

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## My Reading Coach

### What is My Reading Coach?

*My Reading Coach Gold: Professional Edition (My Reading Coach)* is a reading intervention program recommended for struggling readers ages 7 and up. *My Reading Coach* is a technology-based program that has been used with students with diverse learning profiles: regular education, adult education, GED preparation, ESL, bilingual education, home schooled, and students with ADD/ADHD and dyslexia. The goal of *My Reading Coach* is to teach students to read fluently and comprehend on grade level by improving auditory discrimination skills, sound/letter recognition, and auditory memory. The program's core content and instruction delivery is intended for daily one-hour sessions of computer time supplemented with teacher and/or tutor involvement. The program has also been used as an intensive intervention approach in the upper grades for up to two class periods per day, five days per week.

The program was developed from the work of Jim Larrabee, speech pathologist and special education teacher, who developed a reading program that purports to combine phonemic awareness and phonics instruction with emphasis placed on the production of sounds and how to easily blend a series of sounds into a recognizable word. Every lesson begins with an introduction of the new skill emphasizing the pronunciation of the sounds with proper placement of the lips, tongue, and teeth. The program provides immediate feedback as the lesson is delivered. The instructional feedback varies depending upon student need and the activity. Sometimes the sound in isolation is provided; at other times hints, rules, or the actual answer is provided.

Each lesson begins with a presentation of the skills, rules, and memory aids then proceeds with the four or five encoding (spelling) and decoding (reading) practice activities. The activities may include: Word Building, a "hearing activity" to help develop auditory and visual discrimination and sound/letter associations; Listen and Find, matching spoken words and nonsense words with the letters that represent those sounds; Reading, an activity for students to sound out words and nonsense words with the capacity to record and listen to their pronunciation and prosody; Writing, provides practice associating the symbol and the sound with immediate feedback and scaffolding; Two Syllables, an activity that builds on previously acquired skills and includes plurals and compound words; Vowel/Sound/Stick, a system to help students read and pronounce complex words; Spelling, the student spells words utilizing all the sounds taught in the lesson. By using a microphone students are able to practice pronunciation of the sounds and words, which can be recorded and played back for the student and/or the teacher. Later in the program, grammar and comprehension lessons and activities are introduced.

Two spiral bound books accompany the program software; the Teacher's Guide and the Blackline Masters. The Teacher's Guide contains detailed information including an overview of how to use the program, program settings, a comprehensive explanation of the program components, and remediation techniques with specific lesson plans to use for remediation. The progression of sounds as they are introduced, words used in the program organized by lesson, and the grammar content used to support comprehension are found in the appendix section of the Teacher's Guide. The Blackline Master Book includes reproducible activity pages designed to reinforce skills and



encourage parental involvement. A sequential list of the memory aids and rules taught in the program are also included in this book.

The placement test found on the software is used to determine the student's entry level and is one part of the baseline for measuring individual student progress. Teachers are also advised to keep individual student portfolios with baseline data and on-going progress monitoring that could include scores from any standard reading level test, oral readings captured on audio cassettes, and writing samples of dictation lessons. Performance reports detail the results of the placement test and the students' automatic placement assignment in relation to their test score. Although students should be able to work independently through most of the computer portion of the program after the initial session, teacher observation and encouragement are essential to students' success. Each section of the program culminates with a cumulative review test that is automatically assigned and requires 90% mastery. When a lesson's concepts are not mastered, the same lesson is automatically reassigned until the 90% mastery level is achieved. Teachers have the capacity to adjust the mastery level to better serve their student population. A certificate is awarded as students master each section.

Teachers are advised to monitor their students' progress by using the reports that are generated with *My Reading Coach*. These reports can also be used to determine if and when adult intervention is necessary. Reports that are generated include: class reports with corresponding daily lesson plans, progress check lists, remediation, improvement, grammar and comprehension reports; individual student reports including performance reports on phonics, grammar, and comprehension along with error and attendance reports. Teachers are also encouraged to use traditional assessment methods including monitoring students' interaction with the computer program, the amount of time students devote to specific lessons, and recognizing students' needs for individualized help.

