

EBLI AND DEVELOPING STRENGTH IN STUDENTS

HOW THIS MICHIGAN TEACHER CHALLENGED HER STUDENTS TO HOLD THEMSELVES ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR MISTAKES IN THEIR READING AND WRITING—AND SUCCEEDED



Ashley Windnagle, first grade teacher in Michigan

“This year, I can read the writing of every single one of my students. It was easy for us as first grade teachers, as a team, to read it all.”

Ashley on the difference in outcomes for her students after she began teaching with EBLI.

Teacher Profile



Overview

- Teacher: Ashley Windnagle
- School: Leonard Elementary
- District: Ovid-Elsie (Ovid, Michigan)
- Grade: First
- Years teaching: Six
- Students attending school: 313



EBLI Tools

- EBLI In Person 3-day Training
- ETSL Training



Outcomes

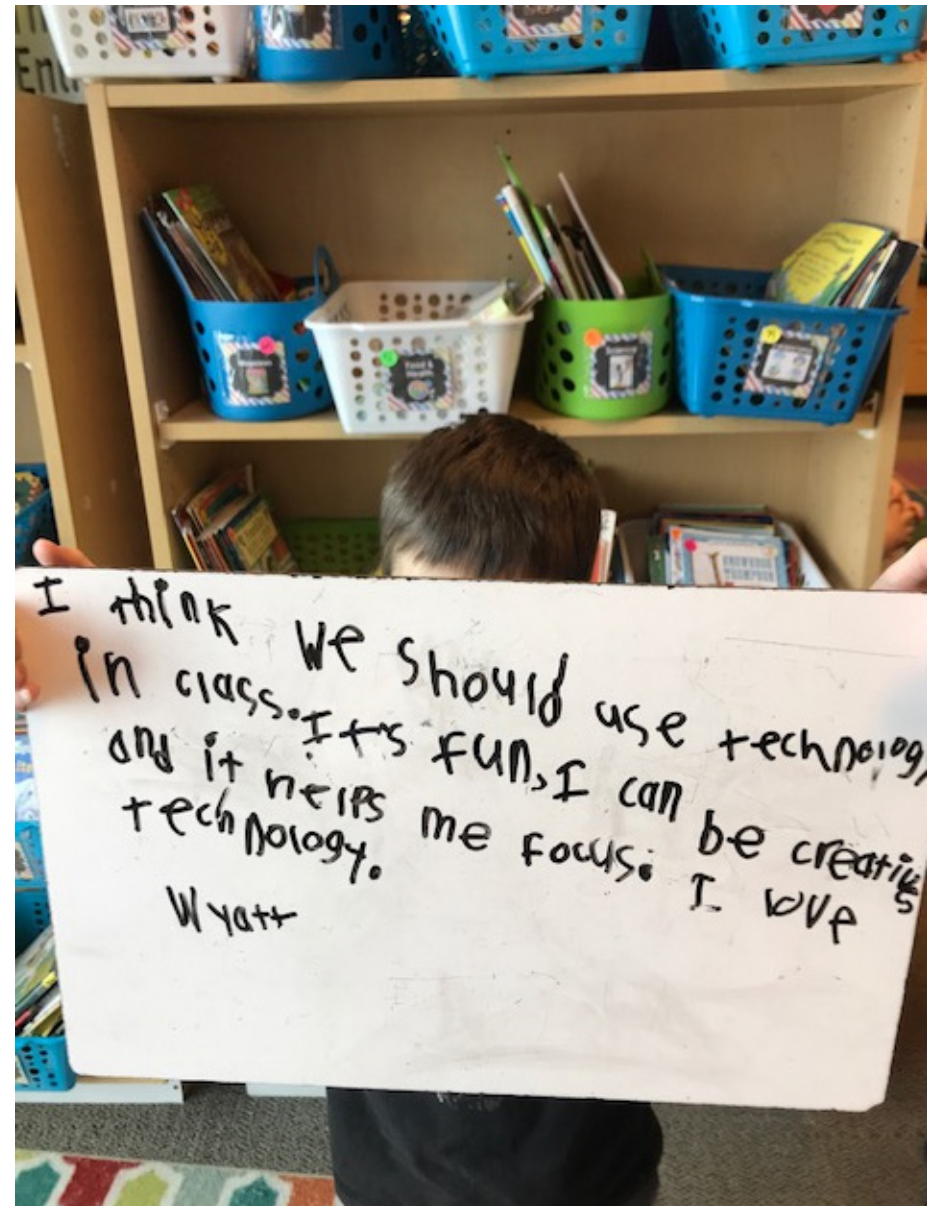
- Increased legability in her students' writing
- More students choosing to write during center-time
- Students experiencing less test anxiety
- Reduction in student behavior issues
- Greater student excitement to write
- More support in the classroom for the teacher

