

Grandfather, grandson learn to love reading

Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland, has been a leader in establishing family literacy programs like Reading Together/Second Grade™. Most family tutors are parents who find that the experience strengthens bonds with their children and their schools, and sets a pattern of success for younger siblings.

But at least one Montgomery County grandfather found that Reading Together has changed his own life, as well as his grandson's. Ralph Carry says his wife tricked him into attending training and becoming a tutor. He started the program with reservations, uncomfortable around books and unsure of his teaching ability.

"I said (to my grandson), 'We're going to have to do a partnership here. Grandpa's not a good reader, so what we'll have to do, we'll teach each other. I may find some words where I'll stumble and you go ahead and tell me. I'll tell you what I know,' " he said. "And that's the way we've been working with the program."

Reading Together has affected his whole family, said Carry, who takes a lot of teasing from his grown children. "They ask why I never read to them."

One reason is that Carry admits he hasn't read a book since he left school. "I've read more books in the

past couple of months than I've done my whole life. But he'll come and say, 'Grandpa, it's time to read.' It's almost like he's the tutor.

"What's come out of this is more than I ever expected."

Math program adds Reading Together strategies

In English class, the teacher gives the dates of the birth and death of a famous author, and asks how old the author was when she died. Silence falls over the class as students scratch their heads in frustration. "It's hard to do math in English class!" one student exclaims.

That exchange illustrates how difficult it can be for students to recognize and use knowledge they already possess to help them solve new problems or understand related concepts, say Carla Mathison and Cheryl Mason of San Diego State University. "In an age of specialized knowledge, the segregated clustering of subject area instruction often prevents students from identifying important interconnections among the subjects they study," they wrote in a presentation to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Learning Together's new program, Math Together™, takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining math skills with reading, writing

and an understanding of U.S. history. Each of the 30 lessons is built around a pivotal moment in U.S. history, reinforcing what fifth-grade tutors are learning in their regular classrooms. Math concepts for the third- and fourth-grade tutees are embedded in these stories.

Lessons end with journal writing for the tutees, who reflect on their math progress. Tutors also record reflections, which cue them during coordinator debriefing.

Both tutor and tutee become more skilled and confident mathematicians and thinkers. SOLVE, a five-step problem-solving paradigm, gives students a consistent strategy to apply across all math strands.

Look inside for an overview of the reading and writing strategies used in Math Together. Share it with your principal or math specialist.

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Word of Mouth

"I saw a great improvement in the second graders' skills at retelling. The students who were in Reading Together began sharing these comprehension skills with other students in their classroom."

Jennifer Anderson, Coordinator
Cheney Academy,
Willow Run Schools, WI

Before-reading activities key for English Language Learners

by Ann Hopkins, Literacy Consultant and Language Development Specialist
Martinez, CA

Paying special attention to the pre-reading activities in each lesson can help English Language Learners benefit from Reading Together. ELL tutees can improve comprehension by learning to activate several kinds of knowledge before they read.

Effective readers have a range of behaviors and strategies that they rely on when they engage with books. Kenneth Goodman, University of Arizona, Tucson, refers to three kinds of knowledge that readers draw from to make meaning from text: semantic knowledge (knowledge of the world); syntactic knowledge (knowledge of language structures); and graphophonic knowledge (knowledge of letter-sound relationships).

Effective readers use all three kinds of knowledge simultaneously. They draw more or less heavily on each kind, depending on what

they are reading, the purpose for reading and how much they know about the topic. Knowledge of the content, knowledge of the genre and familiarity with the language of books allow readers to make use of a key resource — what they already know.

A basic principle of good teaching is to go from what students already know to what they don't know. When children are learning to read, it is important that they develop reading skills within the context of familiar content. Readers who don't know the topic and are unfamiliar with the language are left to rely on a single source of knowledge when they read: graphophonics. Comprehension is severely impeded and meaning is lost.

For tutors of English Language Learners, the temptation may be to avoid any books with unfamiliar cultural or linguistic elements. Instead, the challenge for the coordinator and tutor is to build up the knowledge and understanding needed for comprehension. By the time the tutee actually reads the text, the information won't be so unfamiliar.

In other words, what the tutor does before the tutee reads is an extremely important part of the coaching session.

Pre-Reading Activities

During the preparation session, help your tutors predict what information or content might be unfamiliar to English Language Learners. Tutors also should note which aspects of the language may cause difficulty, such as unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases, imbedded complex sentences, use of pronouns, unknown verb tenses and idioms.

These can be highlighted in the Tutor's Guidebook. Predicting the content of the story based on title and picture is the most important pre-reading activity, and it is built into every Reading Together lesson. But tutors can try one or more of these additional activities with their tutees before reading:

- Develop a semantic web using a word or phrase from the book. Have tutees offer words or phrases they associate with the topic.
- Have tutees predict the kind of text (narrative or informational).
- Make copies of illustrations from the book and have tutees sequence the illustrations.
- Show tutees a key illustration, then have them pose questions they would like to have answered: "I wonder...."