### How is *My Reading Coach* aligned with Reading First?

Each of the five components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) is addressed in varying degrees. For example, vocabulary knowledge is broadened through word work and grammar lessons, although vocabulary skills are not specifically taught.

*My Reading Coach* instruction immediately begins with sound/letter association using written letters and emphasizing auditory and visual discrimination skills. First, the sound and letter are introduced, although not practiced or necessarily taught to mastery. Then, the student immediately begins a practice activity that is considered an advanced phonemic awareness skill: students are asked to listen to a word or non-sense word then click and drag on a letter to build the word. However, there are no activities that teach phonemic awareness without the use of written letters, such as auditory phoneme isolation or segmentation, essential to struggling readers who are deficient in phonological awareness skills (McEwan, 2002).

Phonics is taught systematically with sounds presented in an order that is based on ease of producing and blending sounds together. The program introduces sounds that are auditorily and visually similar together, such as /b/ and /d/, with the idea that explicitly pointing out the similarities and differences early on will help alleviate later confusion. However, research indicates that this sequence of instruction may potentially cause confusion for struggling readers (Carnine, 1976, 1980). Another potentially confusing instructional technique is found in the presentation of the sounds

for r and b, pronounced /ruh/ and /buh/, possibly causing students to incorrectly associate the schwa sound with these consonants.

Although some of the above mentioned specifics in presentation are not consistent with the most recent reading research, the program design teaches phonics systematically and explicitly and includes some research based methods: blends are presented by teaching students to sound each phoneme separately before blending the two sounds together; short vowels are introduced before long vowels; sounds are introduced with emphasis on the sound they make rather than their letter name. Most lessons also incorporate memory aids to help the student retain the sound symbol associations (e.g., M is the lip together sound, because it is made with your lips together. N is the tongue-up sound, because your tongue is up when you say this sound.)

Fluency, grammar, and comprehension are taught almost interchangeably in *My Reading Coach*. Students are taught to use pause points and inflection to eliminate sound-by-sound reading as they are introduced to longer words and more complex sentences. Once they have achieved this level of fluency they are presented with the "Read Like You Talk" technique as well as passages and questions that increase and/or decrease in complexity, based on student performance. Challenge sheets are also provided, for reading with an adult at home, encouraging fluency. Grammar lessons include the parts of speech, major parts of sentences, and simple punctuation. Students are prompted to use these elements of grammar to determine the way the words are used in the sentence, thus creating a mental picture of what is being read. Students are also encouraged to read as if engaged in a conversation, again creating a mental image. Reading as if speaking and visual imagery are the only strategies used to teach comprehension in *My Reading Coach*. Teachers have the capability to delete the grammar lessons, as they may prove too complicated for young students and struggling readers.

Certification training is required for trainers of *My Reading Coach*. Initial training is done in a one day, six-hour workshop. Participants receive three hours of reading content training and three hours of program implementation that includes interpreting and using the progress printouts to inform instruction. The initial program trainers provide on-going training over the web and with telephone technical support. Video based training can also be used to train incoming new teachers.

### Research Support for My Reading Coach

In a pilot study, two groups of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students reading below grade level were separated into a control group and a *My Reading Coach* group. The control group supplemented the regular curriculum with alternative supplemental materials. The treatment group supplemented the regular curriculum with *My Reading Coach*. The Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) standardized reading comprehension test was administered for the pre-test and the post-test. The control group did not include ESL students although the *My Reading Coach* group included nine ESL students. Pre-test results for the control group were reported with an average stanine of 3.8 and *My Reading Coach* group reported an average stanine of 1.6. The report states that the control group went down 2 percentiles while the My Reading Coach group increased 2.2 percentiles. However, because the groups differed at pretest and because the posttest stanines are not available, we cannot conclude that any results reported are the direct result of *My Reading Coach*.

