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Many schools throughout the United States use the Renaissance Learning Accelerated Reader (AR) program as a tool to enhance reading instruction. The purpose of this paper is to argue the advantages of the web-based version of the program, Accelerated Reader Enterprise (ARE), over the desktop version. The web-based version of the program will give students the ability to take tests on books read outside the school library collection, will give teachers an array of student data quickly, and will give parents access to student information.

What does this technology really do?

Many features are available in ARE for teachers, students, and parents. ARE allows students to select a book on their individual reading level and take a reading comprehension quiz about the book. Students earn points based on the difficulty level of the book. Online access to all quizzes is available to students from Renaissance Learning, Incorporated. Many of the quizzes are available as voiced quizzes. In the voiced quizzes, the computer will read the questions and answer choices to the student. Students can search for a quiz by the book title, author, or quiz number. The student is not required to enter the entire title or author in order to find a particular quiz. Vocabulary software is included and Renaissance Learning, Incorporated (2009b) states this software will “maximize vocabulary acquisition and build excitement for learning new words” (p.14). A word count feature calculates the number of words read in each book. Multiple reports are available which provide an array of student data for teachers, administrators, and media specialists. The Renaissance Home Connect (RHC) portion of the program provides the parent a view of their student’s points, quizzes, and book level their child is reading. Parents can register with RHC and immediately receive an email reporting test results each time their child takes an AR quiz. By using the AR BookFinder area, parents have the

ability to find AR books that may be in their home library or public library.

What specific and necessary problem will this piece of technology solve?

Access to all quizzes on ARE allows students to read books outside the school library collection and take quizzes on those books. The ability to take quizzes on books outside the school library collection opens a wide range of topics and genres appealing to the reading interest level of a greater number of students. The voiced quizzes allow younger students with a limited reading vocabulary to participate in the AR program. In addition, the voiced quizzes address the needs of students with particular disabilities. In searching for a quiz in ARE, typing a portion of the title or author without an exact match saves time and frustration for younger students. Students can quickly and easily access quizzes with minimal assistance. This ease of access allows teachers more time to work with students in small groups or individually. RHC allows parents to track the reading level and point status of their child. The U.S. Department of Education (2002) encourages and supports “the use of technology for promoting parental involvement” (p.86). RHC encourages parental involvement by providing parents with access to their student’s AR data. Watkins (1997) states, “these communications prompt parents to become involved.”

What cheaper/better/easier/simpler technology already exists to solve the problem, and, in what way is the proposed innovation an improvement over other options or the existing way of doing things?

Many schools have purchased the desktop edition of AR. This software is loaded on individual computers or loaded on an individual school network. The desktop version has a limited number of quizzes that are available to the students. D. Smith (personal communication, July 10, 2009) from Renaissance Learning, Incorporated states, “When using the AR desktop

edition, schools are required to purchase an initial desktop software package and purchase each quiz for \$2.99 to correlate with books owned by the school media center.” A school must calculate the cost of the initial package and the number of quizzes needed for the number of books in the library when using the desktop version. If using ARE, a school must pay an initial host fee and a \$4 license fee for each child participating (D. Smith, personal communication, July 10, 2009). Depending on the school, ARE may be a slightly higher cost than the desktop edition. The advantages of ARE outweigh the monetary difference. Students have immediate access to new quizzes with ARE as well as the entire collection of quizzes. ARE has superior reporting methods which allow teachers to quickly access detailed information about student achievement. Easy access to detailed student data allows teachers to address individual student needs on a weekly, daily, or even hourly basis. The reports offer valuable information for teachers when they remediate or enrich students’ learning. Using the reports, teachers and students work together to set goals for the number of points each student should achieve during each grading period and for the entire school year. In addition to point goals, the word count feature allows goals to be set for the number of words read within a particular school year. Automatic upgrades and access to the training center are included with no additional cost. The desktop edition must be updated manually each year for an additional fee and no training is included. RHC is an enormous advantage of ARE over the desktop version. Renaissance Learning, Incorporated (2009a) states, “parents can log in and see student progress” (p.4). The email sent from RHC to a parent would immediately notify the parent of their student’s progress without requiring extra work by the teacher. The desktop version requires school personnel to print reports and send those reports home with students for communication with parents. In many cases, the reports are lost and parents do not receive the AR information. RHC will reduce paper

use and will reduce the monetary commitment to paper for parent communication.

Conclusion

ARE provides a vast number of reading comprehension quizzes for students. The frequently updated quizzes are from a variety of genres and topics to increase student interest and participation. Teachers can access student data for more individualized instruction. RHC provides an excellent form of parent communication about student progress. RHC saves time for school personnel and saves money with less paper use. ARE will save time, increase student participation in reading, and increase parental involvement.

References

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