

Learning A-Z has merged Headsprout’s two elementary reading products — Headsprout Early Reading and Headsprout Reading Comprehension — into one adaptive, effective, and fun K-5 online reading program. From introducing early readers to key reading fundamentals to growing reading comprehension skills for more established readers, Headsprout is the perfect resource to help children become capable and confident readers.

St. Anthony’s School, Milwaukee, WI

Headsprout reading programs accelerate student learning

Headsprout Early Reading and Headsprout Reading Comprehension increased the literacy rate at St. Anthony’s by 49 percent.

With 1,500 students ranging from Pre-K through 12th grade, St. Anthony’s School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is the largest Catholic School in the country. Almost all of St. Anthony’s students come from low-income or Latino households. Many of the students have limited English, and some speak no English at all upon entry. Since the school is focused on the English immersion model, this poses a challenge when it comes to literacy.

When Dr. Mary Schmidt became director of academic development at St. Anthony’s in 2004, the school was facing a harsh reality. “Only about 43 percent of our students were proficient on the state exam in reading,” she says. “With the state of Wisconsin averaging a 70 percent reading proficiency rate and Milwaukee’s urban schools averaging 55 percent, we had a long way to go.”

Addressing the literacy issue

Schmidt has a background in experimental psychology, a master’s in special education, and a doctorate in urban education. She also has a background in direct instruction (DI), and has followed the work of leading learning scientists Joe Layng and Kent Johnson since the late 70s. So Schmidt says she knew immediately where she wanted to turn to address the literacy issue: Headsprout online reading programs.

“Layng and Johnson are among the finest learning scientists in the world,” she notes. “I had confidence that their reading and comprehension products could accelerate learning at St. Anthony’s. And if my

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confidence wasn’t enough, I had beta-tested the products with my son and saw firsthand how effective they were.”

In fall of 2005, St. Anthony’s purchased Headsprout Early Reading for 260 kindergartners and first graders, and Headsprout Reading Comprehension for 50 children in grades 2-5. With roots in DI, the Headsprout programs take a phonetic-based approach to reading, including built-in vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Brandy Hart, director of curriculum instruction at St. Anthony’s, explains that “ESL children struggle with vowel sounds and letter sounds. Most of them speak

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CASE STUDY



Spanish in their homes and the sounds in English are almost the opposite of what they hear at home. The Headsprout programs help them with pronunciation because when the students are at the computer, they have to say the sounds out loud and it makes it fun for them.”

“Before implementing the Headsprout programs, our students only used the computers to play,” says Claire Brefka, director of operations at St. Anthony’s School. “These programs finally let us record accurate data about our students’ learning and progress in reading, so our teachers could intervene with those students who were struggling.”

The teachers at St. Anthony’s use the Headsprout programs every day in the classroom. Most children are on the computer 20 minutes each time, with 3 lessons per week. “The products have a fluency component and rich vocabulary, which makes the instruction more dynamic,” says Schmidt. “And the programs are very effective and efficient, so there’s not a lot of wasted time.”

“The kids are engaged the whole time”

Hart says that reading comprehension is normally “extremely hard to teach.” But, she says, “Headsprout makes it easy. It’s set up like a game and students are motivated to do well. Children are taught with passages and are instructed to go back and reread to find their answer.” When a verbatim answer can’t be found in

the story and has to be inferred, the program highlights what children should reread before they answer the question. Hart says that the students are really excited about the program because most of them don’t even have a computer in their home. What’s more, she says she has seen how Headsprout instruction has helped them “build confidence in their reading groups.”

Brefka adds, “Headsprout Early Reading was a great complement to our direct instruction, since our students were seeing the text in regular orthography to help them recognize sounds and words—no matter how they looked or where they were read from.”

“Headsprout is really user friendly,” continues Hart. “When I first used it, all I had was a password and I was able to figure it out. And it’s so easy for the kids. They’re engaged the whole time. I can’t believe how fast they learn.”

The proof is in the numbers

St. Anthony’s first implemented the Headsprout programs as part of an overall school reform. The school also adopted DI and Accelerated Reader. “Today, the Headsprout programs have become part of the culture of the school,” says Schmidt. Teachers think the programs are effective—on the assessment side of things as well as on the intervention side—but the proof is in the numbers. Today, 64 percent of St. Anthony’s students are proficient or advanced readers.

“While we are pleased with our progress, we are confident that we can continue to improve that number,” explains Hart. “Struggling readers have trouble in every subject—history, science, and even math, since there are so many word problems these days. Helping them improve their reading gives them a foundation of knowledge that is critical to their success.”

“The Headsprout programs have opened up a whole new world for our students and have been such a huge confidence booster,” Schmidt says. “When children struggle with reading, it takes their energy and requires extra resources. Reading impacts everything they do in school and in the world. Seeing a struggling reader transform to a successful reader is rewarding and inspiration to everyone involved.”

Learn more at Headsprout.com or 866.889.3729