

Rationale/Basis of the Practice:

It's a typical first day at Rincon Middle School. Students sharing stories about the summer, backpacks full of school supplies and reading books, parents dropping off their students, staff members buzzing about the new year ahead, and our principal greeting every student as they come on our campus. If you look a little closer you might be surprised to see students sharing their favorite books of the summer and the principal asking them what books they've read. Step inside a classroom and you might see a teacher sharing his or her favorite picture book of all time with their new students. On this campus, it's plain to see students and staff embrace reading; Rincon is a family of readers.

It hasn't always been that way. Data from the California Standards Tests (CST's) in 2007, Rincon 6th graders scored 47% proficient in language, 7th graders scored 51% proficient and 8th graders scored 46% proficient. Clearly there was a need to look at how we could improve our scores.

The road to literacy took patience and dedication over time. It took careful examination of our current teaching practices. In order to build a community of life-long readers, the staff at Rincon decided to make a commitment to emphasize reading in all classrooms. They understood the necessity of developing literate members of society. Teachers knew that in order to create both confident and competent readers, it required commitment and dedication from all teachers. How would we get that commitment and dedication? Teachers began to realize that we couldn't leave behind kids who struggled with reading. Teachers knew that reading was the powerful link to success in life. How could that be ignored? We recognized that within our community of readers we needed to include all students, from the gifted to the struggling reader. We decided that our goal of building life-long readers and improving our API score would be built on three areas: create expertise staff-wide in the area of reading comprehension, teach reading in our language arts classes, and create an overall community of literacy. Gains could be made with implementation of these practices and they would benefit our target population.

Looking at all the data identified our target populations, English Language Learners (ELL) and Students with Disabilities (SWD). The data showed that we were not making the growth we should have been in these important subgroups. We recognized, however, that to build a community of life-long learners, all students are important. We set out to target these populations exploring the best strategies we could find. Once the target population was identified, proper placement would be essential. Consideration for placement of these students was based on CST, California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores, informal reading assessments, teacher recommendations, and district benchmark assessments.

Rincon's English learners make up approximately 38% of the total population and it grows every year. Previously these students had been placed in a class for English learners only, leaving little opportunity to integrate with other student populations. Rincon made the decision to include these students into a new type of reading class. Through inclusion into the "Structured Reading" class, as it would be named, these students would have increased opportunities for successful reading strategies and more opportunities to access the content.

Inclusion of students with disabilities has long been an important practice at Rincon. All

Resource Specialist Program (RSP) and Special Day Class (SDC) students are fully included in content classes, with the exception of autistic and medically fragile students. For fully included students we currently have five full time inclusion special education teachers and five instructional aides for 110 students. We also have eight severely autistic students and six medically fragile students who are mainstreamed as much as possible, depending on their abilities and limitations. Many of these students are able to be included in our structured reading classes, which have helped them to work with materials closer to their reading level and pacing. This positive support has increased their sense of belonging to the Rincon community and improved their success in reading.

Description of Practice:

The road to improving adolescent literacy began with educating the staff informally over one summer through a small green book, *Improving Adolescent Literacy* by Doug Fisher. Teachers were “invited” not “required” to check out the book for summer reading. Soon after, ideas from the book spread around the campus. Teachers were discussing strategies that could be used across all content areas. The following school year was an informal journey with our first visit from author, Doug Fisher.

About a year later, the district was grappling with pending “Program Improvement” status with schools in the district. They researched and looked for the best ways to improve our schools and consequently decided to focus on reading comprehension. Rincon found the new district focus to be directly in line with what had already begun at our site, it fit perfectly with Rincon’s plan. Rincon Middle School had already begun its journey down the path of reading comprehension with its special focus of improving adolescent literacy. Our plan included a second invitation to Doug Fisher, who had already attained celebrity status with our staff, and more collaboration centered around literacy. The movement was in full swing, teachers continued to embrace reading strategies and tried new ways of approaching teaching in their classrooms. To date, the staff has begun its second professional school-wide book study, *Strategies that Work* by Stephanie Harvey. We collaborate on best literacy practices at staff and department meetings. We examine student work more carefully and analyze our assessments. Additionally, we are working on centering our work on questioning strategies with our students.

In addition to our school-wide focus of improving adolescent literacy, we knew that we needed to teach reading differently in our language arts classes. The second part of our route to building a community of life-long readers would also be a long journey. It would include a careful examination of what was needed to be changed in those classes and who we were reaching. General education students were doing fine, but those with special needs, whether struggling or gifted, were left behind as well as English Language Learners.

Plans were made at the district level by a small, but dedicated group of literacy coaches to design a program that could deliver the core materials to our English Language Learners, one of our target populations. Rincon took the program and also included special education students and struggling English-only readers. This class would focus on strategies to give students universal access to the core language arts materials and teach them in small groups with texts at their level. As mentioned earlier, this class would be called “Structured Reading.” The implementation process began initially with district training showing what the components should look like: access to the core materials using Specially Designed Academic Instruction In

English (SDAIE) techniques, guided reading, scaffolded writing and English Language Development.

In Chapter 2 of *Taking Center Stage*, research “found that middle school ELL students have lower rates of growth on the California English-Language Development Test than elementary school ELL students...” This program sought to remedy that discrepancy. Furthermore, it also sought to specifically address one of the several reasons cited in expecting lower gains in middle and high school... “ELL students at the middle and high school levels share the added difficulty of learning advanced material in specific subjects in addition to learning English.” Structured reading gives our ELL students differentiated strategies to access challenging secondary content with specific SDAIE techniques.

