

Scientific and Artful Reading Intervention in Seventh Grade

Kelly Beggs

Below is an email note I received from 7th grade teacher Kelly Beggs earlier this summer that summarizes her work with struggling readers in the 7th grade. Enjoy. Tim R

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Hello Tim,

I am a 7th grade reading intervention teacher. My students took the Fastbridge reading assessment test this past fall and the intervention screening report recommended phonics and fluency work at the 1.2 level....yes, first grade, 2nd month! My middle school didn't see a red flag connecting the dots of reading acquisition and reading comprehension and the fact that the school's report card is going down every year. I was shocked to find out that phonics hadn't been taught for the past 6 years since the Lucy Calkin's Units of Study was adopted! I had been wondering why it was so hard to move them one year because in the past I've been able to move a class of students 1.7-2.0 years in a year's time. I am passionate about pedagogy from Donalynn Miller (The Book Whisperer), Steven Layne (In Defense of the Read Aloud), Kelly Gallagher (Read-acide) and the ton of research that supports the many benefits of reading for pleasure daily.

So, it behooved me to take matters into my own hands. I started networking with other schools outside our area to find they recommended Wiley Bevin's work in phonics. My Literacy Specialist in training purchased his books, so I could learn more about something that is normally taught in the elementary grades. I also studied Deb Glasser's work with morphology, and your own resources for Greek and Latin roots, as well as your daily word ladders. Once I established a scope and sequence, I instituted what I call "Word Work Wednesdays." It's the only day my district would reluctantly allow me to stray from the workshop model and teach these foundational skills.

By January, many of my students moved up to grade 3.2 phonics and fluency (2 years growth), but... then I learned more about reading fluency and decided to start to address the fluency issue. For older students, I found the 6-Minute Solution. Is it great? Maybe not, but it's better than nothing which is what's been happening previously. We introduced and practiced fluency for 7 weeks. During that 7 weeks, I learned and studied the Nonsense Word Fluency concept which is a component in the Fastbridge Test that confused my students. Why was it confusing to them? Because they had little to no phonics background to "hear" words decoded/encoded. So I developed an oral reading list for nonsense words and had students work with the words for 4 weeks. This process took us to the spring Fastbridge test a couple of weeks ago.

Here's the great news! Spring testing found that in my 2nd hour class all but one student's Lexile scores increased! My 3rd hour....same thing! My 4th and 5th hour classes have the SPED students included. However, in both of those classes, student scores went up with the exception of 2 or 3. If there is any news better than that...here it is: The screening report recommended "No intervention" after the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th hour classes tested while my 5th hour still recommends phonics and fluency. Eighty percent of my students increased their Lexile scores from fall to spring! Many are on track now. What do I attribute this to? Your resources provided the much-needed work. Your weekly Greek/Latin root work, the word ladders, and the fluency program worked! I only wish this focus would happen in the grades below and above my 7th graders because if it isn't practiced, it won't continue to grow.

As I prepare to retire soon, I want to graciously thank you for your help. The support from people of your level of study is the only kind I respect for all your years of work/study in the field.

Thank you so much for being my lifeline this year,

Kelly Beggs, MA Education

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