Another study was conducted to determine if the use of *My Reading Coach* (MRC) improves reading comprehension of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students. The study took place in

two Title I elementary schools. One school used the *MRC* program for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade reading, whereas the other school used the in-class reading program *Success For All (SFA)*. Reading comprehension was measured by pretests and posttests using the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) exam. Two analyses were undertaken. First, the pretest DRP unit scores were analyzed to determine if the groups were equivalent. Results indicated there were distinct differences at pretest. Second, a repeated measures analysis of the differences from the pretest to posttest scores by treatment (*MRC* vs. *SFA*) and type of student (Regular Education vs. English Language Learner) was conducted to investigate the benefits of the different reading programs for different types of students. The results provided to us indicated that the *MRC ELL* students improved more than the *SFA ELL* students, whereas the *MRC RegEd* and *SFA RegEd* students did equally well. The reported results stated that this study had an unbalanced design with small sample sizes in the *MRC RegEd*=13 students, *SFA ELL*=10. Also, the RegEd vs. ELL composition of the student populations at each school is approximately reversed. Furthermore, we conclude that because the two groups of students were not randomly assigned across the two schools and were significantly different at pretest, there may be further unknown differences between the populations. Therefore any gains shown could not be positively attributed to the *MRC* program.

Between the years 2001 and 2003, longitudinal data was collected from 164 elementary school participants who received lessons in the *My Reading Coach* program. Most of the participants were in the second grade (108) and the remainder in first grade (56) when the data collection began, and each participant's reading score was evaluated an average of three times. The students represented regular education, learning disabled, ESL, and bilingual education programs. Participants' reading ability was tested at the beginning and end of two consecutive years except for 65 participants who were tested on random dates throughout the study. The results indicated that students in regular education had higher reading scores than learning disabled and ESL students, but students from all groups had improved reading scores with more lessons and their reading scores improved over time. Students in regular education programs seemed to improve significantly faster than students in the other groups, but learning disabled and bilingual students seemed to benefit the most from more lessons. However, because the study did not include a control group whose reading growth was also evaluated, we cannot conclude that *My Reading Coach* is responsible for the increase in participants' scores.

Although some of the results are favorable toward *My Reading Coach*, the design of these studies (*i.e.*, lack of control groups, lack of random assignment, lack of information about the assessment tools) does not allow us to determine that the gains reported are the direct result of the *My Reading Coach* program. We conclude that the effectiveness of *My Reading Coach* as an intervention for struggling readers is unknown. Future studies with improved design are recommended to provide useful evidence about the program's effectiveness.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *My Reading Coach*:

- The program provides immediate feedback.
- There is an emphasis on the importance of teacher interaction and management.

- The program provides explicit and systematic instruction in basic reading skills and is mastery oriented with enough practice activities to help struggling readers acquire new skills.
- The program provides regular assessments of student progress that can be used by the teacher to manage instruction.

*Weaknesses of My Reading Coach:*

- There is an emphasis on auditory and visual discrimination exercises rather than explicit phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, which may pose a problem for struggling readers.

**Which Florida districts have schools that implement My Reading Coach?**

|          |              |
|----------|--------------|
| Dixie    | 352-498-6131 |
| Hamilton | 386-792-1228 |
| Marion   | 352-671-7702 |
| Nassau   | 904-321-5881 |
| Orange   | 407-317-3202 |
| Pasco    | 813-794-2648 |

**For More Information**

[www.myreadingcoach.com](http://www.myreadingcoach.com)

**References**

Carnine, D. W. (1976). Similar sound separation and cumulative introduction in learning letter-sound correspondence. *Journal of Educational Research*, 69, 368-372.

Carnine, D.W. (1980). Two letter discrimination sequences: High-confusion alternatives first versus low-confusion alternatives first. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 12, 41-47.



McEwan, E.K.(2002). Teach them ALL to read. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Lead Reviewer: Georgia Jordan, M.S.

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**Important Note:** FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)

