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Mini-Grant update 5-19-13

In September, I applied and was awarded a mini-grant for my fifth grade classroom at Gratz Brown Elementary. As a result of being awarded the funds, I chose to get a listening station for my room where students can read along with books by their favorite authors while listening on tape. I had in mind the idea that students would be able to listen and read along with books on a higher level than they would if they were reading independently. As it turns out, the players and read along books have been nice additions to my independent reading time. The following is a brief summary of my experience with the new equipment as well as academic statistics that I attribute to the use of this new technology.

It is important to note that it took a while for me to get this project up and running. Upon application, I was told that my grant was approved, but instead of CD's and CD players, they would rather keep up with technology and get MP3 players, which makes perfect sense. I changed my proposal and the district was very prudent in purchasing my materials. What I was not prepared for was the difficulty in setting up some kind of account to get the audiobooks to put onto the players. It seems as though Audible.com, which is a subsidiary of Amazon, has a pretty good corner on the market for these things. Unfortunately, you need to have a monthly subscription to Audible to be able to purchase the books. To make a long story short, I figured out how to "borrow" audiobooks from my public library, so that has worked out for the short term. I would love if we could have a discussion with accounting next year to see if we can get a district Audible membership, as Audible has such a vast selection of books, and you can keep them for as long as you wish.

Once I prepared the MP3 stations, I situated them in a box in my "Reading Garden". The response to them was very positive. Before you funded my grant proposal, the reading garden was a rarely visited corner of the room. The last couple of months, however, it has been quite popular with the students. They really enjoy reading along with the author's on the audiobooks, and I know it helps them by enabling them to read slightly higher-level texts, such as *The Hobbit* and other titles that will prepare them for middle school level reading. The headphones allow students to "go into the world of the book" without having to deal with typical classroom distractions. I have a couple of students with ADHD issues that have really benefitted from this type of environment, and I have seen their enjoyment of reading increase over the last couple of months.

The following is some data that I have compiled using two of the students who I felt could benefit from this technology. Out of respect for their privacy, I will refer to them as "student 1" and "student 2".

Fluency checks: Twice a quarter, students are given a fluency check on a grade level reading passage. These are graded using the DRA scoring sheet and based out of a total of 12 points. Student 1 raised their fluency check level by a point on both the first and second fourth-quarter checks. Student 2 stayed the same on the first, and then raised their score by a point on the second fluency check.

STAR Reading Test: Both students 1 and 2 showed an increase of a grade level between the winter and spring STAR tests, going from 5th to 6th grade equivalency. Also, both students gained more than 100 points on their scaled score, which compares them to their peers.

Literacy by Design theme tests: While results varied by theme and certainly I have not seen an increase in each and every theme test, I have noticed a general trend of improvement for both students. I am not certain of the statistical significance of this, as this trend began before I implemented the audiobook station in the classroom. Still, it is nice to know that they are improving and growing as learners.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the board of education for allowing me to make these additions to my classroom. As I stated earlier, I would love to have a discussion with those in charge of purchasing to see if we can make buying the online audiobooks a less cumbersome process, because the students really enjoy the new station in my room. I have seen some great things happening since I made the equipment available, and I know that next year I will be able to see more growth and enjoyment of reading in my classroom. Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to improve students' literacy.