

## **Rutgers Reading Club: An After School Program to Motivate and Enhance Literacy for**

### **Struggling Readers**

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children who struggle with the beginning stages of reading often continue to find reading difficult throughout their school years and beyond. (Stanovich, 1986). Children struggle to learn to read for a range of reasons. Vision, hearing or language processing challenges can contribute to difficulties learning to read. Lack of experience with books, limited background knowledge, lack of interest, limited access to literacy materials, frequent moving in the early years, and the effects of trauma, hunger, or lack of safety may all contribute to reading difficulties. When children struggle with learning tasks they will often withdraw, lack self-esteem, and become anxious and passive. We have learned that these children benefit from additional instructional time, particularly when the instruction is more explicit and intense (Wharton-McDonald).

One approach to working with children who struggle to learn to read has been to create university-based reading clinics. Traditionally, this model of intervention has meant that parents brought their children to the university campus for reading instruction; however, this arrangement creates new challenges and barriers for some, including transportation, childcare, and financial issues. With this in mind, we designed a program that incorporated many of the qualities of successful university-based reading clinics but that was housed within an elementary school. We found a range of advantages for moving the clinic to the school, including greater access for all children, more time for teaching, and greater congruence between the tutoring and the school curriculum.

Children enrolled in the Rutgers Reading Club at their elementary school met in small groups with experienced teachers after school several times a week to improve their literacy skills and build their sense of self-efficacy for literacy learning. The Reading Club sessions incorporated opportunities to socialize, instruction tailored to specific learning needs, and relationship building. Teachers were charged with ensuring that each child experienced success, tackled reasonable challenges, was given some choice, and was provided with lots of positive reinforcement.

### **Project Description**

The goal of this project was to establish a University Literacy Clinic in a public school district. Universities are often hard to get to, charge a fee, and children need to be driven. Those children who most need tutoring often don't have the resources to participate. Tutoring after school at the school site provided children with a familiar environment and eliminated the need for transportation to the university. In order to pay tutors and procure materials, university clinics often must charge fees. Using the school setting allowed us to tap into school funding for afterschool programs and to use teaching materials already available in classrooms. Because the program was held immediately after school, children did not miss class time for this additional instruction. The Reading Club was a new approach to providing support for children in the school. While the district did have an afterschool program that targeted low achieving students, it was designed as a "test prep" and homework help program. In contrast, the Reading Club tutoring was organized in a way that targeted individual literacy learning needs, using authentic reading materials and engaging children in authentic writing tasks, often based on a theme of interest to them. They worked in very small groups for instruction with experienced teachers. The teachers offered lots of positive reinforcement and focused on building self-efficacy while addressing learning needs (Gambrell, L.B., Morrow, LMM, and Pressley, P., 2007).

The program took place in a K-4 elementary school serving primarily low-middle working class families. The children invited to attend the Reading Club were reading at least one grade below grade level expectations, but were not receiving special education services. Twenty children were selected: four children from first, second, and third grades, and eight in fourth grade.

Teachers within the school were invited to apply as tutors, allowing us to select those teachers with the most expertise in teaching young readers and writers. We also selected a site coordinator to take care of organizational tasks such as providing the snacks and taking attendance. Before the program began, tutors attended a training session during which we introduced the structure of the tutoring sessions, provided and discussed a range of assessment tools, and modeled the use of teaching tools and strategies. Each tutor received a tool kit that included some assessment and teaching materials. We discussed building self-efficacy and confidence alongside instruction aimed at increasing reading achievement. We expressed our hope that the tutors would build a respectful, caring relationship with each child. The tutor was to aim to become someone the child could count on and feel safe and secure with (Guthrie, J.T., 2004).

**Procedures:** The tutoring took place after school twice a week for one hour for twelve weeks. In the 15-minutes between the end of the school day and the tutoring sessions, the Reading Club students met as a whole group and had a snack. We found that this time, brief as it was, offered students a chance to relax and socialize and contributed to a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

After the whole group meeting, the children moved into small groups of three with their tutors. These groups were established based on reading and grade levels and remained consistent throughout the twelve weeks. Tutoring sessions included instruction aimed at building each child's ability to recognize words, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension and writing abilities. In order to build motivation and to provide a vehicle for relationship building, the tutors also found time to read aloud a

book selected by the children; typically this was a book beyond their current reading level. The tutors worked with the children to select a theme that was used to guide the selection of texts and to frame writing tasks.