The more time the tutor spends on these kinds of activities, the more success the ELL tutee will have with a particular text. Overall, comprehension is more likely to improve when vocabulary and language structures are introduced in context, rather than in isolated word or language item lists.

Source: Gibbons, P. 2002. *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning; Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*. New Hampshire: Heinemann Publishers. ISBN 0325003661



Coordinator's Corner

Make the connection

Keep your eyes open for ways to help tutors and tutees make text connections with Reading Together passages and books. Readers who connect to their background knowledge, current events or other texts come away with a better understanding of what they read.

Newspapers, television shows and classroom books are some places you might find such connections. In August, for example, British researchers announced that they were studying a crow named "Betty," who had learned to use a piece of wire to get food from a bucket. What a perfect story to share with second-grade tutees who are reading "The Thirsty Crow!"

Find pictures and a film clip of Betty at the researchers' website, http://users.ox.ac.uk/~kgroup/tools/tools_main.html, or make a copy of the Associated Press newspaper article from August 8-9, 2002 at <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/national/AP-Toolmaking-Crow.html>.

Service-learning: a powerful strategy for teaching and learning

Whether they are in fifth grade or eighth grade, your Reading Together tutors are learning lessons they will carry with them into their adult lives.

Recent studies show that students who perform community service, such as volunteer tutoring, strengthen their own mastery of academic subjects as they help their schools and neighborhoods. This teaching method, called service-learning, is an increasingly popular way of integrating service projects into the school curriculum.

"We've found that service-learning is a powerful strategy for teaching and learning, which allows young people to deepen and demonstrate their learning and at the same time develop a strong sense of civic responsibility," says John Glen, chairman of the National Commission on Service-Learning. "We firmly believe that it can become a central strategy for teaching and learning in our schools."

Service-learning offers significant benefits, according to the National Service-Learning Partnership:

- boosts students' academic achievement
- fosters lifetime commitment to civic participation
- improves social skills
- prepares students to enter the workforce

Read more at these websites:
<http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/>
<http://www.aypf.org/>
<http://www.ascd.org/>

From the trenches...

Extend learning time for second and third graders with these fun Phase I activities:

Lesson Four: *Armies of Ants*
Borrow an ant colony from the science lab or set up a new colony. Monitor their progress at the end of remaining Reading Together lessons.

Lesson Five: *Floss*
Ask students to draw pictures of their pets or friends' pets, then tell a short tale about the pet.

Lesson Six: *Fireflies!*
Pull the shades, turn out the lights and reread part of the story by the light of a flashing string of white mini-bulbs.

"Now my son asks, 'When are we going to do our reading? I'm ready.' He's really developed a love for learning and for reading. It's made a difference for us."
Parent of a second grader

"...it made me feel happy inside to see their faces when I helped them."
Fifth-grade tutor

"We know the best way to learn is to teach and this is what (the fifth graders) did."
*Andrea Schroeder, Coordinator
Cheney Academy,
Willow Run Schools, WI*

Satisfaction brings you back

Welcome back, second- and third-year coordinators. Thank you for sharing ideas and suggestions to enhance our programs. In a survey of site and district coordinators conducted this summer, more than 95 percent of the respondents rated their level of satisfaction with training and support as good to excellent. Reading Together program materials were rated as excellent, very good or good by 98 percent of those asked.

The survey was designed to provide a snapshot of the overall satisfaction with program materials, training and support, resources and customer service. The comments and opinions expressed will be used to refine existing programs and explore the development of program supplements to address specific needs. We will continue to poll coordinators throughout the year for feedback and suggestions on lessons and other aspects of our programs.

If you are interested in providing feedback on an ongoing basis, consider participating in one of our focus groups. The focus groups will be held quarterly via conference call to address a specific topic. Coordinators may be asked to pilot new lessons and tradebooks, review content on the website and offer suggestions for training and programs. Participation will require a minimum commitment of 10 hours per school year. This includes a conference call three or four times a year, as well as time spent reviewing materials prior to the call.

For more information, please call or email Nedra Baldwin, Customer Relationship Coordinator: 1.866.921.0000 toll free
nedrab@learningtogether.com.

Contributors

- JOANN CASSELL
Editor
- SAM MOFFITT
Marketing Director
- NEDRA BALDWIN
Customer Relationship Coordinator

The Learning Together Company
5509-A West Friendly Avenue, Suite 205
Greensboro, NC 27410

Toll-free 866.921.0000
Fax 336.852.7188

info@learningtogether.com
www.learningtogether.com

www.learningtogether.com
Greensboro, NC 27410
5509-A West Friendly Avenue, Suite 205

