

Edmark Reading Program Q & A

EnableMart Education Sales rep Gabriel Swatzell recently interviewed Dr. Lauren Mayfield, to discuss her thoughts on the Edmark Reading program and its success in schools across the nation.

Why did you choose Edmark?

I chose the Edmark Reading Program as a tool for the classroom and as the subject of my dissertation research because of the fantastic success I had with my students over a 21-year period.

I have taught in state institutions for the mentally handicapped in both Mississippi and Louisiana, as well as in public schools in Louisiana, and have seen non-reading students with classifications such as Learning Disabled, Mentally Disabled, Emotionally Disturbed, Other Health Impaired, and Speech Impaired-Language become successful readers using the Edmark program. I have used it with students in kindergarten all the way up to teenagers in institutions who had never been taught to read. I have also used it with non-special education students in private tutoring situations. Wherever I taught, the first thing I requested was a copy of the Edmark Reading Program.



Why do you think that sight word recognition techniques like the ones presented in Edmark is the best way to educate at-risk students?

A sight-word approach is definitely not necessary for all students; the majority of our public school students are successful with a phonics-based and/or whole language approach to reading. When we talk about students who are at-risk for reading failure, however, we are working with students who have not been successful with the traditional approach, whether phonics or whole language. I believe that many of these at-risk students cannot hear the different sounds in a phonetic approach; research has shown that many children cannot differentiate between different musical tones, a fact which supports my theory. Other at-risk students must have instruction broken down into small, discrete steps, making success in a whole-language approach dubious. My experience has been that these groups of students flourish with Edmark's sight-word approach.

How would you measure your success rate with the Edmark Reading Program?

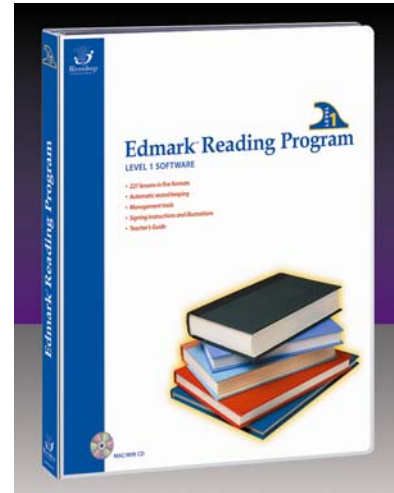
I can only think of a handful of students in 21 years who were not able to progress to ending 2nd grade or beginning 3rd grade level in reading using this program. The most dramatic success story that comes to mind happened in my last year of teaching special education in a public elementary school. A 5th grade student, classified as Learning Disabled, transferred from an inner-city California school. When I began working with him in October, he could read about 10-15 sight words and was constantly being sent to the principal for fights with other students. I used Edmark with him in a one-on-one situation for 30 minutes a day. Once he completed Levels I and II, I used a sight-word strategy I have developed, which is a natural

extension of Edmark's approach, to instruct him in the 5th grade basal reader. By March of that year, the child was passing 5th grade reading tests in the regular classroom setting given only the accommodation of extended time—and he was seldom in the principal's office.

What do you think the most effective part of the program is?

I believe the program is effective because of its sound theoretical roots - the concepts of Direct Instruction and Mastery Learning. Students are taught one word at a time, and once taught, that word is immediately put into context in sentences and stories, and is then reviewed constantly throughout the program. While critics may think that a child will never learn to read learning just one word at a time, the opposite is true. Most at-risk and learning disabled students can complete both levels of Edmark, thus mastering 350 words, given 15-20 minutes of daily instruction, in one school year.

The program uses an "errorless discrimination" method that allows the student to learn without making errors; students are first asked to find a word where the other possible choices are non-words (lines, letters). The program enables the at-risk student to experience success every step of the way. This is critical for children who have experienced failure, and may perceive themselves as failures. Edmark lets all students be successful and appropriately receive constant verbal praise and reinforcement from those teaching them.



Would you suggest that schools implement the Edmark Reading Program?

Without reservation! I believe every special education teacher should have it available for at-risk readers. Beyond that, I think it is an excellent intervention to be used by school systems addressing Response to Intervention. The reauthorization of IDEA allows districts to use 15% of their special education funding for early intervening services; for the first time, special education dollars can now be used to help keep children out of special education. In my district, paraprofessionals have been hired for each elementary school and trained in Edmark. Teachers in the elementary schools refer their at-risk K-3 readers to the program. These students receive 15 minutes of instruction in the Edmark Reading Program every day. We are still collecting data on the decrease in special education referrals in our district, but qualitative data from regular class teachers and parents have already shown the success of this program. Our goal is to provide effective interventions that will keep students out of special education, and so far, Edmark is helping us do this!

Dr. Mayfield is currently the Director of Special Education for the Bienville Parish School Board in Arcadia, Louisiana. Her dissertation on Edmark was published in 2000 and received the Herbert Handley Dissertation Award given by the Mid-South Educational Research Association.