
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION STIPEND YEAR-END REPORT

Rose Institute for Learning and Literacy Stipend Report

Schools: P.S. 117 in Queens, NY and P.S. 277 in the Bronx, NY

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I. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research was to investigate how training in Spalding methods through the Rose Institute at Manhattanville College impacted teachers' instructional methods, beliefs, and assessment of student literacy learning. Specifically, research was conducted with six teachers across two different New York City public schools in Kindergarten, first grade, a special education self-contained classroom, and inclusion classrooms. These teachers were being trained in and using Spalding methods for the first time with their students during the '15-'16 academic year. The goals of the training remained the same as previous years—that the teachers learn how to teach: accurate speech; legible handwriting; accurate spelling; analysis of vocabulary as words relate to sounds, spelling rules, syllabication and meaning; sentence structure; oral reading with expression; and comprehension.

Research methods used: 1) mid- and post-training interviews with teachers 2) collaborative conversations between the teachers facilitated by the researcher 3) informal conversations with principals as their availability allowed

II. Findings

STRENGTHS of Rose Institute Model according to the teachers:

Consistent across the years of study:

- Teaches blending words well

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- Consistency in the structure and routine allows students to know what to expect and minimizes transition time
- Review of previously taught sounds allows for spiraling of curriculum
- Oral language is emphasized and allows students to practice answering questions in full sentences which was found to be important for students to transfer to writing
- Coaching and mentoring is ongoing and site-based
- Fills gap in foundational skills for all learners
- Provides teachers with understanding of English language that they themselves did not have prior to this training
- Exposure to foundational skills through Spalding method was noted as critical for all levels of learners
- Consistency of common language for each lesson

According to the principals:

- The program provides aspects of reading and writing that many children are missing--namely the structures and systems of how English works.

Additional strengths noted in 2015-2016:

- Deep value in the mentor model—when specifically asked about flexible approaches to the model, the teachers all felt across both schools that the high level of mentorship could not be compromised by having fewer planning and classroom-based sessions given the complexity of the material and the need for explaining and demonstrating for teacher understanding

CHALLENGES

Consistent across the years of study according to teachers:

- More support was needed on re-teaching phonograms through small group instruction for below grade level readers; differentiation was repeatedly mentioned by several teachers across the schools as a high need

Additional challenges noted in 2015-2016 from teachers:

- The manual *The Writing Road to Reading* was inconsistently used and several teachers were looking for greater support in becoming independent in their use of the manual as they plan for their students' literacy needs next year.

- The need for manipulatives or reinforcement activities not only as supplemental review but also to enhance student engagement and joyful learning
- The handwriting focus needs to be more specific and a step-by-step approach needs to be given to students.

Additional challenges noted in 2014-2015 from principals:

- To provide continuity for students moving from one grade to the next a multi-year plan of action would be helpful; Principals need some support in how to leverage the program across the grade level and from one grade level to the next

QUESTIONS:

From teachers:

- How can we incorporate differentiated instruction for children not grasping or not participating?
- What do we do with the children struggling?
- What reinforced strategies or methods can be used for English learners?
- What added activities can be incorporated for transference across the curriculum daily?
- Are there hands-on manipulatives or extensions to this work? Games? Word sorts?
- How can formative assessment data from students' dictation notebooks be captured and used at the end of each lesson to better understand who has daily grasp of the phonograms?
- How could this be implemented as a full school?
- When do we have them blend and segment in writing by themselves?

From principals:

- What happens to the children who experienced the program this year? Should they loop together?
- We were told this would be for special education--how much are children who are reading below grade level retaining? What additional measures are embedded for those students?
- If we wanted to have Spalding rolled out in entire grade level and have more teachers involved...what shifts could be made to the model such as having a lab site or model classroom?

PARTICULAR QUOTES OF INTEREST:

Teacher's Beliefs

"My whole philosophy is that as we teach children literacy the younger they are the more able they are able to transfer that literacy into other aspects of their life."

"I love teaching literacy. I love learning as a student myself. I love delving into skills and strategies to give children the tools they will need to feel that they can read. I love reading. I love teaching literacy. My enthusiasm transfers over to them."

"It's my second year teaching Kindergarten and I felt a need to get a better handle on the phonics. I do believe the students really do need it. We've had a few different programs that have not been successful. We were in dire need of this. We need more time for this work because we only have 45 minutes to do it."

"I used to do Foundations for the past 6 years and I was very passionate about that program so switching I thought let me try something different. I love Foundations but I thought maybe there is something even better than that. I like the systematic approach. The way you teach Spalding is different by teaching all the letter sounds up front. It is easier for me when students are writing for me to support them with thinking about which sounds they know. With Foundations they were restricted with only knowing the one sound. I now am able to talk to the kids a lot more about different letter sounds and have a reasoning to back up their thinking since we teach the rules and I try to transfer that into other parts of the day. I feel like I have more things to say to more children which I like."