The path was a bumpy one at first; middle school teachers *had* to begin to think of themselves as reading teachers, not just content teachers. Special trainings were held, site grade-level collaboration was ongoing, and teachers began to buy into the idea of teaching reading to middle school students. Currently, in order to support the teachers, bilingual aides are present six hours a day, five days a week for beginning and early intermediate language level students and for intermediate students. Support teachers are also available three days a week, 4 hours a day to help with our struggling populations.

English Language Learners, struggling English students and Students with Disabilities were not the only students who needed something different. So did our gifted students. A special opportunity presented itself in the spring of 2008. Rincon was invited to become a part of a research project from the University of Connecticut known as School-wide Enrichment Model-Reading (SEM-R). Gifted And Talented Education (GATE) teachers were trained in reading strategies to enrich and provide rigor to GATE students and increase their volume of reading. The university provided an in-depth training, which a team of teachers participated. The program components included introducing students to new genres and providing a concentrated amount of supported, independent reading along with one-on-one strategic conferences with the teacher.

The third priority to improving adolescent literacy is building a community of readers. According to California P-16 Council, one of the major factors for successful learning is cultivating a culture or climate that is “safe, promotes a sense of belonging, and fosters strong, positive relationships among students, among school staff and between the school and home/community.” Rincon conducted the California School Climate survey. Results from the survey showed that 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Rincon “is a supportive and inviting place for students to learn.” It also showed that over 90% of respondents believed that Rincon “fosters an appreciation of student diversity and respect for each other.” This positive culture and climate has helped to create an environment that embraces a community of literacy.

“Rincon reads” has become a mantra on campus. Unique to our middle school is the daily practice of sustained silent reading (SSR) in all language arts classes. Our principal insists on reading everyday. His belief is that “reading enables students to access content in all disciplines. Students are reading better and accessing information better, especially in the non-fiction genre.” Rincon has built our community with the foundation of a literacy council which meets monthly. The council’s purpose is to promote literacy through education and school-wide events. One of those events is the Reading Rage where students are encouraged to read

as much as possible within a one-month time frame. Students get excited as they fill-up reading cards and receive rewards. Barnes & Noble Night is another event that invites Rincon staff and families to buy books to support our library. This well attended event has yielded thousands of needed dollars for books on campus. Additionally, the school has adopted a one-book-one-school program where teachers across the content areas read a specially selected picture book to their students. This book is centered on an important theme or concept relevant to our campus.

A visitor to our campus would be pleasantly surprised to see what's going on outside the language arts classroom. It's not unusual to see a student reading from a special shelf of teacher-selected books in math or science. It's also not unusual to see students hiding a book in a class. Students may often miss a break to finish a favorite chapter, or hang out in the library before and after school just to check out the latest title. If you look a little closer, you may even see student our generated book clubs on campus.

Results of the practice:

To monitor and assess the process of the practice, our administrative team visits classrooms daily overseeing reading strategy practices. Additionally, the staff conducts internal observations on colleagues to assess progress and benefit from any new, effective reading comprehension strategies. We continue these processes because we believe they are valuable. About the middle of our first year of the program, we began seeing the fruits of our labor with mid-year reading assessments showing growth. The plan appeared to be working. Finally, we saw even more growth with end of the year reading assessments showing that 92% of our struggling readers grew at least one grade level, with 26% increasing two or more grade levels.

According to our CST same-student language arts data, 7th grade ELL students grew 9% and 8th grade students grew 12%. 7th and 8th grade students with disabilities grew 11%. These scores met and exceeded our API target growth by 41 points for ELL students and 25 points for students with disabilities. Our ELL reclassification rates increased as well, from a total of 46 students in 2007 to 59 students in 2008. One unanticipated surprise was the large gain made by our Socio-Economically Disadvantaged (SED) students, who actually made the largest gain of all our sub group populations, comparing same students on the CST, 29% improved in 7th grade language arts, 32% improved in 8th grade language arts.

For the future, the staff plans to continue our professional development in the practice of building a repertoire of reading comprehension strategies. Rincon wants their students to be fully competent in many reading strategies so that they will be able to apply them in all content areas. We want our students to take these strategies to high school and beyond, no matter the rigor of the material. Furthermore, we also plan to refine the expertise of language arts teachers in our structured reading classrooms.

Don't take our word for it; take the words of the students who have traveled on the path from the first day of school. Alexis was afraid she'd have to read too much in one of her classrooms, she currently reports loving reading. Ignacio came to structured reading hating every minute of it, by February, he found a good book, by March he found a good author, currently he has found many good books. Yasmin is a structured reading student and EL level 3, in the first month of school she was reluctant to read to say the least, this week she has moved to a

regular language arts class and now she is reluctant to put the book down. Finally we leave you with Trae-von. Trae-von, a special education student, who never considered himself a good reader reports reading 8 books this year and says, "They were all good books...I'm glad you introduced me to it."

Rincon's philosophy on literacy can be surmised in a quote by Doug Fisher, "We maintain that literacy must become the responsibility of the whole school. While we do not suggest that every content teacher must become a "reading teacher," we believe that every teacher can assist in the literacy development of adolescents."