



USE YOUR ABCs

Program Description

Sponsor: The Reading Tub, Inc.

Use Your ABCs is a community-based project that engages kids in reading. It offers students the opportunity to develop literacy on several levels: practice reading and comprehension, and apply those skills to effective communication with critical thinking and writing. The project's purpose is to promote reading as a "real life" skill that helps them in arenas far beyond the classroom.

This is a partnership project in local communities. Eligible organizations are nonprofits working directly with children who are failing or at-risk of failing reading benchmarks. The Reading Tub, Inc. provides the books for the students to read at no charge to the organization. The books are donated by authors and publishers. The recipient group, however, is required to place the book with a child who will read and write a review for the book.

This program began in March 2004 through a partnership with Be the Star You Are!TM (BTSYA), a nonprofit empowering youth through positive messages and literacy. BTSYA runs a Teen STAR Review Team, whose members apply to participate in the project. As of December 2007, this program had spread to five schools, from elementary through high school.

Philosophy

Reading is the foundation of all learning, even math. Literacy is more than just recognizing letters and words. It is the ability to comprehend and process the information that we are reading. Test scores tell us one thing about reading, but there are also real-world implications when a child doesn't learn to read. For them, success is much harder. Job opportunities are far more limited, they cannot protect themselves when they sign contracts, just to name two.

For the Fall 2000 semester, 28 percent of incoming freshman enrolled in a remedial class. More than half of the students who enrolled in a remedial reading class ultimately took four or more remedial classes.¹ That is at least one semester's worth of work just to mitigate a "single" skill gap. In an article about reading and college education, Kenneth Gray notes that the greatest student deficiencies for those enrolling in remedial reading classes are speed and comprehension.²

¹ "Contexts of Post-Secondary Education: Learning Opportunities," *The Condition of Education, 2004*, National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004010>.

² Kenneth Gray, "The Baccalaureate Game: Is it Right for All teens?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 1996, p 528-534.

Use Your ABCs Program Description (continued)

One of the most interesting statistics about reading was published in 1998. But it's still true, today. When asked, most people conclude that poverty is a leading contributor to illiteracy. This is not the case. The real answer is the whether or not the kids have something to read in their house! Jeff McQuillan said it best.

The only behavior measure that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books at home. An analysis of a national data set of nearly 100,000 US children found that access to printed material – **not** poverty – is the "critical variable affecting reading acquisition."³

So while socio-economic factors may affect whether or not someone buys books, it does not limit their ability to learn. While schools can help, kids spend more time at home each year than they do at school. Finding ways to increase their access to reading materials at home is crucial to their success.

In April 2002, G. Reid Lyon (Chief, Child Development and Behavior Branch, National Institutes of Health) provided the following assessment at a Summit on Early Childhood Development in Little Rock, Arkansas:

Children who do not receive a strong language and emergent literacy foundation during the preschool years frequently have difficulties comprehending and using language and developing strong reading and writing abilities throughout their school tenure. No doubt, this lack of development places these kids at later risk for school failure, but for limited occupational and economic success, not to mention detriments to their well being.⁴ (emphasis Author's)

When more than one in four children enter a school system without the requisite skills to be functional readers, intervention is required. While children may be able to move beyond letter recognition quickly, developing reading comprehension skills—understanding what you read, describing or explaining (without repeating) the material, etc.—requires extensive practice and reading opportunities. Where children view a “school” approach negatively, a peer-based effort may fill the gap.

Program Objectives

-  Create a forum for kids to practice their reading and reading comprehension skills where they spend the most time: at home.
-  Encourage children to develop their critical thinking skills.
-  Teach children how to convey information effectively through written communication.
-  Improve self-esteem for at-risk readers by providing an opportunity for individual and team success.

³ Jeff McQuillan, *The Literacy Crisis: False Claims, Real Solutions*, 1998.

⁴ G. Reid Lyon, Summary Comments, A Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development; Ready to Read, Ready to Learn: A Call to Leadership, April 30, 2002. http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/cognitivedevsummit02/page_pg4.html
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Benefits

Kids who struggle with reading, as well as those who lack confidence/self-esteem, benefit significantly with this project because they get to practice their reading in a non-school, fun way. They also have the opportunity to share the book with others (e.g., a ninth grader reading a picture book to a second grade class) or to keep it for themselves. Kids who have "their own" books treat them like treasures.

There is a tangible product that comes from their effort (i.e., book profile), and they can go to the Internet to see what they wrote. In writing the profiles, they are asked to have the opportunity to offer their opinion—something that doesn't always happen at their age! Although they are reading the books individually, the children are offering each other encouragement and support.

Program Functions & Beneficiaries

The *Use Your ABCs* initiative is a partnership project. It requires direct, continual communication between the Reading Tub, Inc. and a project manager in the selected organization. The Reading Tub® works with authors and publishers and independently assesses its book collection to identify books that are appropriate. In general, the most valuable titles are text-heavy picture books, early reader chapter books, and middle-grade novels.

Books donated to the organization will remain with their library for general availability *or* in specific circumstances, will be given to the child. Students who get to keep books are kids who do not have reading material at home and who need continued practice outside the classroom.

Once a profile is written, a Reading Tub volunteer will then prepare and post the review—complete with the Team's logo—on the Web site. Should the Reading Team have particularly voracious readers, they will be able to secure additional material their local libraries.

Children directly benefit from this program in several ways. First, they are introduced to books that go beyond the media-hyped materials they hear about. Second, they have an opportunity to practice their reading and reading comprehension skills in a non-school, comfortable environment. Third, they will practice their creative writing, learning how to select salient material in presenting their opinion on what they read. As part of this, they will also learn how to find—and convey—positive information, even when they don't like something. Fourth, the team has incentive as a whole, as their work will be "published" on the Internet.

Note: The Reading Tub will not identify any individual authors by name. Participating organizations have the option of providing a logo (school mascot, specially created image) to place on the pages of the profiles their students wrote.

Performance Measures

 In 2008, establish two additional partner organizations for creating Reading Teams: one for middle readers still reading at a third grade (or lower) level; and one for high school students still reading at a fifth Grade (or lower) level. Potential partner organizations include: after-school programs, schools, and community centers (e.g., YMCA).

Use Your ABCs Program Description (continued)

-  At the end of each review cycle (i.e., when all of the books have been returned), the recipient organization will complete a survey to assess the effectiveness of the program and provide feedback to the Reading Tub Staff.
-  Success is defined as ...
 - Continuation of the project through at least two cycles.
 - An expansion of the project (i.e., growth from one to two Reading Teams) within the same organization.
 - Improved literacy skills (reading, comprehension, writing) by at least 25% of the participants (as judged by the teacher). Note: These do not have to be test scores, but they must be tangible, specific improvements.

Project Budget

Contact the Reading Tub for this Information.