Case Study

Students with Special Needs Improve Reading Skills, Confidence and Motivation with Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant

Canyon View School – The McKinley Children's Center

San Dimas, Ca.

School Statistics

Number of students: 200

Grades: K-Adult

Website:
http://www.mckinleycc.org/Programs/Brain-Lab.aspx

Student Population:
11% African-American
1% Asian/Pacific Islander
36% Caucasian
52% Hispanic

100% free/reduced lunch
23% English language learners
75% special education

Scientific Learning®

The McKinley Children's Center's Brain Lab uses the Fast ForWord® and Reading Assistant™ online learning programs to provide individualized instruction for students with disabilities at Canyon View School, and through summer and afterschool programs. As a result, students have made dramatic, enduring gains in their language and reading skills, and have improved their confidence and motivation. Thanks to the Brain Lab's focus on early intervention, some students have even exited special education and moved from non-proficient to proficient on state tests.

Challenges

Located in San Dimas, Calif., Canyon View School serves students with special needs from ages five to 22. It is part of the McKinley Children's Center, which offers support for youth issues ranging from reading difficulties to severe emotional trauma.

In 2006, the center opened the Brain Lab to provide language and literacy services for students attending Canyon View School.

"Our students are diverse in terms of their disabilities," said Albert Jackson, the Brain Lab coordinator. "More than 80 percent of our students have deficits in reading. Most are three to six years behind in their language and literacy skills, and many also have motivation deficits. They simply aren't interested in learning or putting in the time to build language and reading skills. Since there is only one of me and the majority of our student population needs intervention, I wanted to find a computer-based program that would allow me to reach more students than I could with one-on-one or small group instruction, and in a way they'd find motivating."

As Jackson set up the Brain Lab, he worked to combine excellence in teaching with research-based neuroscience technologies to provide early intervention, and to help students who are behind in or want to improve their reading skills.

"We chose the Fast ForWord program to be part of the Brain Lab because it not only builds students' language and literacy skills, it builds executive function skills as well. It's also fun, so they're able to play while learning," he said.

Solution

The Brain Lab implemented the Fast ForWord program in 2006 and added Reading Assistant in 2009. At the technology-based reading center, educational services are available during the day for students who attend Canyon View School. Services are also offered after school and during the summer to students from surrounding school districts and families that pay privately for the program.

Fast ForWord

The Fast ForWord online reading intervention uses the principles of neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to rewire and improve — to treat the underlying cause of language and reading difficulties, once and for all. It was developed by neuroscientists to address reading skills while concurrently developing foundational skills including memory, attention, processing and sequencing.

"The Fast ForWord program is different from other reading interventions in a number of ways," said Jackson. "Many children with special needs require a great deal of repetition. In a 30-minute Fast ForWord session, students can get a lot more repetition of foundational skills — like phonological awareness, phonological processing and vocabulary sight words — than I could ever provide in a one-on-one session. It allows each student to learn and progress at his or her own pace, and makes it easy to self-monitor. It also enables me to individualize instruction without a lot of the prep work required by other programs."

She improved so much in her behavior and academics that she received our Reaching Academics Positively or RAP Award at a big year-end banquet"

During the Brain Lab's first year with the Fast ForWord program, Jackson saw students improve in a number of areas, including language and reading skills, time on task, focus and motivation. He also noted tremendous gains with one student in particular, a five-year-old girl who had struggled in public school and was referred to him for academic and behavioral interventions.

"It appeared as though she had a noise filtering problem. Any loud noise or lot of talking would cause her to scream or cry and cover her ears like she was in pain," he said. "I was cautious at first because the Fast ForWord program requires intensive work, which she wasn't used to. She embraced the program and, from September to June, she improved her listening skills, expressive language abilities, and ability to filter noise in a loud room. By the end of the year, she could sit in a classroom without screaming, communicate with her peers and teachers, and participate in group discussion without it hurting her ears. That's when I was really sold on the program. She improved so much in her behavior and academics that she received our Reaching Academics Positively or RAP Award at a big year-end banquet — and she sat through the entire presentation in the auditorium. She eventually went back to public school and in fifth grade moved from special education to general education. Without the Fast ForWord program, we would not have been able to provide that early intervention that was so critical to her success."

Since then, the Brain Lab has expanded its Fast ForWord implementation to serve more students. Canyon View School currently uses a pull-out model for instruction in the lab. Students work on the Fast ForWord program 30 to 50 minutes a day, five days a week. Program cycles range from four to 16 weeks.

"Nearly 80 percent of our students are classified as having an emotional disturbance. A great deal of effort goes into stabilizing students emotionally and behaviorally, so they can start benefiting from the academic curriculum," said Jackson. "One of the things we like about Fast ForWord is it allows us to create structure and consistency. Students get uninterrupted academic time and intensive instruction in foundational skills they can apply across the curriculum."

