

Grant Proposal for Implementing Raz-Kids
Into Classroom Instruction
To Improve Reading Skills


by

Renee E. Larson

A Grant Proposal Project Report
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Education (Professional Development)

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



Kimberly Martinez

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

May, 2011

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Larson, Renee E.

Title: *Grant Proposal for Implementing Raz-Kids into Classroom Instruction to Improve Reading Skills*

Graduate Degree/Major: MS Education

Research Adviser: Kimberly Martinez, PH.D.

Month/Year: May 2011

Number of Pages: 22

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 6th edition

Abstract

In 2010 62.5 % of third grade students, 48% of second grade students, and 43% of first grade students at Somerset Elementary scored below the normal RIT score on the MAP test in Reading. The average data on the Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination (WKCE) in Reading and Language Arts over the previous five years (2005-2010) show that 24% of tenth grade students at Somerset scored below the proficient level.

The Somerset School District is seeking \$974.50 from the local parent group, Partners in Education (PIE), to establish a new program for helping struggling readers improve their reading fluency and comprehension. Raz-Kids is an online program where students read or listen to books and have the option of recording themselves reading the book so teachers, students, and parents can listen for fluency. As students read books at their reading level and improve reading fluency and comprehension, they are given more challenging books to read.

We hope that by implementing the Raz-Kids reading program at Somerset Elementary School we will be able to improve instruction by accomplishing the following objectives:

- 80% of students will score at or above the normal RIT score for their grade level,
- 95% of students using the Raz-Kids program will improve their reading fluency,
- 250 students in grades 1-4 will use the Raz-Kids program at least 45 minutes a week as part of their reading practice,
- 90% of students participating in the Raz-Kids program will report increased self-confidence in their reading ability,
- 10 teachers at Somerset Elementary school will incorporate Raz-Kids into their reading instruction.

Teachers will be provided with assistance in setting up and managing their Raz-Kids account. Students will be given two half hour sessions in the computer lab once a week to use Raz-Kids. The students will also be provided with information for accessing the program at home.

Pre and post surveys will be used, with students using Raz-Kids and not using Raz-Kids, to measure the students' motivation to read. Students participating in the program will have their RIT scores on the MAP assessment reviewed to see if they improve each trimester at a rate greater than those not using Raz-Kids.

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my wonderful husband, Shane, for all his extra support while working towards my masters. His added work around the house and patience is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank my sister, Becky, for her help proofreading my papers and providing encouragement.

I dedicate my grant proposal to all those students who struggling in reading. I hope you find a way to improve your understanding and find a love for reading.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

..... Page

Abstract.....2

Chapter I: Organizational Background6

 Mission Statement.....6

Chapter II: Introduction7

 Problem Statement/Significance of Problem.....7

 Current Conditions.....8

 Need9

Chapter III: Project Goal and Objectives.....12

 Goal & Objectives.....12

Chapter IV: Project Methodology.....13

 Plan of Action/Methods13

 Evaluation Plan14

 Dissemination Plan16

 Budget Plan.....17

References.....19

Appendix A: Cover Letter20

Appendix B: Student Pre & Post Reading Surveys21

Appendix C: Parent Pre & Post-Reading Surveys.....23

Chapter I: Organizational Background

Somerset School District is made up of four buildings on one campus:

Administration/Early Learning Center (Early Childhood-Pre-K), Elementary School (K-4), Middle School (5-8), and High School (9-12). Somerset, WI is a growing community located 35 miles northwest of the Twin Cities. The district has approximately 12,000 residents with 1,506 students making up the student population. At the elementary each grade level has about six different sections with about 22 students in each classroom.

Mission Statement

"The School District of Somerset is committed to developing motivated, educated and responsible citizens who are prepared to successfully adapt to the changing global environment." One of Somerset's goals is to enhance the teaching and application of character education for Somerset students. Everyone in the district is required to work together to reach this goal.

Chapter II: Introduction

Statement of the Problem: Poor Reading Scores/Student's not Reading at Their Level

The declining literacy of society has been a major concern for many years, and yet things are not getting better (Kaufmann, 2008). According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), two-thirds of students who cannot read proficiently by the end of the 4th grade will end up in jail or on welfare (2010). In 2003 NAAL reported that 22% of adults in the United States were below basic (the lowest level), indicating they possess no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills.

Each semester the elementary students at Somerset school take an assessment that measures academic progress (MAP) to monitor growth in reading. This assessment provides a RIT score, which stands for Rasch Unit. This is a unit of measure that uses individual item difficulty values to estimate student achievement. Each grade level is given a normal RIT score, which is considered the acceptable score for saying students, are reading at grade level.