"I like it. I also come from more of a balanced literacy background. I haven't done any program for an extremely long time. We did Foundations for 2 years and now I'm doing this. I think my favorite thing about it is they learn all of the letter sounds from the beginning. There are no secrets. We are not hiding anything from them. They learn why for example ch makes the /ck/ sound in school. I need to work on the transfer more. Modeling the transfer. How they can use what they know when reading and writing and across all content areas? I feel like that is something that if I practiced more or modeled more they would internalize it. There are some students that really love it and are

internalizing it whether I'm modeling it or not but I would like to get to a larger group.”

“It takes a lot of components. To me, reading is such a complex skill that involves so many different parts of the brain to be active at the same time that it's hard for me to say that a student is moving because of one specific thing. Like did they stop at a word because they knew it didn't sound right or because it didn't look right? I'm not in their brains. So, I think I believe in balanced literacy: read alouds, a lot of modeling, independent reading—eyes on print, shared reading, guided reading is really important—I think that's where most instruction at first grade level takes place, there is definitely a phonics component. Part of me feels like Foundations may have reached more students. My students that are low are past the point of even catching up to Spalding at this point. “

“I really *really* believe in phonics. I think it is so beneficial to the students. Most kids need explicit instruction in how letters and sounds work. They need a systematic approach to figure out how to decode. I think this is a perfect partnership with Teachers College for the read aloud and guided reading work. Phonics is not always the most joyful but it's a necessary component of learning how to read. Foundations moves more slowly. We just did a sight word assessment yesterday and even our lowest students skyrocketed. We do it 5 times a year. In the beginning one student knew 2 words now he has 50. If he had Foundations he would not have made that amount of growth. He is very into participating with Spalding even if it is hard for him. He is getting exposure.”

“I think structure in teaching anything is important. The only thing I would be interested in is I don't find that my kids are super engaged in it and I don't know if it's because it's a long time to be sitting in their seats (40 min) without movement. With Foundations they had white boards, magnets, opportunities to move. I want to put more in it for them. It's not as joyful for them. In our school there is very little time for anything like that so I thought Foundations was one of the only times they had to manipulate with magnets for example. It didn't necessarily have greater transfer but it was more fun. I can't say for sure this year it's transferring. My class this year is in a much better spot. Out of 26 I only have 5 that are not on grade level. I just can't say 100% that this is what's making a difference but it is probably playing a part.”

Mentorship

“In the beginning, the mentorship was essential. Now I am more independent and more comfortable with the program.”

“This is genuine mentorship in every sense of the word. My mentor demonstrates everything and subtly interjects when I need support. She doesn’t make me feel bad about trying.”

“We plan together. She demonstrates. We take turns with the lead. If I have questions through the learning, she processes them with me.”

“In the beginning the mentorship was essential. I would not know what to do or say for the first couple of months. I feel like I am a little more independent now. I know how to introduce the sounds we’ve done. Now I run the lessons and the mentor watches and offers tips. I would not even know where to start without her. The time to plan, talk, and immediately do it was a great model. I am an active learner so this worked for me. It’s an ideal partnership to me. I can do a routine now perfectly but if we start adding components it’s great to have the mentor there.”

“It’s made me a lot more comfortable. This has made me come back to having someone in my room. It’s a genuine mentorship and we are very honest about what we feel like we can try. She is flexible and understands. Having her see the students in action she realizes where the students are to help make the planning realistic. She’s open to suggestions we have, too.”

“We both spoke about how the mentorship makes the program. It is so much information in a condensed period of time that having them here two days a week. Any question I have it’s not a question for very long because I can see them and ask. Questions don’t go very long without being answered so I can get back to focusing on the kids. That is a key component to the program.”

“She has been amazing. I have really grown professionally from her. I think that had I not have had her expertise in the classroom I may not have been able to teach it as effectively. It’s really through her guidance.”

Acquisition of Skills and Student Empowerment

K: “The Kindergarteners know more letters and sounds this year. The children now know specific things about how words work. Even the lowest students skyrocketed on sight words.”

“Students are empowered as readers and writers now.”

“Spalding really opened my eyes. I am empowering students. I never empowered my students as much as this year.”

“Some of my students are not ready yet but they are all receiving exposure to sounds and letters they would not have otherwise. I’ve seen a huge jump in sound knowledge this year. Even my most struggling students are picking up

sounds and that is only due to Spalding. I have seen phenomenal growth and progress in December and January.”

“With Spalding, my students have the tools to spell high frequency words. I am giving them tools to stretch out words and solve unfamiliar words. I feel bad that I didn’t give all of my students in the past these tools. I will forever have these techniques to use.”

“There are two to three more students noticing double letter phonograms that they are now seeing. It’s carried over for some kids to their writing. I would love to see more. When I sit with my more struggling students I really have to coax them. They know the answer but they are not there on their own yet. They need 1:1 still but I do think the program helped them gain confidence. Some students are trying to decode a word and if it doesn’t make sense with prompting they will try the other sounds until the word sounds correct.”

Grade 1:

“Since all of the sounds that phonograms make are taught at once, students have gotten much stronger at their flexibility with reading words.”