**Assessment.** Prior to tutoring the children were assessed using a running record to determine each child’s reading level and his/her comprehension achievement, a high frequency word test, and an informal phonics survey. These assessments were administered again in the middle and at the end of the 12-week session. The data was used to tailor instruction for each child and to determine growth (See Table 1). Tutors also kept reflective journals about the students to track qualitative changes. We also solicited feedback from the teachers, children, administrators and tutors about the program.

**Table 1: Assessment Results Across the 12-Week Program**

	January	February	March
High Frequency Words	128	171	255
Guided Reading Level	E	H	J
Informal Phonics Survey Score	42/74	63/74	68/74

Many children made significant gains in their scores on these assessments by the end of the 12 weeks. Some students were now scoring within grade level expectations and, therefore, did not continue in the next 12-week session. This allowed us to invite new students who teachers believed would benefit from the program. Some of the original cohort of students were invited to continue to participate in the Reading Club for an additional 12-weeks with the goal of furthering the growth demonstrated in the first session. We also identified a few students who were not making much progress and these students were referred for evaluation for special education services.

Tutors and classroom teachers reported that the children improved more than they could have if it weren't for the tutoring. Classroom teachers and tutors reported a noticeable growth in confidence and a sense of self-efficacy among the children attending the Reading Club. Teachers commented that the children were acting more like successful students, completing homework and engaging in reading and writing more readily. The tutors were also able to build relationships with families that allowed them to influence other aspects of school success as well. For example, one pair of siblings who had been chronically late to school and who rarely completed homework began to consistently arrive on time and proudly submit their homework with their classmates.

The children also provided evidence of the impact of the Reading Club. One child remarked, "I finally have someone who understands me when I read." Another said, "The only person I can read with is my afterschool teacher. I'm too scared in my classroom." Early in the program we took photos of the children and their tutors and gave the children copies. One child told us that he put his teachers' photo by his bed so he could look at her all the time. A number of children brought small items such as a pieces of candy to their tutors each time they met. One child said to his tutor, "You are like family; you have to come to family parties, like Thanksgiving and Christmas." Teachers and children exchanged e-mail addresses when the tutoring ended so they could keep in touch.

Anecdotes provided by other members of the school community also provide evidence of its success. One Mom told us that her child was asking for books to read and never had before. Children who were not in the reading club asked to join since those who participated talked about it in a positive manner.

As we reflected on the Reading Club and the impact that it had on children, we identified a number of reasons that we believe contributed including:

- Experienced teachers provided individualized, targeted instruction

- Teachers planned activities aimed at engagement
- There was time for socializing and snacking
- A strong effort was made to build relationships between the teacher and student
- Teachers prepared activities for which children could experience some success but also offered some challenge
- Teachers differentiated instruction to meet individual needs
- The program provided the children with instruction that added to the reading instruction provided during the school day
- Children had time to practice what they learned
- Themes were selected to create a relevant and purpose for reading and writing

The Reading Club has continued on in the school where we first launched it. The school staff has taken on the program as we have moved on to new districts to introduce the program. The results in the new sites have been similar, with children building self-esteem and literacy skills and the school continuing the program after we leave.

#### References

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Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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**Rutgers Reading Club  
Lindeneau Elementary School  
End-Review  
4-15-15**

School Principal: Cynthia Tufaro

Curriculum Resource Teacher: Maritza Mosley-Aviles

Rutgers Center for Literacy Development: K. Kunz

# of Reading Club Sessions Conducted:	<u>32</u>
# of Students Included in the Data:	<u>20</u>
AM:	<u>11</u>
PM:	<u>9</u>

\*The Rutgers Reading Club began with 22 students. 2 students are omitted from the data because of low attendance; therefore, comprehensive diagnostic literacy assessment data was not available.

