Technology-based Reading Games in Developing Early Young Readers
Abstract

The paper begins with a description of how if used right, technology-based reading games can be an effective and useful way in developing reading skills. This mode of instruction provides an alternative way of teaching reading unlike the traditional style used by most elementary teachers today. Online reading programs such as the Kaboose Program and the Time4Learning Program offer great insight for teachers and parents to collaborate and develop lessons. These programs offer assistance in vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, reading fluency, and decoding and serve as a great tool for the students to use. These programs are effective because they enable the students to choose from a variety of different activities. Rocket Phonics is a program that uses the “One Letter, One Sound-No Exceptions” mentality and has been proven to drastically improve student reading achievement in phonics. This program creates excitement for the children inside and outside of the classroom and if used consistently, can produce a 4-1 ratio of reading improvement compared to similar sites such as Hooked on Phonics and The Phonics Game. In conclusion, online reading games provide a variety of different interactive activities that can enhance the reading skills of each child in the classroom in a way that the typical classroom reading environment cannot produce.
Summary

Description

Technology-based reading games can be an effective and useful way in developing reading skills. This mode of instruction provides an alternative way of teaching reading unlike the traditional style used by most elementary teachers today.

Effect of Online Reading

Online reading offers a “game” for the students to play so they tend to stay more focused and motivated when they can choose their own activities. Kids learn and read more confidently when they are reading books that cover their interests and the online reading resources allow students to take control of what they want to learn about.

A study from Texas showed that through observations reading through the help of online activities improve student reading achievement. Some of the major findings were that the program was effective in fostering reading accuracy at the first and second grade levels and reading comprehension at the second grade level.

Types of Reading Programs

Kaboose Reading Program

The Kaboose reading program can be used as a connection to any type of lesson plan and it can be applied to any book that might be read in class. But teachers can use the Kaboose program to guide the students in developing better reading habits and reading awareness and serves as a main tool in teaching pre-reading activities. Collaborate with parents to ensure that the kids are able to have full access to the program at home. This structure provides more reading opportunities which has to ensure improvement in reading development.

Time4Learning Reading Program

The direction of this program focuses on four steps; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This program is individualized and self-paced, providing consistent and continuous assessment and guidance. The benefits of using this online program involve supporting student achievement, developing creative thinking and problem solving abilities, immediate feedback for the student in order to make corrections to mistakes, and more importantly begins to prepare students for high-stakes assessments. Time4Learning website provides instructional lesson plans for all elementary teachers to use.
Rocket Phonics

Rocket phonics turns your child’s experience with reading into a fun adventure with games, riddles, jokes and stories. This fun adventure coupled with “One Letter, One Sound-No Exceptions” consistently builds a confidence that no other program can match. If your five year old child used Rocket Phonics for a year, he/she would be reading at nearly a fourth grade level. Rocket Phonics produces a 4-1 ratio of reading improvement as compared to Hooked on Phonics and The Phonics Game. The main emphasis of this program is using and applying it consistently throughout the school year.

Struggling Readers

The Kaboose program, the Time4Learning program, and the Readquarium program can be extremely beneficial for struggling readers in that it enables them to use a different alternative to reading that might spark interest and enjoyment for them as they read.

Make the struggling readers want to practice reading, create opportunities for them to read with expression or with a purpose, and make reading fun and engaging.
The use of Technology

Technology continues everywhere and its impact on reading has created an ongoing surge of enthusiasm in literacy for teachers and students of all elementary schools. Technology as applied online has provided younger students with the opportunity to effectively improve both their reading abilities and reading scores. Online reading games serve as a tool in developing different reading skills that will eventually advance both average and struggling readers into reading more fluently and reading with more confidence. Technology-based learning presents an alternative way to teaching reading, emphasizing and repeatedly practicing areas in phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and the recognition of high frequency words. Many struggling readers need a different approach to reading, outside of hearing their teacher read a book to them. They need to get to a point where they can fluently read a sentence at an appropriate pace as well as developing the ability to read with expression. These students need to start understanding the fundamentals of reading that deal with recognizing and applying sight words as it is one of the main areas of focus for the different online reading strategies.

