Investigating Early-Learning Software and it’s Benefits to ELL Students

It is a well-known fact that there is an achievement gap between different groups and subgroups of students, especially those defined by socioeconomic status, race, or gender. This achievement gap typically occurs because of a few things, there can be a lack of expectations by both the school and the parent, there is also a major correlation between economic disadvantages and how they ink to poor educational performance, and last, one of the main issues is that poorer performing students do not have access to the same educational programs that their higher-achieving counterparts do.

At the Waterford Research Institute, I am able to help see how different schools are able to gain access to higher quality education and close that achievement gap early through the use of personalized learning. The software my company provides for these children is not only free to them, it helps them gain and maintain grade level reading proficiency regardless of primary or prior knowledge of the English language. It has been both a pleasure and a difficult journey to help others see the benefits of Waterford while compared to other products.

One of the many great things about Waterford is that their curriculum is studied by a various number of outside sources in order to prove the efficiency and efficacy of the products we put into schools. In a recent study, Waterford has proven that the best programs for limited English proficient (LEP) students engage them at their own pace. Effective programs encourage language proficiency with interactive, context-rich, multi-cultural content delivered in a safe, personalized learning environment. Waterford leverages its software to maximize student exposure and comprehension to oral language. Waterford addresses the unique instructional needs of LEP students with five unique strategies. Waterford understands that students need to build language skills through regular exposure to oral English and opportunities to practice speaking aloud. Personalize instruction, which allows students to learn at their own level and pace. Emphasize high learning standards while respecting individual strengths and needs. Celebrate student diversity. Encourage language minority parents to be more active participants in their child’s education.

While there are many other early-learning products available, Waterford is the only one that is backed by a nonprofit organization, this means that they are the only ones that can use Title 1 dollars, (money that the federal government gives to schools with a certain number of students who are from lower-income families,) to purchase their software.

Waterford also understands that learners make sense of language in a variety of ways. For LEP students, it is important to provide extra support as they transition to English. Research asserts that for young English language learners, the initial instructional priority should be developing children’s oral proficiency in English. Waterford supports this instructional objective by exposing children to oral English with a rich vocabulary in a non-threatening and highly engaging multimedia format. Children learn oral English in songs, rhymes, and stories, as well as in verbal directions and instruction provided in fun interactive activities. Fluency activities in Waterford Reading also provide opportunities for learners to record themselves reading aloud. Lessons in Waterford’ software is often introduced through memorable songs that provide exposure to oral language.

The reason that early-learning software such as Waterford is needed is to help students receive the personalized learning experience that a typical school environment cannot recreate. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there is only 1 English language learner (ELL) instructor on average for every 150 ELL students (CDE 2014). Such limited one-on-one learning is not enough to address the significant learning and language deficits many English language learners bring to the classroom.

This is why it is a truly wonderful opportunity for ELL students to have access to software that will personalize their learning experience without taking away from the educational experience of the other students. The best part about personalized learning software is that even though students may begin instruction in the same spot within the curriculum, the adaptive sequencer within the curriculum quickly begins creating a customized path for each individual learner based on individual needs while instruction is taking place.

Another key issue that ELL students are facing is the lack of support from their parents. Through various research and reports, data has shown that language minority parents care deeply about their children’s schooling. However, language, cultural, and economic barriers often preclude their active involvement in their child’s education. Providing language and racial minority families with learning activities and materials for the home, as well as guidance in using those materials effectively, has proven to be an important and successful strategy for enabling parents to become involved in their children’s education (Clair 2011). This is why it is imperative that students receive instructional curriculum for both in-school and at-home use.

A high-quality educational software requires reporting tools to help monitor student progress and provide ongoing student data that teachers can use to inform their instructional decision with individual students and the whole class. They are powerful tools for helping teachers better understand each student’s unique strengths and needs. Teachers can stay apprised of and share student performance details with parents using individual student reports. In addition, ongoing professional development and support from expert trainers is beneficial for continuous improvement.

I believe that schools that focus on celebrating student diversity, both culturally and linguistically are able to produce long-lasting results while still maintaining the traditional school environment for all students. With the help of Waterford’s early learning software, students from a variety of diverse cultures are able to be represented. In fact, 22 different languages and 37 different cultures are represented, ranging from Swahili to Russian to Navajo.

The software frequently utilizes peer models, who are representative of the diverse ethnic and cultural landscape found in most of today’s classrooms, to help students connect learning to their own lives and cultural identity.

Impressionable early learners see positive images of themselves reflected back in videos, animations, and stories, as well as biographies of notable historical figures like Bessie Coleman, Sequoyah, and Srinivasa Ramanujan. Waterford’s early learning software includes folk songs from around the world sung in both English and the language of the country of origin. This is just one example of how children are able to see images of themselves reflected throughout the software activities. It is easy to see that great attention was given to make sure that the courseware is both culturally sensitive and culturally responsive.

I believe that the future of education lies within digital-early-learning software, and that companies who put the needs of their students above a pay-scale, are closer to achieving an equitable curriculum for all students.

*Studies Referenced:*

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