“The program because it teaches all these rules. I think that has helped because it has helped the children apply all of the sounds a phonogram makes when they are trying to read new words. They are able to read and understand the text.”

“Compared to Foundations, this approach gives students all of the sounds at once which means they know what to do when they come to a word they don’t know.

“In terms of student growth I’m seeing this year kids if not mastering the harder phonograms they are experimenting with them. Like with the word pound they know it’s not just /o/. They may not master it right away but they know it’s not a one-letter phonogram. This idea of knowing that there is more to a sound than just one letter has been huge growth even for kids that are spelling words correctly they are experimenting with sounds. I have seen dramatic growth on the F&P BAS. I still only have 5 students not on grade level. I have a much smaller number of students below grade level than I did last year.”

“What I find interesting is that it was advertised as a program for kids with dyslexia and I have a student just diagnosed and he is really using the program. He just got his neurological evaluation and the explicitness of teaching the different sounds. He is using the fingers help him to figure out it’s a one-or two-letter phonogram. He needs to know every sound and syllabication. He wouldn’t just pick that up. Spelling is much better for all of my students. I see that in authentic writing. That’s where I’m seeing experimentation with phonograms. We can read a lot more of their writing.”

“Last year’s class was not as accurate in their print. This year’s class is more precise. The program has helped fine tune accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. It is coming together for my approaching and on or above grade level.”

Teacher Understanding of English Language

“I don’t remember learning those rules. I am able to teach myself through the program.”

“The class taught me a lot of things I did not know. I think it’s nice to know why things in the English language are the way they are. I know how to spell certain words and I wasn’t able to explain it before. Now I have a greater base knowledge so I can answer students’ questions.”

Implementation of Methods Next Year

“For me, I really like the oral and written phonogram review. I think it’s very effective and the Ayres list. What I will implement next year to hone in to my own teaching style while using the program is have the children focus more with review through a more fun activity. It needs to have something more than verbal for them. You are only five or six years old once and we cannot take all of the fun out of learning. On certain days I will do a picture word sort and my class loves that. So the program doesn’t allow for that. We treat them like their grown ups. This program is whole class rather than differentiated. Next year I will incorporate more differentiation for my students so that some of them are not sitting idle. They self-select to disengage, if they are unable to do the work. So next year I will implement something else for my students that are struggling.”

Concerns

“I’m looking for support in how to use the teachers guide to create the plans myself more independently.”

“We have one week left and I haven’t planned a lesson by myself yet. That is a little concerning and frustrating. Going back and forth to navigate the guide would be important to add to the mentorship. It should be reinforced to help us in an ongoing way.”

“My strugglers still struggle and that is a concern and I don’t know how to address that. You follow the plan and keep moving. I try to take concerns I have like sight-word recognition, using a pattern to read, and I meet with them in small groups. I circumvent the program for my struggling readers. The flip side is with my more advanced students I’m not able to see them as often

because I'm so focused on the struggling students. I see my struggling students every single day and with that they still struggle.”

“A lot of this program is verbal and for my class that is hard. They are not always making the connection because it is not always written or hands-on. They need to visually see it. I've been implementing using chart paper and showing them the written phonograms to help. There are some things I've implemented that are not part of this. The phonemic awareness of blending and segmenting is all oral. They can tell you the letters in the sounds but they are not putting them together to write or to read.”

III. Recommendations (some remain from previous reports)

- Support for teachers is needed in how to analyze assessment results to inform instruction as part of the planning process.
- Differentiation considerations must be considered for reteaching through small group instruction.
- Teachers need support bridging more hands-on, manipulative methods for students not grasping the phonetic concepts independently and also to remain competitive with programs that incorporate those developmentally appropriate practices
- There should be a gradual release of responsibility towards the teachers not only in the teaching of lessons but also in how to use the manual as part of the planning process.
- A Rose Institute Literacy Achievement and Coaching Retreat could be organized to support all of the mentors in topics such as differentiation, gradual release of responsibility to teachers, use of the manual as a part of mentoring and planning, use of assessment data to inform instructional planning, and to determine common protocols consistent with collaboratively constructed core values of the Rose Institute for Learning and Literacy
- It would be helpful if there were video archives created of the most masterful who have been trained so that clips of best practices can be included in our campus-based methods and early literacy courses.

IV. Summary Statement

The Rose Institute for Learning and Literacy is making an impact on teachers' instructional beliefs and practices. In particular, the teachers in this study found that their understanding of the English language and spelling rules was

strengthened through the process of course work and classroom-based mentorship. The teachers all found improvements in students who were approaching, meeting, or exceeding grade level expectations in reading. The teachers also all found improvement in recognition of individual phonograms for all students. Many teachers found transfer skills to students' authentic writing. Many of the teachers expressed modifications they will make next year to enhance hands-on, tactile, and exploratory enrichment and reinforcement of phonics skills for students. Many of the teachers expressed the value in using Spalding as their approach to word study instruction while also using the Teachers College Reading and Writing Units of Study for their reading and writing workshop blocks. The teachers all lauded the mentorship model and felt that it could not be compromised in order to be able to master the Spalding method with authenticity.