Set in Central Michigan, Leonard Elementary of the Ovid-Elsie Area School District serves over 300 students, from kindergarten to second grade. Ask veteran first grade teacher, Ashley Windnagle, and she'll tell you she's seen it all. From excited and jittery students on the first day of school, to helping students struggling to read and write throughout the year, to that final last day before summer break, Ashley knows the ins and outs of teaching. Naturally, she's discovered the part she loves the most about her job, and the parts that can prove to be a challenge.

"In the past, writing was the worst time of the day," she said of her previous experiences teaching literacy in first and second grades. "All the teachers agreed it was horrible. It was like pulling teeth, trying to get them to put anything on the page."

The numbers reflect the difficulties Ashley and her colleagues had been having: "Our scores were just going down. In the fall, we would be about 50 to 60% on-target; in the winter, it would jump to about 60 to 70%; and in the spring, it would go down. Over the years, it was just going lower and lower."

It was not for a lack of effort on Ashley's part. Educated with both a bachelor's and master's in literacy education, she felt as though she simply lacked the tools to impart the necessary skills onto her children: "There was just so much that I had to do that was not together — there was the story we had to read, and then this comprehension page we had to do, and the phonics page we had to do, and the spelling practice we had to do. It was all jumbled — not cohesive."



Ashley's student shows off their February dictated-opinion writing

Ashley quickly came to realize that she needed to do something different, especially with the expectations put upon her students: “The requirements didn’t meet the age of the kids, and that’s when behavior issues would come out, like asking to go to the bathroom to avoid test time, or crawling under desks. It was stressful for them, and some of them couldn’t read to get through the materials. They’re five and six — why are we doing this to our kids?”

THE CHALLENGE

For Ashley, her kids’ difficulties with literacy have worn on



Ashley’s students during group reading time

her emotionally: “I really feel this kind of grief for my kids that came in as nonreaders and left as nonreaders. They felt really defeated as nonreaders. I would sit in front of a kid and try different things, but I’d never know if it was working.”

It was a struggle that made itself known in the classroom, leaving Ashley disheartened: “I was just so frustrated if they didn’t know how to read yet — especially in February, which I now realize was an unrealistic expectation. Their frustration would come out sometimes too. The kids would act out.”

It’s not a problem exclusive to her classroom: “I think in a lot of cases for teachers, they just don’t know — that’s how I was. The curriculum told me, for example, to have them say the letter names, and so that’s what we did.”

It was an issue that was eating into her day: “I would do 95% Group phonics lessons, so I was reading this whole script and trying to learn it for my half-hour small group. When that wasn’t working, I’d have to try a different intervention lesson.”

Training with EBLI

As it would turn out, the solution to Ashley’s classroom troubles was just a couple of towns over.

“Our building reading specialist is great,” she explains. “She finds other things that are out there, and things that might work better.” On this reading specialist’s radar was Evidenced-Based Learning Instruction (EBLI), a program developed by Nora Chahbazi.

“Nora’s hometown is Owosso,” Ashley says, “and we’re right near there.”

In 2018, Leonard Elementary sent several teachers to get EBLI trained. They came back with a new vigor that inspired Ashley: “They were so excited about it, so I was really anxious to get trained; it seemed like something that was different, and something that was working.”

In January 2019, Ashley went to an EBLI training to see this difference for herself: “It was eye-opening. Right away, they tell you, ‘This is what we don’t do,’ and it was things that I did with my kids all the time.”

The training was simple, but intense: “We got a lesson plan book and a pretty big binder that had the steps, helpful hints, and extra documents. Nora was pretty upfront, saying that it would be a lot different from anything we’ve ever learned. The first day was a lot of PowerPoint — this is the research, this is the data we’ve seen. The next two days were lots of role play. That was great, because after that you knew what to say; it takes more than one time doing it. It was a little bit uncharacteristic of other trainings.”

It all lit a fire in Ashley’s heart: “I became obsessed with the actual way to teach reading. It was the catalyst for me to learn more about the science of reading in general. I’ve read a lot of books; there is so much out there that EBLI packages into a program that teachers can use.”