**Attendance Information:**

The attendance information in this document represents information collected through the 1-28-15 mid-review. These attendance rates remained consistent throughout the remainder of the sessions. It is evident that attendance rates were significantly higher for the

afternoon sessions. In addition, students with consistent attendance made greater gains in the data.

**Overall Attendance: 85%**  
**AM Sessions: 80%**  
**PM Sessions: 92%**  
**Group Attendance Range: 71-94%**

### Data By Group/Student

#### Pecce-AM Overall Attendance: 92%

Student's Name (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Attendance Rate (%)	Sight Words December	Sight Words January	Sight Words March	Running Record December	Running Record January	Running Record March	Phonics Inventory December	Phonics Inventory January	Phonics Inventory March
Roselana Turzani	100	136	258	296	E	G	H	42/74	67/74	74/74
Adam McIntrye	76	60	122	--	C	--	--	39/74	54/74	--
Abigail Jorge	100	135	252	296	F	H	I	40/74	63/74	72/74

#### Flamos-AM Overall Attendance: 80%

Student's Name (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Attendance Rate (%)	Sight Words December	Sight Words January	Sight Words March	Running Record December	Running Record January	Running Record March	Phonics Inventory December	Phonics Inventory January	Phonics Inventory March
Tania Benitez	94	10	44	97	C	E	H	20/74	45/74	63/74
Danny Chau	100	15	63	184	C	F	I	47/74	55/74	66/74
Brayden Bienvenue	47	32	--	--	C	--	--	47/74	--	--

#### Moran-AM Overall Attendance: 71%

Student's Name (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Attendance Rate (%)	Sight Words December	Sight Words January	Sight Words March	Running Record December	Running Record January	Running Record March	Phonics Inventory December	Phonics Inventory January	Phonics Inventory March
Dezaray Keyes	12	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Zeyad Ghazi	76	75	85	188	D	E	G	47/74	57/74	68/74



Josiah Wells-Walker	94	72	97	291	D	F	H	57/74	67/74	74/74
Rebecca George	100	82	99	185	E	F	H	50/74	55/74	65/74
Judy Li *Student switched groups	--	--	--	--	--	D	G	--	--	--

### Brotspies-AM

Overall Attendance: 77%

Student's Name (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Attendance Rate (%)	Sight Words December	Sight Words January	Sight Words March	Running Record December	Running Record January	Running Record March	Phonics Inventory December	Phonics Inventory January	Phonics Inventory March
Alexander Valente*	71	61	127	--	D	D	D	--	--	--
Derick Nieto-Salina	82	164	211	261	F	G	H	--	--	--

\*-Scores are not a true reflection of his ability; Alex did not want to participate in assessments (Brotspies)

### Concodora-PM

Overall Attendance: 90%

Student's Name	Attendance Rate (%)	Sight Words December	Sight Words January	Sight Words March	Running Record December	Running Record January	Running Record March	Phonics Inventory December	Phonics Inventory January	Phonics Inventory March
Allison Flores (1 <sup>st</sup> )	94	272	--	298	D	F	G	57/74	--	--
Aanya Jariwala (1 <sup>st</sup> )	88	264	--	299	E	F	H	56/74	--	--
Samantha Denion (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	88	185	--	293	D	F	G	48/74	--	--

### Happel-PM

Overall Attendance: 94%

Student's Name (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Attendance Rate (%)	Sight Words December	Sight Words January	Sight Words March	Running Record December	Running Record January	Running Record March	Phonics Inventory December	Phonics Inventory January	Phonics Inventory March
Sana Nazari	94	88	275	285	D	H	I	42/74	67/74	68/74
Oliver Zimon	94	51	79	196	B	C	G	--	36/74	61/74

Gabriel Espino	94	12	35	36	Pre-A	B	D	26/74	40/74	41/74
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\*-Students in this group joined Mrs. Mosley-Aviles' group in February due to Mrs. Happel's maternity leave.

