

Educator Interviews

Literacy Challenge

October 2012

BILL & MELINDA
GATES *foundation*

4-8th grade: critical foundational period in literacy education

Learning to Read



Reading to Learn

- Early reading skills must be mastered so you can tackle more & harder text
- Interplay between reading and writing – progress in one contributes to progress in the another

Critical skills & target timing

Reading

Writing

K-3

- Fluency and accuracy*
- Basic comprehension

- Letters, punctuation, spacing, some spelling

4-6

- Vocabulary strategies* (e.g. context clues, word roots)
- Comprehension strategies
 - Main idea & supporting detail
 - Literary techniques
 - Inferencing*

- Paragraph structures
- Summarization
- Grammar
- The editing process*

7-8

- More, longer text
- Variety of genres
- More non-fiction
- Best evidence*

- More, longer, writing
- Persuasive writing*
- Computer-based

What digital tools could offer

Reading

- **Independent guided practice**
 - Lots of content available
 - Including non-fiction (science & social studies)
 - Age appropriate at varied levels
- **Teacher ability to direct practice by picking focus areas for guidance, activities and assessment**
 - Vocabulary
 - Main idea & supporting detail
 - Evidence
 - Fluency
 - Inferencing

Writing

- **Pre-writing**
 - Paragraph structures
 - Word webs
- **Editing practice**
 - Find errors in model paragraphs
- **Editing tools**
 - Scoring
 - Teacher ability to drive practice by picking which editing cycle to focus on (e.g. spelling, punctuation, grammar, word choice)
 - Crowdsourcing

What tools they use now

Reading*

- Achieve3000
- Accelerated Reader
- Aventa
- Compass Learning
- DRA Pearson
- eSpark
- Imagine Learning
- iPod voice recorder
- iReady
- iStation
- Lexia
- Kindle apps
- Plato Focus
- RazKids
- READ 180
- Reading AtoZ
- Reading Eggs
- Scholastic SRI
- SuccessMaker
- VocabJourney

Writing

- Blogs
- Google Docs
- Microsoft Word
- My Access
- MyOn Reader
- NoRedInk
- WriteOnline

Also in market, not used by our interviewees

- Root-1
- Fast ForWord
- Reading Reels
- Lightspan
- Voyager Passport
- Destination Reading
- Waterford
- WICAT
- Writing to Read

What they want to buy

Comprehensive

- Lots of text at lots of levels
- Guided practice on teacher-targeted strategies
- Built-in assessment and progress tracking

WHY?

- Single log-in / more efficient
- Teachers want 1 dashboard
- Practice all skills in varied ways over the year

Supplemental

- Drill down for kids struggling in a discrete area

WHY?

- Nail it and move on
- Depth of quality
- Comprehensive tools run out of content

What's hot

- **Leveled text**
- **Variety of activities**
- **Embedded assessment**
- **Guided practice as reinforcement**
- **Intuitive UI**
- **Online training for teachers**
- **Simple metric**
- **Complex text**

What's not

- **“Babyish” text for kids who are behind**
- **Too gamelike**
- **Redundancy**
- **Fully adaptive lessons inconsistent with class**
- **2+ hour PD training**

- **Complicated dashboard**
- **Same text with “CCSS-compliant” marketing**

Important dependencies

- **Common student login to multiple apps**
- **Formative data standardization**
- **Formative data solid enough for teachers to trust**
- **After-school access to computers (increasingly important after 7th grade)**

Who we talked to

Schools serving mostly low-income and minority students

80%+ free & reduced lunch

20%+ ELL

20%+ special ed

80%+ below grade level

Blended schools

2 teachers

2 instructional technology leads

3 literacy coaches

4 academic officers

Traditional schools

4 teachers

2 literacy coaches