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) grade report for fall of 2010 shows that 62.5% of third grade students at Somerset Elementary are below the normal RIT score of 192 on the MAP test in Reading. That is 65 out of 104 students falling below the norm, only leaving 39 third graders performing at the expected performance level. The same data show that 48% of second grade students (60 out of 125 students) and 43% of first grade students (51 out of 120 students) also scored below the normal RIT score. The RIT to reading range is a score resulting from a correlation between NWEA's (the company that produced the test) reading range and the Lexile score. Lexiles are a scientific approach to measuring reading ability and text difficulty.

Each year more and more students are falling below the expected performance level in reading. Somerset first graders RIT scores range from 132 to 185 with 160 being the norm;

second grade scores range from 138 to 206 with 179 being the norm; and third grade scores range from 126 to 213 with 192 being the norm. The gap gets greater throughout the grades. First grade has a difference of 53 points across the grade level, second grade has a span of 68 points, and third grade has an 87 point difference among students in the grade level.

	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade
% below the normal RIT score	43%	48%	62.5%	50%
% above the normal RIT score	58%	52%	37.5%	50%
# of students below proficient	51 out of 120 students	60 out of 125 students	65 out of 104 students	48 out of 96 students
# of students performing at proficient	69 out of 120 students	65 out of 125 students	39 out of 104 students	48 out of 96 students
Range of RIT scores	132-185	138-206	126-213	149-223
Norm RIT Score	160	179	192	201

Current Condition

The curriculum at Somerset is currently set up for students at their grade level and does not allow for differentiated instruction. Teachers are given a reading book and expected to use the same story with all of the students in the classroom. The students who are reading below average fall further behind because they are reading books that are too challenging. The students become frustrated because there are many words they cannot read and many ideas they do not understand. Students performing above average gain little because they already know all the words and ideas and are not being challenged (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Reading fluency is important for functioning in other subject areas as well as becoming successful citizens in

society. If students cannot read they will struggle finding a job and obtaining the means to survive.

Need

In order for students to become proficient readers, they need to read books at their independent reading level, hear fluent readings as well as be instructed in materials at their instructional level (Rasinski, 2003). When students read books at appropriate levels, their confidence increases. Raz-Kids is a program where readers are matched to stories within their reading level (Patsalides, 2010). This online program is a winner of the 2009 Teacher's Choice award and the 2009 CODIE finalist award. The CODIE Awards celebrate outstanding achievement and vision in the software, digital information and education technology industries.

Teachers who subscribe to Raz-Kids are given an account to set up each student in their class with log-on information, a password, and a starting reading level for each child. When students enter the program they are given a wide range of stories at that reading level. Students are able to choose books that they are interested in so they can be excited about reading. First, the student listens to the book on the computer being read to them using correct fluency. Pinnel & Scharer (2003) report that when students hear a story read aloud, they are provided with a demonstration of reading with phrasing and fluency. Since students are freed from decoding, they can give their full attention to the meaning of the text and expand their comprehending strategies. After listening to the story being read, students read the book themselves with word assistance if needed. If a child comes across a word he/she does not know they can click on the word and have it read for them. The last required step is to take a quiz that checks for comprehension. If the child passes they can choose a different book to read at their level. If the child does not pass the comprehension quiz they must reread the story and take the quiz again until they pass. The students also have the option of recording their readings. With the option of

recording themselves reading the book, teachers, students and parents can listen for fluency. Through the teachers account required recordings can be sent to the students account. The teacher can then listen to the recording and mark down miscues right in the program. Students are motivated to read many books and answer the questions correctly because they are given points. With the points they can buy things (planets, aliens, etc.) to add to their online outer space world which is in the Raz-Kids program. As students finish books in one level with proficiency, they move to a new level with more challenging books.

The teacher is also able to read many reports on the success and challenges the students are having. Reports show how often a child logged onto Raz-Kids, how many books were read, and how he/she scored on the quizzes. The report also shows students' progress through the different reading levels and the teacher has the ability to raise or lower the reading level if needed. This program ensures that students are reading material that is not too difficult as to be frustrating but difficult enough to be challenging and encourage reading progress. According to Harvey & Goudvis (2000), teachers should try to choose books that are just right for students, not too hard and not too easy, so they can improve their reading.

