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IBM Reading Companion

Web-based literacy grant program

"Imagine being a second grader, working with voice recognition software that helps you read and pronounce correctly. Reading Companion will complement our literacy curriculum, will be fun for our students and will be an added resource for our teachers."

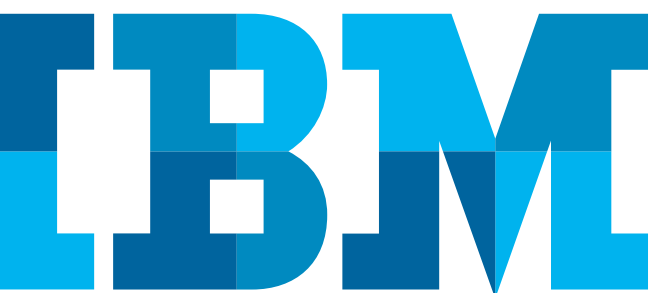—Louis Cuglietto, Principal, John F. Kennedy Magnet School, Port Chester, NY

Reading Companion provides a virtual library of books for learners to read aloud and receive immediate audio feedback through interactive software.

"You sound great!" Music to the ears of anyone learning to read. With IBM's Reading Companion program, emerging readers immediately hear such statements after reading aloud from a library of virtual books. The audio feedback is the result of a ground–breaking interactive software application developed by IBM Research.

More than 900 schools and nonprofit organizations in 26 countries are using the Reading Companion software which is free and can be accessed at www.readingcompanion.org.

Functionality, worldwide applications

At the heart of Reading Companion's effectiveness is its simplicity. Practicing readers are equipped with headset microphones that are connected to their computers. They select an e–book from the virtual library and read the phrases and sentences aloud.

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Reading Companion availability via the Web means ongoing, anytime/ anywhere access for children and adults in need of improving literacy skills.

The Reading Companion software "listens" and then provides immediate audio feedback on pronunciation and accuracy. Accurate readers receive positive reinforcement from the "companion tutor." Those readers having difficulties will hear a gentle reminder to try again or a correct reading of the words.

24/7 availability

Reading Companion's availability on the Web enables students to have access via their home, school or community organization, and users are able to continue their lessons exactly where they left off in previous sessions. In addition, Reading Companion includes evaluation reports for instructors and teachers on the progress of individual students.

Independent evaluations of the technology demonstrate that children who use the software tested significantly higher on word recognition and comprehension tasks. For adults, the software not only improved reading skills but also helped improve their English pronunciation.

Complementing existing literacy curriculum

"This interactive tool is a tremendous asset to have available in our classroom," said Kitty Bateman, Adult Literacy Coordinator, Queensborough Community College, located in New York City. "We have large numbers of adults in search of literacy competencies. This will work great with this audience and within the program we already have."

Additionally, the Ministry of Education in Chile officially recognized Reading Companion as a valuable tool for children's learning in that country. The program was included in the "Catalog of Digital Education Resources" that is available online for all schools in the country.

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