Many students at the young elementary age come to class not having read much or even at all. So from the start, teachers need to separate the different levels of reading in order to place each student in an online game that is age appropriate. The traditional approach to reading involves reading independently, reading with a partner, or reading with aid or guidance from the teacher. This traditional mode has shown proven results and continues to be effective. However,
sometimes kids at that age get bored and want to learn more about what they are reading. Using the internet to teach reading can provide instruction in a way that enables the children to make connections to their own lives. Kids enjoy learning new things which typically involves learning in a different, yet exciting way. If kids see that they are doing the same reading activities over and over again, they will become bored and be completely unmotivated. The goal of using online reading games is to hook the students into remaining motivated and focused on reading and learning about everything they possibly can. The sky is the limit for every child’s reading growth which should be the main concern of every elementary teacher.

There are many different online reading games for young kids to learn and enjoy because the main goal of using technology as a means of teaching is to make sure that the children are enjoying learning. Online educational systems present students with basic elementary concepts, and then through reinforcement, help children master those reading fundamentals (Sherman, Peterson). The great thing about implementing online reading games in to your lesson plan is that it enables the teacher to be flexible and use a variety of sources to teach different reading concepts. Many students have short attention spans which correlate into their poor reading achievement. However, online reading offers a “game” for the students to play so they tend to stay more focused and motivated when they can choose their own activities. Kids learn and read more confidently when they are reading books that cover their interests and the online reading resources allow students to take control of what they want to learn about. Even though using online reading might give the kids too much freedom, every activity they work on is focused on a different component or area of reading. In other words, no matter what reading strategy they choose to practice (vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, etc.), they will always be working to improve and better their reading development (Sherman, Peterson). So for these younger
elementary kids, it is important to find creative ways to get the content or standards covered, yet making sure that the teaching style used is both productive and beneficial.

A study from 25 different rural public school districts in Texas attempted to find the effects of technology based programs on first and second grade reading achievement. In the study, students from all the school districts were assessed as to the impact that reading online has on reading achievement scores. Some of the major findings were that the program was effective in fostering reading accuracy at the first and second grade levels and reading comprehension at the second grade level (Knezek). This study is a small indicator as to the impact that reading online has on a reader’s development.

One program that is used to develop reading abilities for elementary kids is the Kaboose Reading Games. These games apply to learning the alphabet, connecting different letters together to make a picture, finding images of opposites, spelling games where you have to create your own words, rhyming, sports themes, and crossword puzzles to work on the spelling and meaning of different words. The Kaboose reading program can be used as a connection to any type of lesson plan and it can be applied to any book that might be read in class. So as an example, the teacher gets ready to read a book about rhymes to the class and wants to give them a pre-reading activity that will hook them in wanting to read the book. Well go to the Kaboose website and direct them through a rhyming activity so that they have prior knowledge about the book before they even read it. This technology-based activity could help the children in their fluency of reading the book because some of the rhyming words they repetitively see in the activity may be some of the words that are used in the book. The lesson will go much smoother if the children already have a foundation of rhyming words. This is just one example, but teachers can use the Kaboose program to guide the students in developing better reading habits and reading
awareness and serves as a main tool in teaching pre-reading activities. The point of the Kaboose program is to give children the opportunity to gain an understanding of what they will be learning before they read the book and hopefully it will better their reading abilities for the particular lesson that they are working on. Teachers can make Kaboose a success by expanding the program to outside of the classroom as well. Collaborate with parents to ensure that the kids are able to have full access to the program at home. This structure provides more reading opportunities which has to ensure improvement in reading development. "Learning to read is a lengthy and difficult process for many children, and success in learning to read is based in large part on developing language and literacy-related skills very early in life" (Lyon, 1997)