Reading Assistant

In the Brain Lab, students also work on Reading Assistant 20 to 40 minutes a day, three days a week. Reading Assistant is the only online reading tool that uses speech recognition to correct and support students as they read aloud, building fluency and comprehension with the help of a supportive listener. No other program or e-book provides comparable real-time guidance and feedback.

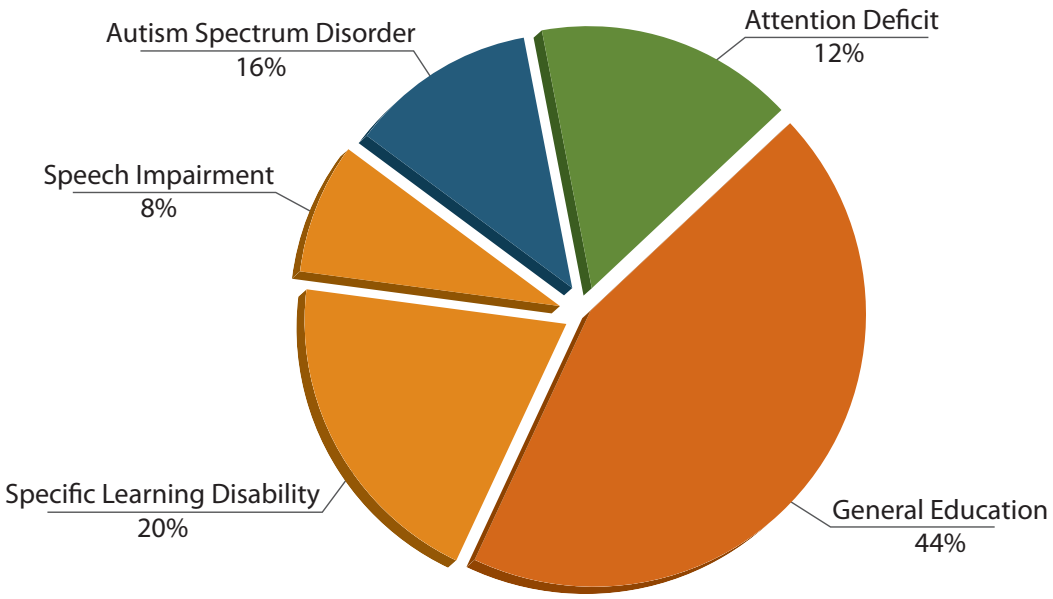
"Reading Assistant gives us an effective tool to build students' fluency, comprehension and vocabulary," said Jackson. "What makes it different from other programs is that it walks students through the entire reading comprehension process, rather than just drilling them on particular skills. Students don't just read something once and they're done. Each story is broken up into short passages that they can preview, read and reread to make sure they understand them. After completing a passage, questions measure their literal and inferential comprehension. This process helps students become more independent and more confident readers because they can take the skills they're developing and immediately apply them in the classroom."

Further, online access makes the program easy to implement for school or home use. "Some students choose to work on Reading Assistant as homework because they really like it. Others may have jobs that prevent them from using it during the school day. The online platform gives us the flexibility to provide it to students anytime and anywhere," said Jackson. "I even had one student who asked me to let him use the program last summer. I set it up for him and he used it every day on his own. It's really exciting to see that level of motivation."