Ten teachers in the Somerset School (six second grade teachers, one teacher from each of the other grade levels 1-4 and the English Language Learner (ELL) teacher) are interested in incorporating this supplementary reading program, called Raz-Kids, into their reading instruction. In order to incorporate this program into the classrooms, each interested teacher needs to subscribe to Raz-Kids. The students already have their own set of microphones to use for listening to the stories on Raz-Kids. The school also has one set of 25 recording headphones for the computer lab. Another set of 25 microphones would be needed for teachers to share at each grade level.

There are a significant number of computers in the school to allow adequate time for all students to access Raz-Kids. One of the second grade classrooms has one computer per student and the other classrooms have at least three computers per classroom along with an additional four shared computers per grade level. There are also two computer labs along with one mobile computer lab for all students to use in the elementary school.

By keeping track of data scores in the classrooms that use Raz-Kids along with how often the program is being used, teachers will compare growth to classrooms that do not use the program. This would help evaluate the program for showing what kind of difference is made. Raz-Kids also monitors students' reading levels, so this would be compared to the suggested reading level given from MAP assessment, to see how accurate the online program is. The results from the MAP test will be used to monitor the students' progress in reading.

Chapter III: Project Goal and Objectives

Goal/Objectives for Raz-Kids

The goal of integrating the reading program, Raz-Kids, into instruction is to improve students' reading abilities while promoting reading at the students' appropriate reading level. By May 2012 the teachers will improve instruction by accomplishing the following objectives:

- 80% of students will score at or above the normal RIT score for their grade level on the MAP assessment by May 2012,
- 95% of students using the Raz-Kids program will improve their reading fluency by at least one reading level by the end of each trimester,
- 250 students in grades 1-4 will use the Raz-Kids program at least 45 minutes a week as part of their reading practice,
- 90% of students participating in the Raz-Kids program will report increased self-confidence in their reading ability as measured by a pre-post survey,
- 10 teachers at Somerset Elementary school will incorporate Raz-Kids into their reading instruction.

Chapter IV: Project Methodology

Methods for Improving Reading Skills

The Raz-Kids program is a very important and useful tool in helping students read literature at their reading level while improving fluency and comprehension. To make this program effective, the teachers using this program will be provided training on setting up and managing their Raz-Kids account as well as a tutorial for using the program with their students.

The IMC instructor along with the ELL specialist both have experience using Raz-Kids and will provide training for the teachers as well as assistance for students. The technology specialist will take on the responsibility of setting up each class account for 250 students. Teachers will schedule computer lab, two times for thirty minutes each session, so students can use Raz-Kids on the computers for reading practice.

All students in the district are required to take the MAP assessment at the beginning of the school year, half way through the school year and at the end of the school year to keep track of reading progress. The two reading specialists will prepare test results with RIT scores after each of the three MAP assessments for each classroom teacher. At parent-teacher conferences the teachers will show the parents their child's test results. A pre and post survey will be distributed to students (see appendix B) and parents (see appendix C) to check for self-confidence in reading. The curriculum director will compare test results of students who participated in the Raz-Kids program to students who did not.

The project staff of seventeen has a cumulative 173 years of experience in dealing with struggling readers and are willing to work together to improve reading fluency and comprehension among all students.

Project Participants

Principal – Cherrie Wood	1 st grade teacher- Stacey Helders-Pevan
Curriculum Director- Trisha Sheridan	2 nd grade teachers- Renee Larson,
IMC Instructor-Kristin Flater	Nancy Andersen, Sherry Johnson,
Technology Specialist-Angie McVitty	Dawn Paulus, Sarah Praschak,
Reading Specialists- Ann Jauquet & Cindy Snegosky	& Mike Holmquist
English Language Learner Specialist- Christine Scheid	3 rd grade teacher- Cory Kreibich
Project Coordinator-Renee Larson	4 th grade teacher- Kelly Larson

The methods that are chosen assure teachers will be able to achieve the goal of improving instruction through the use of technology. The activities are tied directly to the objectives and provide opportunities for both formative and summative assessments. Goal, objectives, timeline, and evaluation criteria are listed in Table 2.

Evaluation Plan

The Somerset School District will be using a combination of formative and summative assessment measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities chosen to meet the goal and objectives for implementing Raz-Kids. Teachers will be provided with training on using the new program and continued support will be provided throughout the school year. Scores from MAP testing will play a huge factor in providing evidence that the new program helped improve reading among students. A survey will be taken by students and parents before using Raz-Kids as well as after having the chance to use the program. Parents will also have the opportunity to take a survey at the beginning of the school year, and at the end of the school year in regards to reading among their children.