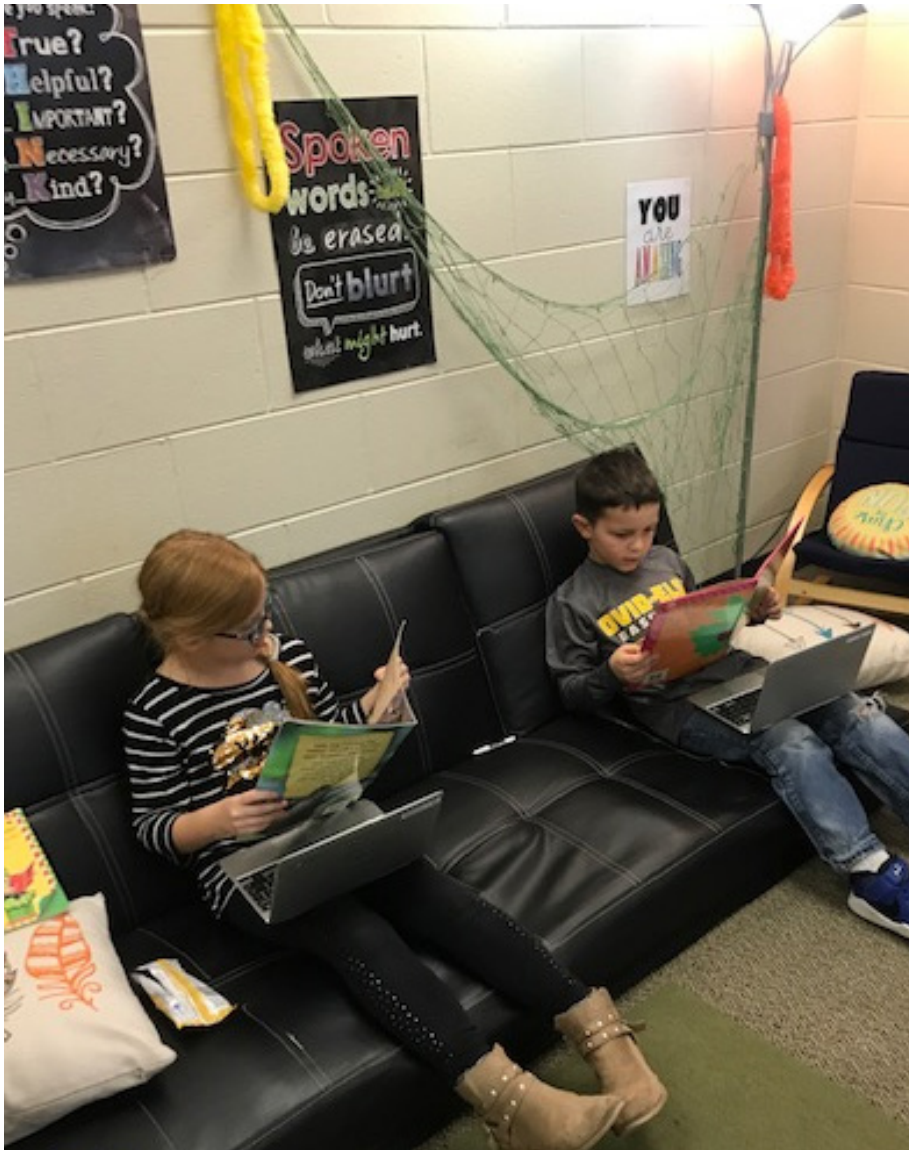
Adding ETSL Training

In addition to the in-person training, Ashley did ETSL: EBLI Training & Student Lessons, the online training for teachers that includes student lessons and instruction plus year long support and resources for them to use in the classroom. ETSL also includes a live online one day orientation, giving teachers the opportunity to experience applying the EBLI strategies and activities themselves.

“ETSL is great for me,” Ashley says. “I log on and look at what’s coming up, I queue up my lesson plan, and I teach it.”

In addition, Ashley also attends monthly zoom calls, “There’s continuous support. If you miss a meeting, the EBLI team shares the videos from the zoom calls, so you don’t miss anything. Between monthly calls, Nora encourages teachers to submit questions, so they could provide feedback and cover those questions in the zoom calls.” Ashley found the additional support incredibly useful, “There was a lot of teacher guided conversation.” The EBLI team knew there would be questions and challenges, and they wanted to be realistic about that. Ashley says, “The way they handled it was important. They addressed it as ‘we’re here to support you.’ They were open and willing to speak to concerns, and put it in the monthly zoom calls to help ensure success.”

