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Virtual Reading Coaches

My Reading Coach

FLRT — A Fluent Reading Trainer

(OS: Windows only)

More than ever, in this era of strict accountability, teachers need resources when kids do not progress at the expected rate. MindPlay, Inc. has created two computer-based reading programs to help: My Reading Coach and FLRT — A Fluent Reading Trainer are software programs that provide diagnostic initial and ongoing assessments, prescriptive computer-assisted instruction, and reports for the purpose of tracking individual and class progress, as well as planning for future instruction.

My Reading Coach was specifically designed to assist individuals, second grade through adults, who significantly struggle with reading and have demonstrated gaps in basic reading skills. It is deeply rooted in the experiences of Jim Larabee, a trained speech pathologist and special education teacher, who serves as the Coach, providing video instruction to the students. His instruction is clear and purposeful, and his interactions with students are always positive and supportive. Over time, students of all ages seem to develop a fondness for the "Coach."

The program systematically addresses three key areas critical to students becoming successful readers: phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency in oral reading, and comprehension. Students practice their skills through a variety of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic activities focused on developing and improving auditory and visual discrimination skills, decoding, reading, spelling, writing, and comprehension. To assist with fluency (speed, accuracy, and expression) in oral reading, the program introduces pause points, inflection, grammar, and "Read Like You Talk" exercises. Regardless of lesson components, however, emphasis is always on acquiring meaning.

First of all, students' competency levels are determined through a placement test. Based on the results, the program prescribes only the lessons needed for that particular student. The entire program consists of 85 interactive lessons (61 phonics and 24 grammar) with lesson instructions available in English or Spanish. The number of lessons an individual needs to complete is based upon the student's age or grade level. Once level 30 is reached, a reading passage and comprehension component is added to the student's prescribed computer-based program. Prior to lesson 30, fluency and comprehension are addressed through expert sheets provided in the administrator's manual and completed with the teacher. Throughout the program, review assessments are periodically provided to ensure the student is retaining the information. Problem lessons and review tests are always reassigned. The goal of the program is for the student to "own the learning" by demonstrating mastery of the basic reading skills over time.

Fortunately, I have worked in both public and private school settings which have made My Reading Coach available to learners struggling with reading issues due to dyslexia, learning disabilities, limited English,

gaps in basic reading skills, etc., and have personally witnessed its impact on student achievement time and again. My experience is that it significantly accelerates student learning and greatly contributes to opening doors to reading success for many students in which other approaches, programs and interventions previously had failed.

Newer to the scene is FLRT — A Fluent Reading Trainer which is designed to be used after a student has shown success in basic reading skills. Within the learning software of FLRT, students develop eye tracking, first with shapes or numbers, and then with sentences. Students also practice visual discrimination and recognition of sight and high frequency words. In addition, varied levels of decodable and non-decodable text in passage format are provided. The goal of the program is to increase silent reading speed while maintaining strength in comprehension. FLRT is able to bridge the two by providing more than 500 authentic literature stories which range in reading levels from 0.5 - 12.0. Selections include both expository and narrative text written in the original, natural language of the authors.

The program uses multiple strategies for teaching fluency and comprehension. The Word Match activity was specifically designed to develop word recognition and automaticity (speed and ease) as students practice matching written high-frequency and non-decodable words to the spoken word. In other activities, students learn to visually process information reducing the number of word fixations (pausing on a word) and regressions (taking a repeated look at a word already passed) allowing the eyes to track smoothly from left to right across the page. FLRT's Single Line and Multi-line activities ensure development of basic visual and perceptual processing skills resulting in reading with ease and comfort, increased effective reading rates, and improved comprehension. The comprehension questions which accompany each passage selection cover more than 15 comprehension skills, and allow teachers to select a preference of literal vs. analysis questions presented to the class or individual students.

Both My Reading Coach and FLRT come with administrator manuals that are easy to follow and explain the research-backed rationale for each component of the software programs. The individual student and class reports that teachers or administrators can generate provide meaningful information and data that should enhance purposeful planning of instruction to best meet the needs of the individual student or class. The comprehensible format of the reports also makes the information easy to share with parents.

Though both programs, My Reading Coach and FLRT, can stand on their own merits, the ongoing support provided by their publisher, MindPlay, adds to their value. The staff's willingness to assist, guide, and support goes well beyond that of the initial purchase. MindPlay's leadership has a genuine passion for helping children and adults overcome obstacles and barriers to reading, and that passion is at the heart of their mission, evident in the quality of the My Reading Coach and FLRT software and can be felt with every interaction with the MindPlay team.

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