Goal : Integrate the reading program, Raz-Kids, into instruction to improve students' reading abilities while promoting reading at the students' reading levels.			
Objective 1: 80% of students will achieve at or above the normal RIT score for their grade level on the MAP assessment by May 2012.			
Activities (Process Objectives)	Timeline	Responsibility/Participants	Evaluation Criteria
1.1 Administer the MAP assessment 3 times during the year; beginning, middle, and end of the year	September 2011- May 2012	Technology Specialist	% of students scoring at or above the normal RIT score in reading has increased on the MAP assessment
1.2 Review MAP scores noting the percentage of students who increased scores since the previous assessment and which students did not make any gains or decreased in ability	October 2011- May 2012	Reading Specialists	Analysis of gain scores on MAP assessment completed
Objective 2: 95% of students' using the Raz-Kids program will improve their reading fluency by at least one reading level by the end of each trimester.			
2.1 Introduce students to the Raz-Kids program	October 2011- October 2012	1-4 grade teachers	Analyze students' attitudes
3.2 Share results of the Raz-Kids program with parents during conferences	October 2011- May 2012	1-4 grade teachers	MAP assessment report
Objective 3: 250 students in grades 1-4 will use the Raz-Kids program at least 45 minutes a week as part of their reading practice. .			
3.1 Provide kids with 45 minutes of reading per week using the Raz-Kids program	October 2011- May 2012	Technology Specialist and 1-4 grade teachers	Computer Lab attendance record
3.2 Set up 10 classroom accounts with students log in information	October 2011- October 2012	Technology Specialist and Project Manager	Account and log in accessibility recorded
Objective 4: 90% of students participating in the Raz-Kids program will report increased self-confidence in their reading ability as measured by a pre-post survey.			
4.1 Create a pre and post survey for students and parents about student confidence in reading	July 2011- August 2011	Project Manager	Students and Parents Reading Confidence vs. Satisfaction survey
4.2 Administer student and parent pre-reading survey	September 2011	Principal and 1-4 classroom teachers	Students and Parents survey
4.3 Administer student and parent post-reading survey	May 2012	Principal and 1-4 classroom teachers	Students and Parents Increase satisfaction from pre-survey

Objective 5: 10 teachers at Somerset Elementary school will incorporate technology into their reading instruction by using the Raz-Kids program.			
5.1 Provide log in information and computer usage for students using Raz-Kids	October 2011- May 2012	Technology specialist	Account log in and computer accessibility recorded
5.2 Train 10 teachers with the Raz-Kids program	October 2011- ongoing	IMC Instructor and ELL specialist	Pre-post survey for teachers on program knowledge before and after training

Dissemination

The dissemination plan for this project reaches a variety of audiences including teachers, administrators, school board members, community members, and parents. Since literacy is such an important skill for being a successful citizen in society, it is important that everyone is made aware of how Raz-Kids can help students become better readers.

The project manager will provide an introduction for teachers about implementing the Raz-Kids program into student instruction during a staff meeting. A PowerPoint presentation will provide information about the program, how to set up an account with student log-in information, as well as ways to use the program with students in school and at home.

The technology specialist will provide information on the school website and in the local newspaper. This way people around the surrounding community can be informed about how to use Raz-Kids to improve reading skills. There will be an opportunity for other teachers and administrators from other districts to visit Somerset school and learn more about how to implement Raz-Kids.

Results from the parents and students on the pre-post surveys will be shared with teachers through an email by the principal. This will provide information on how parents and students are feeling about the program before and after Raz-Kids is implemented. If the surveys provide positive information, they will be shared with the community through an article on the website

and in the school newsletter. MAP assessment scores will be shared by the curriculum director with teachers during an in-service and with parents at conferences.

The project manager and administration will provide a final project report for teachers, community members, school board members, and grant supporters. The final report will include information about the Raz-Kids program, survey results from parents and students, as well results from the MAP assessments, and student achievement. The project coordinator will be presenting information to other districts for implementing this program into their instruction.

Budget

Somerset School District currently has two teachers using Raz-Kids with their students. Together these two teachers are willing to volunteer their time to provide information to the ten teachers interested in using this program. The trainees will help each teacher set up an account for their classroom and show them how to manage their account. Through the teacher account on Raz-Kids teachers can see how their students are progressing in reading as well as assign certain tasks for the students to complete for improving their reading even more.

The requested \$599.50 includes ten subscriptions to the Raz-Kids online reading supplement, which includes 250 students in grades first through fourth. Students read or listen to books online and have the option of recording themselves reading the book online so teachers, students, and parents can listen for fluency. The requested \$375 includes a set of 25 headphones/microphones for each classroom to share in the computer lab. These headsets will be kept in the computer lab so the ten classrooms involved in the Raz-Kids program have access when they want their students to record themselves reading.