This particular aspect of the EBLI program has proven revolutionary for Ashley’s classroom time, in terms of both quality and quantity. “It’s so easy,” Ashley explains. “I know what I’m doing for my entire reading time. I don’t have to think about the pacing of it.”



Students recording books on the SeeSaw application during group reading time

The ETSL program includes instructional videos, for both the teacher and students, to help get them started with EBLI: “I showed Nora’s videos a lot in the beginning, because I wanted to make sure that they were getting the right language, but I felt comfortable teaching EBLI pretty early on.” As the year went on, Ashley used the video instruction to support her over time, “I found myself going back and watching the teaching videos throughout the year to refresh myself on the language and to make sure I was teaching the lessons with fidelity.”

It has saved Ashley money on supplies as well: “I had so much stuff — flashcards, and word games, and file folder games — so much of that, which I did not use this past year, because it just wasn’t necessary. With the kids, we would just get a whiteboard and dry erase marker, and that was enough.”

EBLI in the Classroom

After training, Ashley was anxious to put her newfound skills to use: There’s a little bit of a learning curve in the beginning. There were these little practices from the past that I’d do that were so ingrained.”

EBLI staff was always available to help when Ashley needed it: “When Nora looked at my mid-year scores, she said that I had to get the kids blending. I realized that when they were sounding out words, I was starting the word for them. So, when they would go to read on their own, they couldn’t do that blend — they couldn’t blend the word on their own. It’s

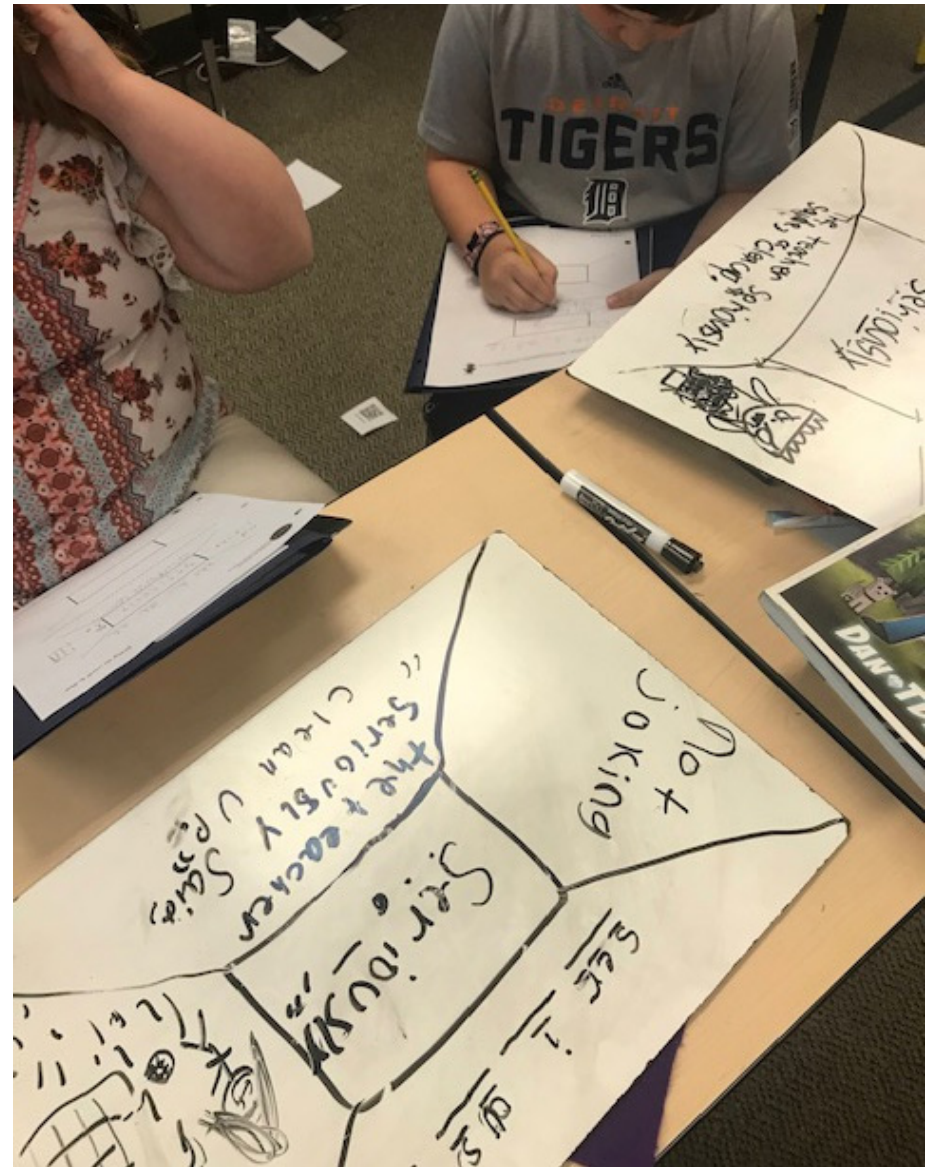
good to see that something I didn't realize I was doing." She was never deterred: "That's the thing with EBLI," Ashley explains. "You can keep learning and keep learning."