Another online reading program that emphasizes the development of reading skills is the Time4Learning program. The direction of this program focuses on four steps; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This focus allows young readers to expand their knowledge and appreciate the use of oral and written language to develop of love for reading. This reading site encompasses high-quality, research-based instruction with engaging learning activities stress reading fundamentals in a creative atmosphere. This program is individualized and self-paced, providing consistent and continuous assessment and guidance. Time4Learning is a balanced program that incorporates phonics curriculum with project-based interactive activities. The Benefits of using this online program involve supporting student achievement, developing creative thinking and problem solving abilities, immediate feedback for the student in order to make corrections to mistakes, and more importantly begins to prepare students for high-stakes assessments. The program, directed by Odyssey uses the same reading strategies supported by IRA, NCTE, NAEP, NAEYC, CIERA, and the NRP, providing research-based curriculum that covers phonics awareness, phonics instruction and decoding, fluency, background knowledge,
vocabulary, and comprehension. Teachers can make this program successful by using it by means of a language-rich environment. The Reading Skills Pyramid on the Time4Learning website provides instructional lesson plans for all elementary teachers to use. Research shows that children who develop phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge early on are more likely to be strong, successful readers. Children can build these skills by reading aloud, practicing nursery rhymes, and playing letter and word games (Edelson). Computer programs such as Time4Learning can effectively reinforce these skills if used appropriately by the teacher. Therefore teachers need to utilize the resources located on this reading website into their daily lesson plans. Not every day, but maybe along the lines of once or twice a week. Also, similar to the Kaboose program, parent involvement is key in order for Time4Learning to be a success. Parents should provide high quality educational materials, establish a pattern of daily reading, and creating a language-rich environment so that the child’s reading progress can be monitored both inside and outside of the classroom.

The Reading Rocket Program is designed to help or guide children who have come to realize that learning to read can be extremely difficult. A child can feel completely isolated and alone in their struggles with reading and want to give up. This is a time when teachers need to step in and provide an alternative to instruct the reading material, which is where Reading Rocket can be used to launch readers towards success. Reading Rocket focuses on all aspects of reading, but unquestionably, the main emphasis with this program deals with phonics instruction. Rocket phonics turns your child’s experience with reading into a fun adventure with games, riddles, jokes and stories. This fun adventure coupled with “One Letter, One Sound-No Exceptions” consistently builds a confidence that no other program can match. This phonics program is fast, fun, easy-to-use, over three times as effective, and half the cost of competing
programs. Rocket phonics is so effective that your child should be drastically improving in his/her lesson at the end of their very first lesson. In a recent study, 43 home schooled students using Rocket Phonics gained in just three months, an impressive 8.9 months in reading skill. This means if your five year old child used Rocket Phonics for a year, he/she would be reading at nearly a fourth grade level. UCLA Professor James Catterall analyzed this study and came to the conclusion that the Rocket Phonics students’ reading improvement was nearly four times that of the study’s other student’s recorded through the use of Hooked on Phonics and The Phonics Game (Guffanti). This program is effective because it teaches every possible area of phonics including phonemic awareness, letter sounds, letter combinations, and other phonemic strategies that will enhance fluency and decoding in a child’s reading development. The main concern with this program is consistency which relates to both the parents at home and the teachers in the classroom. If used consistently throughout the school year, this phonics program can turn struggling readers into above average readers or even maybe advanced readers. The problem arises when teachers only use this program for certain lesson plans when they should be implementing the program in daily instructional activities.

