

Motivating Young Readers

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Introduction

Each year, more elementary students are reading below their grade level and teachers are having a harder time motivating them to become proficient readers. As these students get older, the texts become much more difficult (Gomez & Gomez, 2007) and by the time they get to middle school, they are expected to read at grade level (Collings, Engler, Romig, & Zhao, 2005).

According to Bosseler & Massaro (2003), "computer-based instruction is emerging as a prevalent method to train and develop vocabulary knowledge" (p. 654) for all students. Last year, I worked with low proficiency readers on a computer software program called Imagine Learning English (ILE), which provides differentiated literacy instruction to students in kindergarten through sixth grade (K-6). (See Figure 1.) Through my experience, ILE meets the needs of 21st century learners as it is stimulating to the senses and provides a digital learning environment. In addition, it is a type of literacy intervention especially needed in grades K-3 to help students learn to read (Cadle, Jones, O'Byrne, & Securo, 2006). Unfortunately, limited research has been conducted to determine the impact ILE has on student motivation towards reading. Thus, the purpose of this action research project is to evaluate the effects of a computer software program, Imagine Learning English, on student motivation and behavior towards reading while meeting the needs of 21st century learners at an elementary school in Hawai'i.

Research Design

As a Master's degree student, I decided to conduct an action research project on my class' overall motivation and engagement towards reading through using ILE. The study will be conducted in my, the action researcher's, classroom as part of the normal educational practice. Students in the study will not be harmed in any way and their grades will not be impacted as a result of the study. I will examine the effects of a computer software program called Imagine Learning English (ILE) to determine its effects on student motivation and engagement towards reading on my first grade students. The study will be conducted for a period of three weeks starting on January 18 and ending on February 8, 2010. As an action research project, qualitative data collection methods will be used and student names will be eliminated to help keep the anonymity of student identities.

Sampling

The subjects in this research project will be 27 first grade students in my classroom who have background knowledge and experience with using computers. The students range in age from 6-7 years old and consist of 12 boys and 15 girls. Data will be gathered on the level of engagement the students have with the software program as well as their classroom behavior. In order to obtain this data, the following data collection methods will be used: observations, whole-class discussions, written student reflections, and reports generated from the software program.

Procedural Detail

Prior to the start of the program, my classroom will have three computers, two headphones, and an ample amount of student licenses for my class to use ILE. Since ILE will supplement my reading instruction, a routine will be established for students to follow, which includes a schedule for students to see what days they will work on the program. The routine will include how to start the program, when to use it, and what to do after their session is completed. At the beginning of the school day, I will setup the computer to automatically run the program. A total of five student sessions will run each day, where each session lasts 20 minutes long. Once the students complete their session, they will write a short reflection about their experience on the program in their Reader's Notebook, noting what they learned, liked, and disliked. On their reflection, students must put a happy, neutral, or sad face to indicate how motivated they are to use ILE. This will help me better understand their motivation to use ILE.

While the students are on the software program, field notes will be taken to observe the students' behaviors on and off the program. A checklist will be employed to help determine their level of engagement and motivation towards the program, and as a result it will indicate their motivation towards reading. All student names will be omitted to keep student identities anonymous. In place of names, student numbers will be used to help me identify individual students. The checklist is designed with four columns to track student data. I will indicate the degree to which students show their level of engagement by placing a number, 1-4, where 1 is the lowest and 4 is the highest. There are a total of four categories to help measure their engagement and motivation: book selection/handling, reading sustainment, peers, and teacher. The data will be collected daily.

The written student reflections will provide students an opportunity to share their thoughts about the program, which will help to indicate their engagement as well as motivation. During whole class discussions regarding ILE, students will have a chance to hear how their peers feel about the program as well as voice their opinion. Lastly, the reports generated from ILE will indicate how well the students are progressing towards the program as well as each of their reading ability. It will also determine their motivation and engagement towards the ILE through the amount of time spent on the program and how well they are progressing.

Validity or Bias

To ensure validity, students will write their reflections in their Reader's Notebook, which is a personal notebook seen only by the student, teacher, and student's family. The teacher is knowledgeable of each student's writing, which helps to ensure the validity found in his or her writing. In order to ensure that the information received from students is accurate, they need to provide an explanation and be more descriptive of what they liked or disliked about ILE while also including a smiley, neutral, or sad face to show the degree to which they are motivated.