Summer school and after school programs

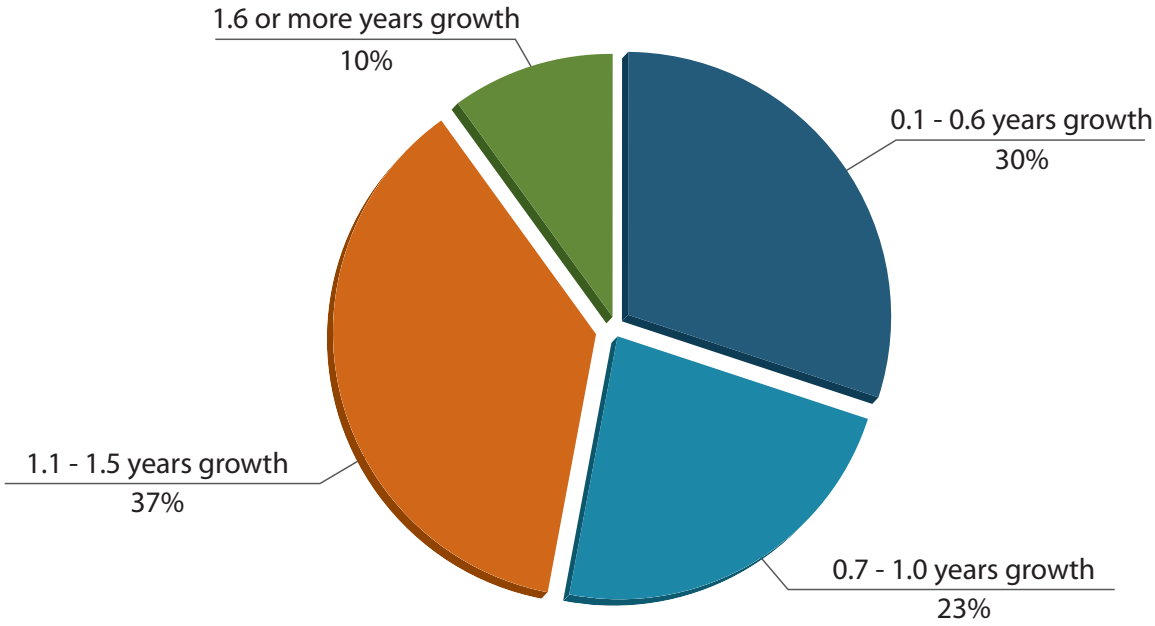
The Brain Lab also offers a four- to six-week summer literacy camp, and an afterschool program.

"During the summer literacy camp, we work with a more diverse student population than during the school year with students attending Canyon View School," said Jackson. "Some parents enroll their child for intervention and others for enrichment."



Summer Student Population

During the summer literacy camp, each morning students spend 90 minutes on the Fast ForWord program, divided among two or three sessions with breaks in between. Students also spend 20 to 40 minutes a day, three days a week on Reading Assistant. After lunch, students participate in recreational activities.



Brain Lab Summer Literacy Success

"Overall, the reading grade level of students participating in the summer literacy program has improved anywhere from .2 years to more than 1.5 years after completion of the six-week session," said Jackson.

In the afterschool program, the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs are geared to the individual needs of each student.

"A student with autism who had struggled with reading comprehension for most of his short school career began attending the afterschool program. After 12 weeks, his parents reported that his grades improved in school. At middle school, he made the honor roll and his parents attribute much of his success to receiving Brain Lab services," said Jackson.

Reporting

Throughout the year, Jackson monitors student progress using MySciLEARN™ reports. The online data analysis and reporting tools enable educators to monitor the individual, classroom, school, or district performance of students working with the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs.

At Canyon View School, each student who participates in the Fast ForWord program receives a notebook, which includes their weekly score sheets and achievement reports. "The weekly achievement reports through MySciLEARN show students' progress, including the percent completed on each exercise, overall completion, high scores and more," said Jackson. "The reports are a useful tool to help students self-monitor, set goals, and take ownership of what they're doing."

The reports are also used to provide parents with up-to-date progress information. "In many districts, instead of going to litigation, they'll offer to send students here for a neuroscience-based education," said Jackson. "Since we get a lot of these cases, it's nice to have a program that's effective and that provides daily information we can share with parents who want to see how their children are doing."

Results

According to Jackson, students who complete the Brain Lab program are able to generalize and retain their skills, and continue to make progress long after they leave the lab.

"The Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs give us the tools to focus on early intervention, which is much more effective than remediation," he said. "I've seen the programs make a tremendous difference on our campus. In a four- to six-week program cycle in the summer, I've seen students achieve gains of two months to one-and-a-half years in their reading skills. In an eight- to 16-week cycle during the school year, I've seen students improve up to a year or more. During an entire school year, students can gain as much as a couple years of growth in their reading skills."

Jackson has also seen students move from non-proficient to proficient on state tests. "We had one student with language impairment who started the Fast ForWord program in the fourth grade. By time he was in ninth grade, he tested proficient on the California Standards Tests (CST) for the first time in his academic career. That's huge when parents call and say their child went from non-proficient to proficient!"

In addition, the programs support Jackson in his role as an educator. "I know the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs have improved my ability to address students' needs," he said. "In the past, to provide this type of instruction, I would've had to work with students one-on-one or in small groups, which is difficult to do when several students require intervention. But with the online programs, students

can progress at their own rates and get the repetition they need to master a skill and move on. This helps students feel more successful and confident, which results in improved behavior and better attitudes about learning. For many students, their participation in the Brain Lab was a turning point in their academic lives.

"I believe the Fast Ford and Reading Assistant programs can have a major impact on special education programs," he continued. "I've seen it have a huge impact on our students and I know many more schools could benefit from it. We have barely scratched the surface of the power of neuroscience and literacy. I look forward to doing much more with these programs."

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Fast ForWord®

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