

Raising Robust Readers Pilot 1/11/24-5/15/24

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Summary

I have been a special education teacher for 10 years in an Essential Skills Classroom. This year, the program Raising Robust Readers was shared with me, and after doing my own research and reading the book *Phonics the R-igh-t Way*, I felt strongly that this program would be highly beneficial for the students I serve. I got the program in January of 2024 and had a pilot group of 5 students and a control group of 5 students so I could determine the effectiveness of the program. Some of the students I had worked with for over a year before beginning the program, and I had seen minimal growth in their reading abilities when reflecting on the data I had collected. All students in both groups had letter/sound awareness, with very few demonstrating decoding skills. I had utilized various programs and strategies and my students were having difficulty with moving past the letter/sound awareness stage to blending sounds and decoding words.

When I began using the program with the pilot group, we spent the first few weeks learning the structure by following the blending and reading sequence which has students start with single sound consonant letters. Once the students had been introduced to the first 4 single sound continuous letters they were introduced to the ay phonogram. They were able to quickly identify that the ay makes the long a sound, and we were able to begin moving into the beginning-to-blend portion of the program. By week 5 of using the program, the pilot group of students was showing high levels of engagement and success (see graph below) while the students in the control group were inconsistent with their skills and hadn't made significant gains. It was decided at that point to begin utilizing the program with both groups.

Students in the pilot program had all made gains in their blending and decoding skills, and I began to collect data about their word reading accuracy to give a better reflection of their levels of learning. I had observed their progress through informal assessments conducted daily, but I wanted to gather specific information about how consistent and accurate they were with word reading since the beginning of the program. Looking back at the data from Weeks 6-13 (See graph below), it is evident that these students were highly successful using this program. We were able to learn and master 5 Vowel Buddy phonograms and read them in words with high levels of accuracy in a very short time This 8-week progress was more growth than I had seen in a year's time frame with some of the

students whom I had taught the year before. These students also went from decoding and blending two phonograms to words containing 3-5 phonograms.

Another area of growth that isn't reflected in the data I collected relates to the students' speech and language skills. Since beginning this program, the SLP and I have both noticed a significant increase in the amount of communication from the students participating in the pilot program and in their ability to produce sounds to better articulate their words. These are students who have very limited verbal skills but through the use of the program, we are seeing an improvement.

Students who participated in the control group were showing very little consistency in their reading abilities and when conducting informal assessments during instruction, I could easily determine that they were not getting their needs met. At the end of week 5, it was decided to discontinue the control group and start utilizing Raising Robust Readers with them as well. These students picked up the program quickly as well and within 4 weeks all were able to decode and blend sounds to read words with very high levels of accuracy and continue displaying these skills consistently throughout the remainder of the school year - even with more Vowel Buddy phonograms being introduced and working with words containing 3 or more phonograms. I feel like the control group may be even more telling about the success of the program because they were able to start the program later than the students in the pilot group and achieve comparable results in word reading accuracy.

I have seen more growth in my students in one semester through the use of this program than I have in an entire school year. It is immensely effective in helping students learn and develop reading skills. It also promotes growth in other key areas, such as speech and language. I highly recommend this program, especially for use with students who struggle with reading. I look forward to seeing the growth my students make when they are able to receive instruction with it for a full school year!

Chelsea Shares Her Findings and Feelings

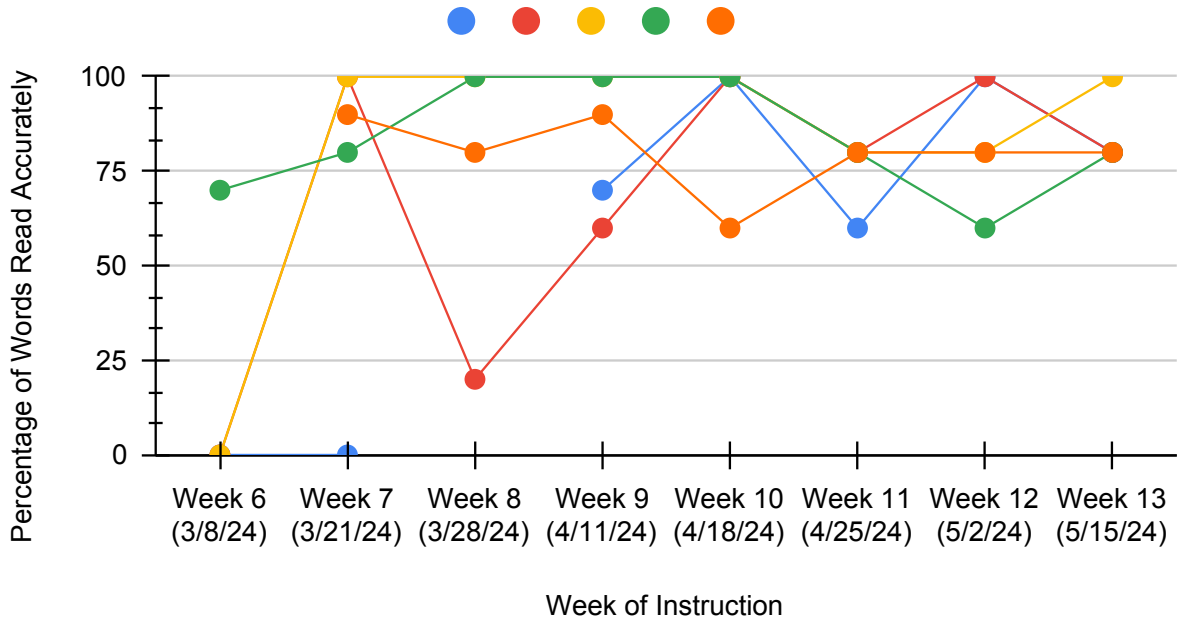
Taken from a Zoom Conversation

"In week six, as reflected in the charts below, we started really working on decoding skills and reading. I started assessing the kids on word accuracy versus phonograms.

