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Review and Redesign

Raz-Kids

Raz-Kids is a subscription based website for families and classrooms. The website offers hundreds of e-books for students with varying levels of reading fluency. I accessed and experienced the website as a teacher. While using the website as a teacher, I found that I could create a profile for each of my students and set an initial reading level for them to start on. I selected this level based on their reported *Lexile Level* from a previously taken *STAR Test*. After organizing student profiles, the website allowed me to curate personalized letters to each family with information regarding accessing and using their child’s profile from home. Throughout the year, I had the ability to adjust reading levels in each profile based on student growth.

On school days when we had laptops in our classroom, students opened their profile and had the freedom to select books from their level. Students could then choose to read the e-book or be read to by a narrator. After reading a book students took a 5 – 10 question multiple choice comprehension quiz. In addition to e-books, narrations, and quizzes the website also offers a recording function. Students can record and replay themselves reading, but my students did not access that function. The teacher view of my students’ profiles on the website allowed me to monitor the books students read and their scores on quizzes.

While the product is generally enjoyable for students and helpful for teachers, there is certainly room for improvement. After collecting feedback from students and teachers, it became clear that the simplest way to improve the user experience is to add more books at all levels. Students and teachers find that there aren’t enough books at each level to hold a student’s interest. If a student’s reading fluency is developing quickly and moving through levels, they may not encounter this issue. However, for the many students who experience peaks and plateaus in their development there simply aren’t enough books per level. Improving the user experience is important, whether it is grounded in research or not, because people are not likely to continuing using the product if they do not enjoy the experience.

Based on the research in literacy and digital media, Raz-Kids could also improve the product by creating an interactive feature. In this interactive feature students will be able to connect with their parents by sharing their favorite books, asking questions, and sharing quizzes. Parents can download a Raz-Kids app on their smartphones or connect to the website from a computer to read and respond to their child’s messages. This connection has the potential to improve and enhance literacy development among users.

Richert, Rob and Smith describe the benefits of a child and parent watching DVDs together or a “joint viewing session” (p. 88). Children were able to learn more when their parents were involved. This same logic could be applied to Raz-Kids. If children are able to send their parents their favorite book from the day, the conversation about that book can continue at home and deepen the child’s learning. This might be called a “joint e-reading session.”

A parent plays a vital role in their child’s literacy development. According to Miller and Warschauer a child’s “ability to understand what they are reading is inextricably linked to their background knowledge. Parents therefore play a vital role in helping children acquire literacy skills.” (p. 3) This information indicates that a parent should be connected to a child’s literacy activities. By creating a means of connecting parents to their child’s literacy activities Raz-Kids is likely to improve a child’s literacy outcomes. If parents are more closely attuned to what the child is reading on Raz-Kids at school they can get involved at home. Parents, more or less, have control over a child’s schedule. They have the ability to increase a child’s background knowledge through additional reading and experiences inside and outside of the home. With a message from their child through Raz-Kids, a parent could tailor those experiences to their child’s literacy activities at school.

It is important to understand the role that co-participation may play in a child’s literacy development. Researchers have “discovered that children whose parents talk about *Sesame Street* as they watch learn more from the show.” (Takeuchi, p. 6) It seems logical that a similar improvement in learning could exist for children who read e-books and talk about the e-books they read with their parents. By creating a feature that connects a child’s literacy experiences at school with their parents, Raz-Kids has the opportunity to research the impact a parent has on a child’s literacy development. Takeuchi suggests that “researchers must turn their attention to… e-books, and other new platforms for media co-participation and the ways in which grandparents, older siblings, and other family members can also support young children’s learning.” (p. 6) Raz-Kids has the opportunity to be at the forefront of this field by creating a simple way for parents and children to make a connection between literacy activities at school and home.

References

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Takeuchi, L.M. (2011). *Families Matter: Designing media for a digital age.* New York: The Joan Ganz Center at Sesame Workshop.