	Pre-Reading Program % correct	Post-Reading Program % correct
Reading Process	13%	50%
Vocabulary	0%	50%
Comprehension Strategies	25%	50%
Comprehending Literary Text	61%	83%
Elements of Literature	50%	86%
Historical and Cultural Aspects	100%	75%
Comprehending Informational Text	54%	71%
Expository Text	42%	75%
Functional Text	63%	75%
Persuasive Text	63%	63%

This example of a female, Hispanic student's progress on the state-mandated exam quantifies her improvement. She passed the reading, and the writing, sections on the exam.

Qualitative data, like the title comment or this one from a student's mother to a principal, are extremely satisfying.

I attempted to contact the student at home, but the number did not work. I attempted to contact his parents and was able to talk to his mother. I asked if I could contact [the student] at home to ask him questions about his reading. She said that they did not have a home phone right now.

She went on to say that she is very impressed with [the student's] desire to read. She remarked that his enjoyment of reading has increased to the point that she rarely catches him playing video games; he's usually reading! She also mentioned that he asked for books for Christmas rather than video games!

The best summary is in the principal's own words, "Wow! Great job of sparking his desire to read!"

References:

- Miller, M. (November 2009). *Teaching for a new world: Preparing high school educators to deliver college- and career-ready instruction*. Retrieved from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/TeachingForANewWorld.pdf>
- Viadero, D. (2009, April 27). Scholars probe diverse effects of exit exams. *Education Week*. Retrieved 12/31/09 from http://www.edweek.org/login.html?source=http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/04/29/30exit_ep.h28.html&destination=http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/04/29/30exit_ep.h28.html&levelId=2100

Appendix A

Sample Weekly Progress Chart from a TECie whose content area is math.

TEC-ie Name:	Student's Name:	Dates: 10/5-10/9 <i>Week 5</i>
<p><u>Motivation:</u> (3) Student has described how his reading has improved overall: schoolwork is becoming easier and he is even able to read newspapers outside of school and understand them. (2) Student maintains his motivation for this program by continuing to practice his flash cards, read his book outside of school, and applies the tools he has gained to the rest of his schoolwork. (1) Student feels that he is approaching his goals both in terms of speed and comprehension. In fact, his average reading speed is now at 250-280 wpm, which is the target speed for a 12th grader.</p>		
<p><u>Strategies Used:</u> Comprehension: Comprehension Flash Cards. <i>Student chooses two new words from the EDL Vocab list that are either similar or opposite, and supplies the word generic to both words.</i> Comprehension: Leveled reading summary: Definition: <i>The student summarizes reading in terms of: (1) plot, theme, or overview, (2) events, actions, or context, and (3) people, places, or items.</i> The “pretest” is the teacher evaluation of the previous day’s work; the lesson is a discussion of how to improve the summary, and the “post-test” is the student’s redo/improvement of the summary. Fluency: Ace Reader: <i>Tachistoscope flash game & eye-span game, done for 15 min between Comprehension Tests (as pre and post test).</i> Vocabulary: Prefix/Suffix Card. <i>Continuing through the standard prefix list.</i></p>		
<p><u>Progress Made:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Comprehension: Student forgot to bring his flash cards two days out of the week. No meaningful results this week. Spot verbal checks showed that he understood the concept of similarities, opposites, and inclusion. He simply forgot his cards. ● Comprehension: Leveled Reading Summary: Student is doing his daily reading. He is refining his ability to effectively identify a “why-overview” vs. “what/how – details”. ● Fluency: Student is now at “12th grade” reading speed. He has more than doubled his IRI reading speed from the first IRI test using 10th level reading material. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monday: Pretest: 75% comp. @ 110 wpm; Posttest: 100% comp @ 110 wpm ○ Thursday: Pretest: 25% comp. @ 280 wpm; Posttest: 25% comp @ 280 wpm ○ Vocabulary: ○ Prefix Flash Cards: 62% of prefix list mastered as of Thursday. 		
<p><u>External Factors:</u> Student holds a full time job outside of school as a shift leader, but this does not appear to impact his performance in Rose-TEC. Thursday, he forgot to bring his flash cards & book reading log to school, and so I was only able to verify his Ace Reader work for that day.</p>		
<p><u>Retrodution:</u> Student feels that he is reaching his reading goals: he can read more than twice as fast as he did on the IRI, sound out difficult words consistently, and make more sense of what he is reading. Student feels that both Ace Reader and the flash cards are effective tools to improve his reading. The focus now will shift to boosting his comprehension, now that his reading is up to an acceptable speed. He understands the concept of similarities and opposites. I think it’s a good time we introduce him to building simple analogies.</p>		