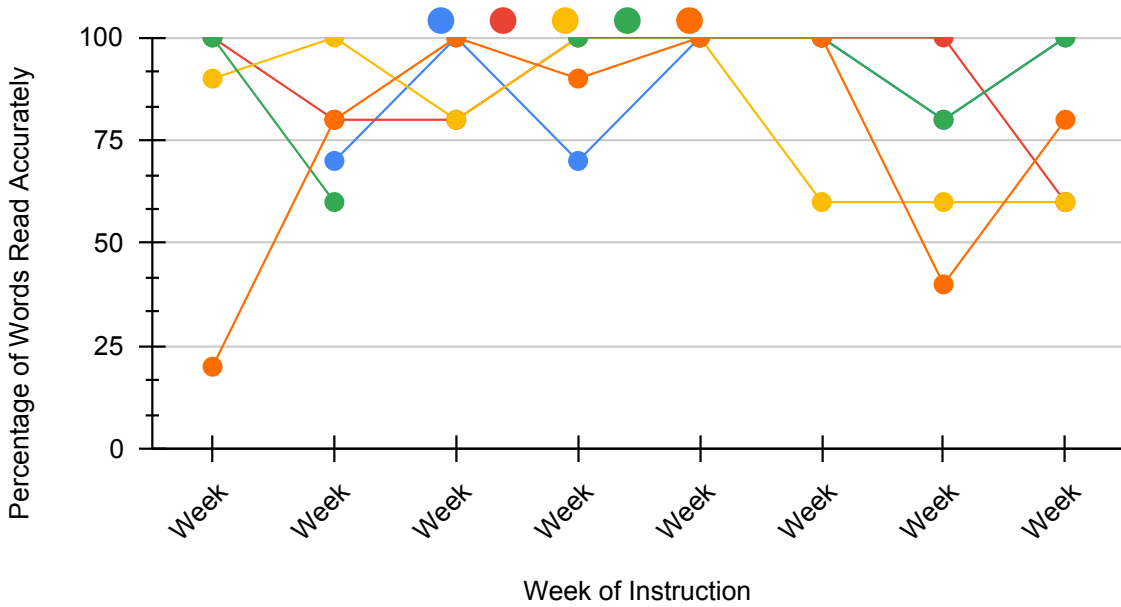
The second graph reflects the Control Group. They were getting introduced to those Vowel Buddies and were not reading any sort of words really accurately other than a couple of the kiddos who had some exposure to CVC words. But my

other kiddos, who were very beginning readers, had no concept of blending and putting the sounds together.”

Control Group Word Accuracy



Pilot Group Word Accuracy



“It was really interesting to see how the group that started with this program from the beginning picked up on the word reading quickly. We had our days where the data wasn't as good, but that is when we introduced new phonograms, such as ‘igh’ or when we started moving from two-sound to three- and four-sound words. It is hard to depict that on the graph. But overall, their data was very consistent. They were getting 70, 80, 90, and 100% word accuracy whereas in my control group, it took several weeks of instruction with the program. But once they had it for a few weeks, their accuracy jumped. They were a lot more consistent, and they were in the 70s, 80s, 90s and 100% accuracy rate. You can almost see when they started getting the RRR instruction.

There are so many extra pieces, though. Just being in the room and seeing it in person, you just can't deny how much of a difference this has made.

The parents have been coming to me more and more and saying ‘The kids are doing this at home. They’re bringing me stuff and trying to sound it out.’

I took on a kiddo from another resource room to try this program and he is blending words. We did a game on the board just the other day and he went right up to it. Typically I'm breaking it and pointing to help him track. But he went right up to that board, pointed to each phonogram, said the sounds, and then tried to blend it together. There were speech errors, but he did it and it's because he's getting it. The para that is with him is phenomenal. She has the materials in the classroom, so when the class is working on reading, she's practicing with him. He's getting that exposure.

We are seeing such an increase in language in so many kiddos as well, and parents have said the same thing. One of the speech pathologists mentioned to me that they were talking so much more, using their device more and using more sentences.

There's such a strong connection between reading and language and we're seeing that happen. She was telling me that one of my kiddos came in the room and wanted something and told her exactly what she wanted, whereas before, she would just go grab it. They're trying to verbalize more and tell us what they want and taking the time to try and say those sounds. The gains that we've had are not just in reading but also in other areas because this has been phenomenal. I've never had such a successful school year. We've only been doing this since January, and some kids only since March.

I've got several parents whose kiddos are moving on to middle school who are very much advocating for this, as nothing else has worked.

I had a parent tell me just the other day, ‘I accepted my kid was not going to be able to read, and that's just gonna be life. Now we know she can.’

I'm very hopeful that it will be spread amongst others in the district because it's so good. All these kids deserve to have this continue so that they can keep learning and growing and progressing with what we've proven works.”