This continuing education is a core component of Ashley's new teaching style: "We're learning new and better ways. There are a lot of pieces to EBLI that are just good practice that, if teachers just implement them, even one or two small things at a time, they'll see improvement."

Indeed, as Ashley notes, with EBLI, 91% of first grade students could complete their phoneme set by March.

She provides some specific examples: "I did a sound wall — all of the sounds that we did, I would put up on the wall. By winter, there were almost 20 different sorts of sounds, and kids would often reference them. We would do something called 'Sound Detective,' so I would give them a sound that we would learn and they would have to go find words in the class that had that sound or spelling"

The strategy was a resounding success: "In everything they did, kids would become detectives in sound and spellings, always pointing out spellings. Even when they were doing independent reading time, they would come up to me and show me different sounds and spellings. That was very cool — that excitement about words that to them just felt normal."



First grade students completing the EBLI Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

Reading and Writing to Build Confidence in Students

The entire experience has inspired a self-assuredness in Ashley's students, even as they struggle: "I had a student who pointed to another kid and said, 'I can't read like him, yet'; and I was like, 'Look, you guys — it's okay!' It was just a whole different way of looking at how kids should be reading at this age, and what they need."

As Ashley allowed her students to lean into the struggle, she saw improvements that she never expected: "This year, I can read the writing of every single one of my students. It was easy for us as first grade teachers, as a team, to read it all. That was not always the case. I always had some kids that left first grade, telling the second grade teacher, 'You will not be able to read what they wrote.' I did not have that this year."

Her kids are feeling all the more strong for it, allowing Ashley to push new horizons in her classroom: "I never had any kids crying about writing or crying about reading. I don't have kids get mad at me. Not ever has one kid gotten upset. It's a part of how the learning is. All of a sudden, I was holding them accountable for their mistakes, and I had never done that before."

She remembers one student in particular, for whom EBLI proved especially effective: "In the beginning of the year, she was able to write two letters, and she was crying because she couldn't write what she wanted to. By February and March, she was choosing to do writing in center time.

She would come up to me, writing in complete sentences and doing a good job of saying her sounds in words, and her thoughts were getting down — that was a miracle; I've never seen that before: just the confidence that she had to be able to keep trying that."

This self-esteem boost has been inspiring for Ashley as a teacher: "I really believe in what I'm doing and to be able to pour that joy into my students every day is exciting. That pours over into my students' attitudes about reading too. That is the biggest difference."

Ashley's Final Word

In this, Ashley finds herself able to live out her deepest beliefs as an educator: "All kids can learn— that's a very common phrase for teachers to say, but when you're in the classroom and when you're doing the work, before EBLI, it really was the fact that they come in your room struggling readers, and then they leave your room struggling readers. It wasn't until EBLI that I realized actually, no. All kids **can** learn how to read and it is our job to teach them that."



Evidence-Based
Literacy Instruction™

PARTNERING WITH EBLI

The EBLI Team believes that no one should suffer from not being properly taught how to read.

Teachers are the experts, and they need the right tools to help their students succeed. To create stronger literacy learning, bolster educational engagement among students, and increase performance for reading and writing, EBLI offers training and support solutions for literacy instructors, administrators, parents, and anyone who wants to enhance their literacy skill set.

EBLI has helped thousands of teachers across the globe to successfully implement the #1 evidence based literacy instruction program. To learn more about how EBLI can help your struggling students, stay up to date on the latest literacy research, and be the first to know about upcoming trainings, join our email list at www.ebli.com.



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