



Recorded Books and Tech Help Intervention at Northview High School

Not all students are the same, therefore, it is important that educators provide students with information in multiple ways. In other words, teachers should try their best to differentiate instruction – to be flexible in their lesson plans and weave whole-class, group and individual activities into their curriculum. As a form of differentiated instruction, intervention can help accelerate student learning. Northview High School in Covina, California, has recently implemented a successful intervention program that has helped more than 789 students in one school year.

A high school of nearly 1,535 students, Northview is “committed to providing its students with a comprehensive education,” according to the school’s vision statement, and is a school known for its leadership and interest in pioneering new programs. The intervention program is just one of them, headed by Hillary Wolfe, the school’s learning specialist. As a professional writer for more than 20 years, Wolfe knows the importance of reading and writing skills. She spent time researching, visiting other schools and learning how intervention programs were built and maintained. “We decided to design the intervention program to be held in the school library,” Wolfe said. “Before our program, the library was seen primarily as a discipline area. That is why we decided to bring in technology – to draw in the students.”

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With the help of Califone International, Inc., and Recorded Books LLC, a publisher of audio books, Wolfe and her team were able to set up a peer tutoring intervention program. More than 70 tutors were trained in library and communication skills, conflict resolution, instructional strategies & intervention across the curriculum. Though it took time and effort to get students and teachers excited about the program – marketing through newsletters and signs around campus – eventually Wolfe had created a well-run system.

Students who need more specific help are pulled from their guided study classes and assigned to intervention work with a peer tutor. To help with reading and language arts, students are able to come to the library, meet with their peer tutor, check out a recorded book, listen and read along on their CD players or in a Learning Center from Califone, and review the material.

Case Study: Northview High School Covina, California



The Califone Personal CD Player is ideal for one-on-one learning or small group instruction when a jackbox is used. For larger group study, students can use the Learning Center, which comes with four stereo headphones and a miniature jackbox with individual volume controls. This technology is best for students who may be hearing impaired or have other special needs where volume level may differ from other students or tutors. “The kids really enjoy the CD players, especially the portable nature of the system,” Wolfe said.

Like many other assisted reading programs, informal studies have illustrated that using technology while reading, such as recorded books and CD players, can interest students in new genres, improve critical listening skills and emphasize the humor or sadness in texts. Also, listening to books can support reading by providing motivation by hooking students into the story, provide a model for good reading habits and allows for independent practice. The American Academy of Pediatrics states that listening to stories read aloud promotes brain development and emerging literacy.

As an example of the program’s success, two 12th grade students reading two years below grade level agreed to come into the library for a week and listen to Hamlet on CD. They listened to the story on the program’s CD players and read along in the textbook with the assistance and supervision of a peer tutor. At the end of the week, they were the only students who had finished the entire first act of the play and were able to participate in the class discussions. Their teacher praised them for being top of their class, a feat they had not previously accomplished.

In addition to helping students finish assignments, listening to audio books or recorded passages can provide beneficial audio modeling, especially for non-native English speakers. As Northview High School has a primarily Hispanic student population, the intervention program serves as a program to help struggling students and those students mastering a new language as well. “Listening to a book exposes students whose first language is something other than English to an academic language they wouldn’t otherwise hear from their peers,” Wolfe said.

Today’s students are “media multi-taskers” according to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation. Providing a learning environment that engages students’ penchant for various media increases their enjoyment and motivation to learn. “With this new program, the library is now bustling. So many students are coming through, we started a book club and we are trying to set-up an inter-library exchange with the community library to access even more recorded books.”

Wolfe also has plans to obtain more audio books for 10-12th grade English and AP history texts. She also hopes to explore using MP3 files in the program as well.

“Most importantly, we have seen on average a 36-40 percent (or an average point score increase of 14.6 per student) improvement in grades for all of our intervention program participants,” Wolfe concluded. “Our Literacy Academy is a great way to meet the needs of many students in one place.”