**Mosley-Aviles-PM Overall Attendance: 92%**

Student's Name	Attendance Rate (%)	Sight Words December	Sight Words January	Sight Words March	Running Record December	Running Record January	Running Record March	Phonics Inventory December	Phonics Inventory January	Phonics Inventory March
Kylie Coyne (1 <sup>st</sup> )	94	46	78	185	E	G	I	48/75	55/74	57/74
Jean Pierr Suazo (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	88	104	171	255	E	H	J	51/75	63/74	68/74
Giovanni Camacho (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	94	55	62	88	D	E	F	51/75	58/74	52/74

**The Rutgers After School Rutgers Reading Club**

Prior to the beginning of the Rutgers Reading Club, the school will select the teachers who will be teaching in the club. There will be a professional development session to describe how the club works. Before the club can begin, the children are selected by the school. Each child is assessed. Assessments are described below. Assessments can be what is used in the school. All materials used or needed are what the school has in

their building. There must be an educator in the building in charge of the reading club to be sure children go to the club on designated days, that the snacks are prepared and that teachers aren't absent, etc.

The atmosphere for the after school Reading Club should be different from school. They should be a little less formal. No more than 3 children to one teacher should be in a group. The group should meet about twice a week for about 12 weeks. The sessions are 45 minutes to an hour. At the end of this period of time children should be evaluated to determine if they need to continue in the program or graduate out. If they need to continue since they are not yet on grade level they do so. If they graduate out, and another child can take his or her place if in need. With this type of an arrangement, many children will get to be in the program over the course of a year.

Children need to chill out after school by using the bathroom, having snacks and socializing. This is important to the success of the program. The children enjoy this part of a program with others. Social interaction amongst them helps build a sense of belonging. There should be a minute or two of some type of exercise that could be yoga, dance, etc.

The teacher and child or children should have their meetings in a quiet room. The teacher's demeanor is as a teacher, however warm, lighthearted, supportive, and can be counted on. Children should not be with their classroom teachers, and not in their usual classroom. This offers more than one person becoming knowledgeable about the child. It also says to the

child that this is not like the rest of the school day.

The tutoring session should have some explicit planned instruction based on the child's needs, some choice, some challenge, some social interaction and success. Teachers must determine the needs of the child and then engage them.

The child should be assessed for basic literacy skills such as word work, comprehension, fluency, writing, and oral language and listening at the beginning of the program. During the sessions, teachers can spontaneously, and informally write anecdotes about the child's progress. At the end of the 12 weeks, there should be another assessment to look for growth and needs. Children's teachers should be consulted about their class work, and the parents should be met with at least once during the program.

The program for instruction should be based on the children's needs. Teachers must try to find out about the child's self-esteem, home life, work in school, activities out of school, etc. The sessions should have some parts that are routine, and at least one thing that is a bit different such as a reading game. The group can give themselves a name and should have a theme.

**Sessions can include:**

- Read to the child using a book of the child's choice that is difficult for the child to read
- There should be discussion about the book read and teach children the use of many strategies to help comprehension. Focus on CCSS

comprehension objectives for narrative and expository text

- There should be Word Work with only what is needed.
- There should be Writing focusing on CCSS objectives
- The child should read orally and silently
- Wrap up: What did you learn today that you want to remember, what did you enjoy.
- Write this on a post-it and take it with you

To make sessions more interesting each group should select a theme such as Fall, winter, bugs, volcanoes, etc. Therefore, some of what you read and write is about the theme. Make some of the work, not schooly. For

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example: If your theme is Fall, write to the Mayor about the abundance of leaves blocking the road for drivers. Themes can be about tornados, volcanoes, animals, etc. At the end of the 12-week session, each group presents something that is reading or writing about the theme at the Club Celebration. The Club Celebration can be during or after school. It can be with the principal, supervisors and parents. Teachers talk about their group and each group presents their theme project. There is food at the Celebration. Children will receive a certificate that acknowledges their participation in the Rutgers Reading Club.

### **The Rutgers Reading Club Cheer**

**Rutgers Reading**

**Rutgers Writing**

**OoRah OoRah Rutgers Reading**

**Reading Red Team**

**Writing Red Team**

**Rah Rah Rutgers Reading**