

CASTLE Case Study
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Implementation: Fall 2008

Background:

College Reading has been offered in our department for several years. Placement in the course is based on the Compass test; if a student scores under 72 on the test, he/she is eligible to enroll in College Reading. However, reading placement at Kirkwood is not mandatory. Of the students taking the Compass test when entering Kirkwood, the number of students testing into the class are as follows:

**COMPASS placement* in College Reading
(01-70)**

- Spring 2005 – 135
- Fall 2005 – 526
- Spring 2006 – 83
- Fall 2006 – 582
- Spring 2007 – 101
- Fall 2007 – 488
- Spring 2008 – 104

*Placement is recommend, not mandatory

The course has a low pass rate, and we hypothesize a couple reasons for this. First, students generally are not motivated to be in the class because they often do not understand their need for the class. They believe they can read but don't understand that they have comprehension issues. Therefore, they tend to avoid homework and studying since they don't believe they really need it. Another issue contributing to the low pass rate is the fact that we also have many students who have extremely low reading levels and are capable of understanding very little of the text and other supplementary materials.

Two years ago, we changed our text and added two online learning components, hoping to see a learning improvement. However, it has been difficult to find a text that does not speak down to students but at the same time does teach the more basic skills they need to acquire.

What are the critical teaching/learning issues in your classroom?

I want to find new materials for the course, improve motivation, create additional learning benchmarks for students, and improve the pass rate for College Reading.

Therefore, our team has chosen a new book, which comes with My Reading Lab, a computer-based program designed to work hand-in-hand with the text. Also, motivation needs to be sustained; students are more likely to stay in class and work hard if they can see some growth. Theoretically, the new materials should aid greatly with this. Developmental students already know they are deficient, so this motivation to follow through and succeed is paramount.

What teaching/learning strategies might be helpful to address these issues?

- Another instructor (Terri Jedlicka) and I have chosen new learning materials for the course which we piloted in Spring 08 – The Skilled Reader text (ABLongman) and its companion online component, MyReadingLab (www.myreadinglab.com), which will provide immediate feedback as well as a personal Lexile reading score, which will fluctuate based on the activities completed in the program. This will address two of our issues above.
- The motivation issue is large, and the online component should help with that. Most of our students like and many times prefer online learning because they are so accustomed to those types of activities (video games, electronic devices, etc). Also, the immediate, frequent feedback within the program combined with the frequent instructor feedback will hopefully work well together and help keep motivation levels higher.
- Building in more specific instances of how improved reading skills will help in college and on the job (for use in classroom discussions) could also help raise motivational levels.

What learning and motivation theories might support or inform these teaching/learning strategies?

Resources:

- --*On Course*, Skip Downing, 8th ed., Chapter 3 (Discovering Self-Motivation) and Chapter 4 (Self-Management)
- --Creole Web CT: Module 2: Motivation Theory
- --Creole Web CT: Module 1, Chapter 4, Meta-Goal 4: Encouraging Self-Directed and Self-Initiated Learning.

What hypotheses do these issues raise that might be further investigated in a classroom research project?

- I hypothesize that this combination of text and multimedia learning will be more motivational and more beneficial to the learning process in College Reading, thus improving the pass rate.
- The more often they have feedback, the more often they can see their growth and that could help them stay in class until the end of the semester and finish successfully.
- Some students have a reading level too low for this basic class.
- Some students have issues other than reading that make it hard for them to focus on classroom activities (family, jobs, health, transportation, legal issues, etc). As faculty, we have no control over these even though they can have large effects on our classrooms and on personal motivation.
- Talking even more about how improved reading skills can benefit students not only in college but on the job and at home should help improve motivation.

What classroom assessment data could be collected to test these hypotheses?

- Pre- and Post-Compass Reading Placement scores

- Pre- and Post-Lexile scores
- Overall class final grades compared to previous fall semester
- Retention

Conclusion

At the end of the fall semester, seven of the original eight students were still enrolled in class. Of these students, the pass rate was 100% as opposed to last fall with the old materials (pass rate was 50%). The average Compass score increase was 13.6 points this fall (83% took test) as compared to 18.8 the previous fall (however, only 55% of those students took the test). Had all nine students taken the test, I surmise it would have been a lower average.

Although Lexile scores were not measured the previous fall, they are now measured at the beginning of the course and updated weekly throughout the entire term. Everyone's Lexile score rose, and the gains were from .1 grade level to three grade levels. The average gain was almost 1.5 grade levels. Each week, students measured their Lexiles and were able to see immediate feedback on the current level.

The largest pieces of evidence that the new materials are working better are the pass and retention rate. Of the six students still registered at the end of this term, all six completed the course and all earned passing grades. The average grade was a B-. The previous fall, of the nine students still registered at the end of the term, only five completed the course, and the average grade was lower than a C-, which is the last passing grade for this course. If Ds were issued, the average grade would be a D.

Anecdotally, I noticed students were more engaged in class and also enjoyed working with My Reading Lab. The book is also very student-friendly and includes many graphics to accompany the material. It is colorful and pleasing to the eye, and that helps students stick with the reading and therefore the course. The old book was much less visually appealing although the information was very good. The weekly Lexile feedback was also helpful and encouraging, and the quick feedback on test scores and homework was also beneficial. Students became more confident in their skills and worked harder in order to keep watching their Lexile scores climb. Working together, this new book and My Reading Lab have invigorated our College Reading program, and I am going to keep using it. I'm very happy with the retention and pass rate using this new system.