Case Studies: Lessons Learned in Implementation of Core5

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Key Takeaways

To ensure that students' time using the Lexia® Core5® Reading program is highly productive and that educators are taking full advantage of available teacher resources, schools/districts should:

- integrate Core5 into larger school- and district-level initiatives.
- have an in-house Lexia Champion who can promote best practices.
- provide ongoing professional development around literacy and blended learning.

Introduction

Implementing a blended learning program like the Lexia® Core5® Reading product (Core5)[1] can be challenging. To use Core5 *with fidelity* (i.e., as intended), teachers need to use the educator-facing website myLexia to monitor student use of Core5's online component as well as deliver offline Lexia Lessons and Skill Builders to help fill knowledge gaps and reinforce online learning.

In this Research Brief, we present two case studies showing different approaches schools/districts have taken to implement Core5. We draw on survey responses, interviews and observations to identify implementation best practices. These data were collected as part of Lexia research projects aimed to explore learning outcomes in schools where Core5 had been used for multiple years. In this report, we first describe each case study and then reflect on their relative successes. The strategies highlighted herein will be especially useful to schools/districts that are in the initial stages of using Core5 and are looking to enhance their implementation.

Konnoto School District[2]

Beginning in June 2016, Konnoto School District purchased Core5 for all of its elementary schools. Konnoto School District, a longstanding advocate for personalized and student-centered learning, primarily serves students from low

[1] Lexia® Core5® Reading (Core5) supports educators in providing differentiated instruction for students of all abilities in grades K–5. Core5 provides explicit, systematic instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, morphology, vocabulary, fluency/automaticity, and comprehension. Core5 includes both online, student-driven adaptive learning activities and offline, teacher-led instruction.
[2] A pseudonym to maintain teacher/student anonymity

SES backgrounds in an urban setting. To help mitigate the impact of staff turnover on quality of instruction, the District offers ongoing professional learning opportunities on a myriad of issues related to teaching literacy and partnered with Lexia Research to provide teachers with an additional professional learning program during the 2017-2018 school year. The program consisted of readings, webinars, and online discussions about Core5 and literacy topics, and participants were encouraged to share information with colleagues and school leaders within their respective schools.

Throughout the 2017-2018 school year, data were collected through tracking student performance in the online component of Core5, examining teacher survey responses, and synthesizing comments from 12 semi-structured interviews with school staff. Findings reveal that students in Konnoto School District showed strong use of Core5's online component. Over 90% were classified as Meeting Usage (i.e., they used the online component for 20 or more weeks and met their weekly usage targets at least 50% of the time). However, despite strong usage, a closer look at student performance revealed that they often struggled to complete online activities in a timely manner and required multiple attempts before finishing units in the program. Although teachers reported using Lexia Skill Builders more toward the end of the school year, their overall awareness and implementation of Lexia's offline materials was rather low. These findings suggest that rather than implement Core5 as a full blended learning program, the teachers primarily used myLexia to check whether students were meeting their weekly usage targets. In some cases, teachers relied on the literacy staff to share information about student usage and progress in Core5, thus not looking at student data in myLexia directly.

Cooker Elementary School[2]

In the spring of 2014, the Cooker Elementary School began using Core5 with their K-5 students. The school is located in an urban setting and is composed mainly of students from low SES backgrounds. Fortunately, the school has experienced low teacher turnover in recent years. With the onset of Core5 use in the Cooker Elementary School, the school designated their Elementary Literacy Specialist to serve as a Lexia Champion. She communicated frequently with Lexia staff to learn about effective implementation of Core5 in the school and then shared these strategies with teachers in the school.

For the research study data were obtained through tracking student performance in the online component of Core5 and synthesizing comments from interviews with

the Lexia Champion and teachers in kindergarten through third grade. Students in the Cooker Elementary School displayed strong use of Core5, with over 90% of them classified as Meeting Usage on a yearly basis. Teachers reported accessing myLexia on a weekly (or more frequent) basis to monitor student usage, check on student progress, and identify students who needed Lexia Lessons and/or Skill Builders. Students' use of offline materials was incorporated into their daily schedule. Lessons were typically administered by the teacher to small groups of students flagged for the same lesson. Each time a Core5 level was completed, students were given Skill Builders to strengthen the skills worked on in the online component. Students completed Skill Builders at a center in their ELA block or during free time in school, and as homework for older students. Teachers strongly agreed that the Lexia Champion served an important role to ensure that all elements of Core5 ran smoothly in the school.

Implementation Lessons Learned

Lesson:
Lexia implementation efforts may be impacted by school culture and district-level initiatives and have an eye toward greater integration.

Core5 was a major component of the curriculum at both Konnoto School District and Cooker Elementary School. In both cases Core5 was integrated into ELA activities and there were public celebrations when students earned certificates after completing Core5 levels. In the case of Cooker Elementary School, Core5 was immersed in the cultural fabric of the school, which encouraged implementation of a full blended learning model. Teacher-parent conferences at Cooker Elementary School included discussions about students' progress in Core5, and use of Lexia's offline materials was emphasized as much as the online component. Conversely, at Konnoto School District, it appears that teachers' implementation of Core5 was treated as distinct from most district-level professional development initiatives, besides the one-off collaboration with Lexia. Linking school- or district-wide initiatives directly to Core5 itself may help strengthen teacher adoption of the program, which can in turn positively impact student learning.

Lesson:
Core5 users benefit from a consistent in-house Lexia Champion who can shepard teachers' adoption of Core5.

Designating a literacy specialist to serve as Lexia Champion greatly facilitated adoption of Core5 in Cooker Elementary School. The Lexia Champion played a pivotal role, making sure teachers were highly familiar with all facets of Core5 and holding them accountable for using and integrating the program in their classrooms. Low

teacher turnover at Cooker Elementary School also helped solidify the knowledge and skills modeled by the Lexia Champion, so that teachers in turn became "champions" in their classrooms. In contrast, although proponents of Core5 could be found throughout Konnoto School District, high staff turnover impacted the district's administration and teachers -- conditions which were not conducive to establishing a consistent and knowledgeable Lexia Champion.

Finally, knowledge and use of Core5's offline materials -- or full integration of a blended learning model -- represents a key difference between Cooker Elementary School and Konnoto School District. For instance, the Lexia Champion at Cooker Elementary School created binders of Lexia Lessons and Skill Builders which were readily accessible to teachers so they could seamlessly incorporate them into daily instruction. Conversely, teachers at Konnoto School District had varying levels of familiarity with these materials, including -- in some cases -- how to download/access them. Knowledge and use of offline materials can help prevent students from spending excessive amounts of time struggling in the online component of Core5. It is imperative for teachers to know when and how to deliver Lexia Lessons, thereby improving students' reading skills and progress in the program.

Lesson:
Core5 users should continuously build teachers' knowledge and use of offline materials in accordance with a full blended learning model.

Conclusions and Future Directions

An examination of these two cases provides valuable insights regarding best practices for Core5 implementation. First, effective implementation means that the program should be interwoven into school- or district-wide initiatives on blended learning. Second, it is highly worthwhile to appoint a school leader to champion use of the program. And third, program implementation should extend beyond simply "completing minutes" to include administration of offline materials. Future and larger scale research studies are needed to determine how well each of these recommendations contribute to effective implementation and, as a result, support reading gains for students. At present, we recommend that schools and districts aim to adopt the practices highlighted in this report as they continue to implement Core5 in upcoming years.

Lexia also makes available Implementation Support Packages to help new and returning customers optimize Core5. For more information on this program, visit: https://www.lexialearning.com/why-lexia/implementation-support