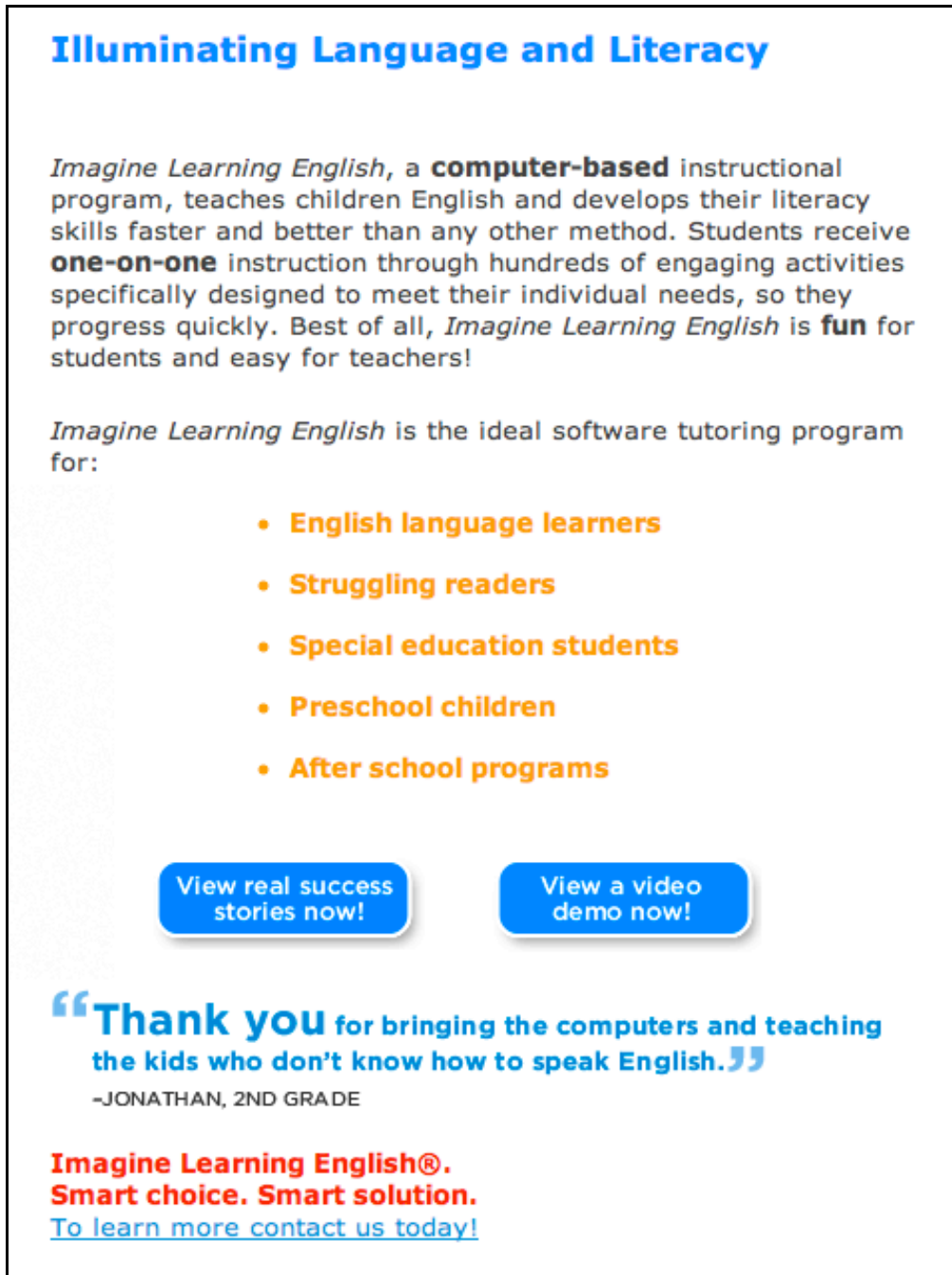
Data Analysis

Data from the teacher checklist, anecdotal notes, ILE-generated reports, and student reflections will be compiled to determine the overall effectiveness ILE has on student motivation and engagement. Points will be calculated from the teacher checklist to determine the different reading categories, which help support and motivate reading. The column with the most points correlates to the students' overall motivation and engagement towards ILE. This information helps determine the degree to which students want to read. Using a plus-delta chart, the student reflections and teacher notes from whole class discussions will be placed into one of the categories. Once compiled, the action researcher will be able to determine the positive and

negative aspects of ILE and decide if further intervention is necessary for students. In addition, the happy, neutral, and sad faces will be calculated to determine the students' degree to which they are motivated towards ILE.

Timeline

Date	Procedures for Action Researcher
October 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a schedule for students to go on ILE • Create whole group discussion questions • Proposal and literature review approval
November 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Subjects approval
December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute and collect parent and student consent forms
January 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will begin ILE for three weeks • Teach students how to write responses • Use teacher checklist to monitor student behaviors on and off ILE • Use whole group questions
February 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze data: plus/delta chart to categorize student written and oral responses, look at ILE-generated reports for total time spent on computer, and calculate the total amount of smiley faces
March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write up paper

The graphic is a white rectangular box with a thin black border. At the top, the title 'Illuminating Language and Literacy' is in blue. Below it, a paragraph describes the program as a computer-based instructional tool for teaching English to children. A list of five target groups is shown in orange. Two blue buttons with white text are positioned below the list. A quote from a 2nd-grade student is featured in blue, followed by the program's name and a call to action in red and blue. The background of the box features a faint, stylized illustration of a child's head and shoulders in shades of blue and grey.

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-JONATHAN, 2ND GRADE

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Figure 1. Imagine Learning English Program Overview.

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