

BC3 students' novel approaches show results with young New Castle readers

April 22, 2019



Gladys Donnell, a 2004 New Castle Area High School graduate and an early childhood education (Pre K-4) major at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, plays "Sight Words Fly Swat Game" with second-graders in the library of H.W. Lockley Early Learning Center, New Castle, on March 20, 2019.

(New Castle, PA) Aside library shelves topped with books such as "The Three Little Superpigs," "Monsters Under Bridges" and "The Big Adventures of Tiny House," five BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing early childhood education (Pre K-4) majors this spring used novel methods to improve the skills of 10 struggling second-graders in a new "Reading Buddy" program at H.W. Lockley Early Learning Center.

As freshmen at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, city residents Alaina Cantakis, Gabby Jenkins, Kindal Procopio and Gladys Donnell, and Jessica Husske, of Pittsburgh, were the first

group of BC3 students designing games and activities to help the 7- and 8-year-olds more quickly identify sight words – those that pupils should recognize without sounding the letters.

Fifty percent of the pupils increased their skills by two grade levels and 50 percent, by one grade level, in the three-month program that ended April 17, according to Stephanie Long, coordinator of BC3's early childhood education program.



A second-grader at H.W. Lockley Early Learning Center, New Castle, writes sight words – those that a pupil should recognize without sounding the letters – while working with BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing early childhood education (Pre K-4) majors in the library of H.W. Lockley on March 20, 2019.

“The success of the program exceeded my expectations,” Long said. “I won't ever forget walking into the library and seeing my students actively engaging their students in activities and thinking, ‘They really are teachers!’ When we began, I knew my students were very capable of accomplishing the task at hand, but to actually see them become facilitators and educators right in front of my eyes was remarkable.”

Said Cara Florie, a reading specialist with the New Castle Area School District: “I am very pleased with these results. It shows the positive impact of highly engaging, intentional small-group instruction.”

“Reading Buddy” is the result of a New Castle Area School District social worker who determined that a number of H.W. Lockley pupils had not read for the required 20 minutes with an adult at home each night and contacted BC3 midway through 2018, Florie said.

Florie and Long discussed how they could collaborate “at a deeper level with readers at H.W. Lockley and give (Long's) students quality pre-service, real-world experiences,” Florie said. “So we brainstormed and looked at the root causes of our students who were struggling and came to the conclusion that students needed additional support in mastering sight words.”

That additional support enlisted Cantakis, Jenkins, Procopio, Donnell and Husske, students in BC3's Education 102 course, taken by second-semester freshmen who observe the developmental patterns and behavior of childhood from preschool to fourth grade. They worked with the 10 H.W. Lockley pupils for 90 minutes each Wednesday since mid-January, and introduced activities intended to appeal to the second-graders.

Bingo, blocks and Popsicle sticks

Cantakis, a 2018 New Castle Area High School graduate, created a challenge using Popsicle sticks. Jenkins, a 2018 Shenango graduate, an activity in which students spelled words on a dry-

erase table. Procopio, a 2018 Lawrence County Career & Technical Center graduate, one using small wooden blocks; Donnell, a 2004 New Castle graduate, “Sight Words Fly Swat Game” and Husske, a 2016 Laurel graduate, “Sight Word Bingo.”

Donnell had two pupils write words such as “find, like, my, jump, here, away” and “what” within purple, yellow and green flies drawn on a piece of paper and scattered atop a table. She then spoke one of the words, and her pupils had to quickly identify and “splat” that word on the fly with a swatter, Donnell said.

“It’s a game for building speed and confidence,” Donnell said. “Children find the physicality of the activity fun. It is a great way of giving the students the repetition they need to achieve mastery while keeping them engaged. Because the game is so physical, it is a good game for channeling their energy when they are feeling a bit wiggly.”

The second-graders, Long said, “really enjoyed this one.”

Husske had two pupils use highlighters to quickly mark an “x” on words such as “on, no, one, run” and “ran” on a 24-block grid in “Sight Word Bingo.”

“They got a kick out of it,” Husske said. “The goal was to have them find the word and say it out loud. After one or both got bingo, I had them write the words down and say them out loud to make sure they actually understood what they were saying. ... When I asked (the pupils) at the end of the tutoring session if they wanted to do a different game, they both said no.”

Program a “win-win,” principal says

Such has been the popularity, and success, of the program, Florie and H.W. Lockley Principal Joseph Anderson said.

H.W. Lockley pupils, Florie said, were “certainly engaged, motivated and fully participating with the BC3 students.”

“I was able to observe students engaged in the lessons,” Anderson said. “The kids were all smiles and look forward to the visits from the BC3 students.”



Kindal Procopio, a 2018 Lawrence County Career & Technical Center graduate and an early childhood education (Pre K-4) major at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle, works with H.W. Lockley Early Learning Center pupils in New Castle on March 20, 2019.

kiddos. I'm learning more about the profession doing this than I would be reading about it from a book. Here, I get to talk to other educators and see their views on things."

Long said she hopes "Reading Buddy" with H.W. Lockley Early Learning Center will continue, attributing the program's success to the "remarkable partnership we have with the administration, faculty, and staff at H.W. Lockley, particularly Cara Florie. The connection between the district and BC3 happened seamlessly. The second reason is that every party involved ultimately wanted a common goal, for every student to succeed."

Ninety-four students are enrolled in BC3's 63-credit early childhood education (Pre K-4) program as of the spring 2019 semester, according to Sharla Anke, BC3's assistant dean of institutional research.

In addition to BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, BC3's early childhood education (Pre K-4) program is also offered on BC3's main campus in Butler Township; at BC3 @ Armstrong in Ford City; at BC3 @ Brockway in Brockway; at BC3 @ Cranberry in Cranberry Township; and at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage. The program is designed to provide the basic coursework necessary for transfer to a bachelor's degree program at a four-year institution.