The district is willing to purchase an additional set of 25 headphones/microphones for students to use with the mobile computer lab the district already has. The district is also willing to purchase additional subscriptions to Raz-Kids if the program proves to be successful.

Budget Item	Quantity and Cost	Budget Request
Raz-Kids Subscription	10 x \$59.95	\$ 599.50
Microphone headphones	25 x \$15	\$375
Total Budget Request		\$974.50

In-Kind Contributions by the Somerset District

Budget Item	Quantity and Cost	Budget Request
Microphone headphones	25 x \$15	\$375
Raz-Kids Training	2 x \$24	\$48

Support from Partners in Education (PIE) will help teachers improve reading instruction to over 250 students in the Somerset School District through the Raz-Kids program. These funds will give first through fourth grade students the opportunities to improve their fluency and comprehension skills so they can become successful and literate citizens of society.

References

- Harvey, S. & Goudvis, G. (2000). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension to enhance understanding*. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Kaufmann, S. (2008). *7 pleasurable ways to improve your reading ability*. Retrieved October 19, 2010, from <http://www.pickthebrain.com/blog/7-pleasurable-ways-to-improve-your-reading-ability/>.
- Patsalides, L. (2010). *A review: Raz-Kids, an interactive library*. Retrieved December 8, 2010, from <http://www.brighthub.com/education/k12/reviews/32285.aspx#ixzz17ZYXZ2x0>.
- Pinnel, G. & Scharer, P. (2003). *Teaching comprehension in reading grades K-2: Strategies for helping children read with ease, confidence, and understanding*. Jefferson City, MO: Scholastic Inc.
- Rasinski, T. (2003). *The fluent reader: Oral reading strategies for building word recognition, fluency, and comprehension*. New York, NY: Scholastic Professional Books.
- Write Express Corporation. (1996-2010). *National assessment of adult literacy*: Retrieved December 9, 2010, from <http://www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics.html>.

Appendix A: Cover Letter

April 1, 2011

Mrs. Melissa Wright, Co-President
Partners in Education
635 Sunrise Drive
Somerset, WI 54025

Dear Mrs. Wright:

The teachers at Somerset Elementary are excited to submit their proposal to the PIE Grant requesting \$974.50 for an online reading program that is expected to improve reading skills and test scores among students.

The declining literacy of our society has been a major concern for many years. Educators are looking for ways to improve reading skills in students across the grade levels. Implementing a reading program, called Raz-Kids, will allow students to learn through books at their reading level and make growth. At this time students are reading books in class that are too difficult or too easy and little growth is being made. Students need to read books at their level in order to improve their reading skills.

Your support would allow differentiated instruction for students. With a variety of reading abilities in each classroom this program will help meet the student's abilities and needs. Students can also bring the excitement of reading home, since they can access Raz-Kids through any computer.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. Please contact Renee Larson, second grade teacher in Somerset, with any questions you may have about the grant application by phone (715) 247-4848 or by email rlarson@somerset.k12.wi.us. For more information about the Raz-Kids program you can visit their website at <http://www.raz-kids.com>. We look forward to working with you on this important project.

Sincerely,
Renee Larson
Second Grade Teacher
Somerset School District
645 Sunrise Drive
Somerset, WI 54025

Appendix B: Student Pre and Post Survey
Students of Somerset Elementary School

This survey will be used to help improve the reading abilities of students.

1. Do you think reading is important?

Yes No

2. Do you like to read?

Yes No

3. Do you like when others read to you?

Yes No

4. Do you think you are a good reader?

Yes No

5. How confident are you in your reading?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit Very confident

6. Would you like to be a better reader?

Yes No

7. How often do you practice reading at home?

Never 2-3 days a week 3-5 days a week Everyday

8. When you do read about how long do you read for?

Less than 10 min. 10-20 min. 30 min. 45-60 min. Over an hour

Appendix C: Parent Pre and Post Survey
Parents of Somerset Elementary School

This survey will be used to help improve the reading abilities of students.

1. Do you think reading is important?

Yes No

2. Do you like to read?

Yes No

3. Do you think your child likes to read?

Yes No

4. Do you think your child is a good reader?

Yes No

5. How confident do you think your child is in his/her reading?

Not at all A little Somewhat Quite a bit Very confident

6. Would you like your child to be a better reader?

Yes No

7. How often does your child practice reading at home?

Never 2-3 days a week 3-5 days a week Everyday

8. When your child does read about how long does he/she read for?

Less than 10 min. 10-20 min. 30 min. 45-60 min. Over an hour