

A Reading Challenge at Comegys

By Ted Behr

Coded messages exchanged by a couple of enthusiastic second grade students described for their teacher and friends the progress being made with the 100-Book Challenge reading course instituted at B. B. Comegys Elementary School's after school program last fall.

"I'm at 2 Red!" cried one student; "I'm at 3 Yellow," bubbled another.

Among the unique aspects of this special approach created by the American Reading Company is the fact that the students established their own reading level.

"When they find they can't read five words in a particular book, they select a book on the same subject at a

slightly more simplified reading level," explained Jennifer Ramsden, a 2nd grade teacher who is spearheading the use of 100-Book at Comegys.

"Whatever reading level they decide on provides them with a concrete learning experience that they can share with their classmates," stressed Ramsden. "We keep a reading log for each child that gives them credits for 'steps' which are 15-minutes of reading. Their 'step' progress is carefully monitored by coaches (teachers and parents)."

The 100-Book design fosters this individualized approach by providing big "boxes" in a great variety of

subjects for each group of students. Students decide what they want to read about and



Comegys Elementary students read selections from the 100 Book Challenge program mentored by third grade teacher Angela Green

can tell by the color of the reading level where they will be comfortable.

"They have formed book clubs, and even pick out the authors they want to read," added Ramsden.

A typical afternoon reading session will comprise 10 minutes of quiet reading by themselves, and then another period when they pair off and discuss what they have read with another student. By this means, the afternoon team of teachers is able to monitor the level of comprehension and encourage other reading assignments.

While limited this school year to the after school program, Comegys principal Geraldine Fitzpatrick-Doria, said she hoped to institute the 100-Book Challenge as part of the regular academic curriculum next fall.

Fitzpatrick-Doria, also new to Comegys this year, was favorably impressed with 100-Book at her previous schools. She particularly liked the "Skills Cards" feature that let student set benchmarks for their progress, and also provided parents with guidelines so they can participate in the reading experience at home.

"This way parents are seen as partners in their child's learning, which is a key component of Dr. (Arlene) Ackerman's 'core values' for the Philadelphia School District," said Fitzpatrick-Doria. "It also conforms to Dr. Ackerman's precept that 'children should read at just the right level.'"

Fitzpatrick-Doria mentioned that at her previous schools she would often see youngsters huddled in corri-

dors or stairwells actively discussing books they were currently reading.

"It is my feeling that the use of this reading approach contributed directly to the two-level increase in Average Yearly Progress (AYP) we achieved at those schools," she stated.

"I was amazed at the rate which American Reading adds new titles to their lists," said Ramsden. "Every time I come across a newly published children's book that looked interesting, 100-Book had it reviewed, rated, and

incorporated in its appropriate box."

Ramsden further noted that, "Given the range of reading competency encountered in our schools, it is helpful to have books at one or two reading levels above—and, below the nominal class grade. This way, teachers are able to have each student reading a book related to the particular subject and contributing his or her unique learning experience to class discussions."

For more information about the 100 Book Challenge, visit www.americanreading.com.