Another example of the effectiveness produced by Rocket Phonics comes from a letter written to Dr. Phonics, the director of the program. The letter is from Laura Ontario, a resident of California who notes, “Rocket Phonics is going very well and I can really see Alyssa’s confidence in reading improving. We all enjoy using the program, too!! It’s advanced for my four year old son, however, when it comes to a game he is right there playing. His letter recognition has improved immensely!! I really want to thank you for putting Rocket Phonics together, it’s made a difference already and I can’t wait to see Alyssa’s reading when we finish the program” (Ontario). This letter is a small indication of how effective the Rocket Phonics
program can be and how useful it is to the parents at home. Anytime you can make reading exciting to the point where the kids even enjoy reading at home, then it must be a positive thing. The director responded to the letter by saying, “Thank you for your kind letter. You are not alone many children have problems with learning to read. In fact the more reading specialists that find out about Rocket Phonics the more referrals I get” (Ontario). This program has been proven effective and useful for not only the children, but for the parents and teachers as well. So for all elementary teachers out there, “Use the Rocket Phonics Program!”

All of these websites can be used as great tools in improving reading development for the typical elementary child. However, there will always be those two or three students in your class who are below average or struggling readers. Using online games such as the Kaboose program, the Time4Learning program, and the Readquarium program can be extremely beneficial for struggling readers in that it enables them to use a different alternative to reading that might spark interest and enjoyment for them as they read. These websites can offer a way of building their confidence and getting them excited to read which is the first step in improving their reading ability. In order to transform struggling readers into strong readers who will develop a passionate lifelong love of reading, teachers need to do these three things: Make the struggling readers want to practice reading, create opportunities for them to read with expression or with a purpose, and make reading fun and engaging. These three elements are combined in the powerful strategies for reaching struggling readers. And once those elements become mastered by the struggling reader, the individual will become more confident and gradually build a higher vocabulary, recognize words more easily, comprehend difficult stories, and read at a faster and more efficient pace.
In conclusion, technology-based reading games supply all levels of readers with an alternative way of reading that cover many of the key fundamental areas such as vocabulary development, comprehension, high frequency words, basic phonics, and reading fluency. These online strategies can serve as a tool towards using prior knowledge and repetition to give students some familiarity in the reading lesson or book they will be working on. The internet provides a variety of different interactive reading activities that can enhance the reading skills of each child in the classroom in a way that the typical classroom reading environment cannot produce.
Annotated Bibliography


This website provides insight into how using technology can be an effective tool in getting students to develop better reading habits. This site also discusses the effect of technology on improving reading development through all of the different stages. Lastly, the article talks about what teachers can do to make sure they are teaching their students alternative ways to become better readers that can be applied both in school and at home.


This article discusses a study that occurred in Texas involving 25 rural public school districts during the year 2002-03. In this study, the students were assessed as to whether or not using technology as a reading tool improved student reading achievement. The study was intended for first and second grade and the results showed that the program of using technology helped in reading accuracy for both grade levels and enhanced reading comprehension for the second graders.


This short article discussed how parents are just as important as teachers in getting children to read. Because reading is so important to children's success in school, parents can and should help their children become interested in reading and encourage growth in their reading skills. Learning to read is a difficult process, but collaboration of both parents and teachers is vital in the reading process.


This page discusses the importance of having the students read in a language-rich environment. Research also shows that children who develop phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge early on are more likely to be strong, successful readers so it's important to get them involved with technology at an early age. Lastly, the page talks
about the importance of establishing a pattern of daily reading, and collaborating with parent to monitor and record a child’s growth in reading.


This article describes Rocket Phonics and its ability to establish stronger readers in the area of teaching phonics. Also, the article talks about a study that involved 43 homeschool children using Rocket Phoics. During the study, it was proven that using Rocket Phonics gives you a 4-1 ratio of reading improvement as compared to Hooked on Phonics and The Phonics Game.


This letter from Laura Ontario shows her gratitude towards Dr. Phonics and the Rocket Phonics Program in general. She talks about how both of her children are excited and enthusiastic now because of the program. She also discusses how her daughter, Alyssa, has drastically improved her confidence in reading and how her son is starting to recognize letters and sounds better all thanks to the Rocket Phonics Program.