

Read Naturally Live

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| Title | Read Naturally Live |
| Authors | Read Naturally, Inc. Candyce Ihnot and Tom Ihnot |
| Contact Information | http://www.readnaturally.com |
| Type of Product | Web-based reading program |
| Platform | Windows XP and higher Mac OS X 10.4 and higher |
| Minimum hardware requirements | Computer with Internet connection (512 Kbps and faster) |
| Supplementary software | Web browser with following plug-ins: – Adobe Flash Player version 10 or later – Adobe Reader versions 8.2 and higher |
| Price | A 12-month subscription: 1 seat: \$149.00 6 seats: \$299.00 (\$49.83/seat) 30 seats: \$599.00 (\$19.97/seat) 130 seats: \$1999.00 (\$15.38/seat) |

Introduction

Read Naturally Live is an online reading assessment and intervention program geared towards helping learners of English (as a first or additional language) improve their reading fluency and comprehension. The program also aims to help teachers (and/or parents) monitor their students' progress in developing reading skills. This web-based program can be used by schools, language institutions, teachers, and even parents at home, and with students across a wide range of language proficiency levels from first graders up to adults. By using Read Naturally Live, educators can easily differentiate

reading instruction and place learners of different levels into the tier that is motivating and engaging to them.

Read Naturally Live consists of two modules: Benchmark Assessor Live, an online assessment tool containing passages for each grade level used to assess reading fluency, and Read Naturally Live, a reading intervention program used to help improve reading skills; this second module is the focus of this review. In the following sections I will take a closer look at the program and the ways it can help English learners improve their reading proficiency.

The Program

Read Naturally Live allows the main administrator of a given account to add schools, classes, students, and staff members with different roles (principal, school administrator, teachers, etc.) assigned to them. Staff members in different roles will be allowed different levels of access to the settings of the program and permitted to make a variety of changes to those settings. For example, only account administrators are able to add schools, whereas, any staff member can add students. Members in data entry or principal roles can add principals, school administrators, and teachers. Similarly, staff members assigned different roles in the program have differing levels of access to allocate licenses to schools, distribute them to other members, or assign them to students. Each member can log in to their own page (see Figure 1.) with the user name and password specific to them (which can be changed at any time from the account settings page).

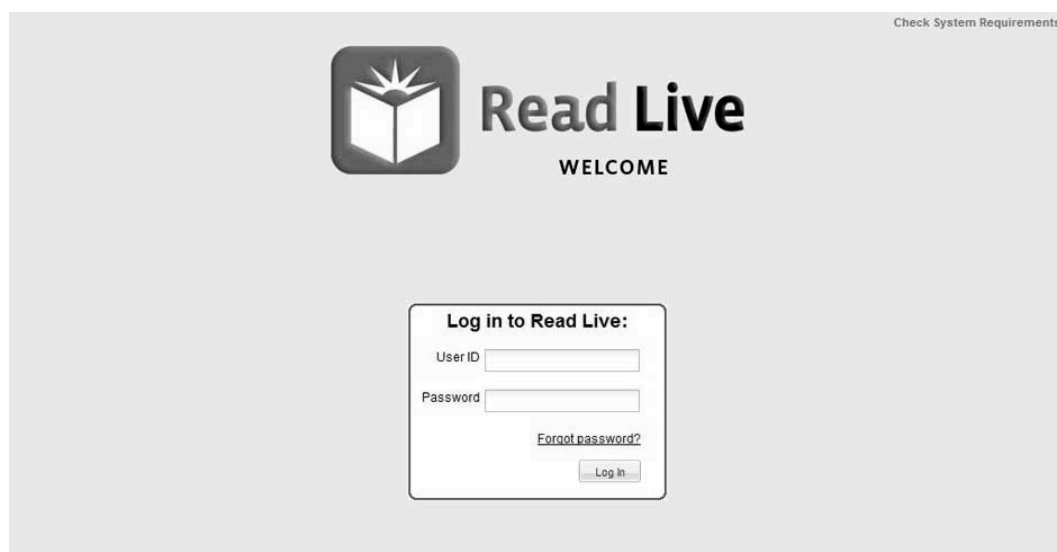


Figure 1. *Read Live log in page*

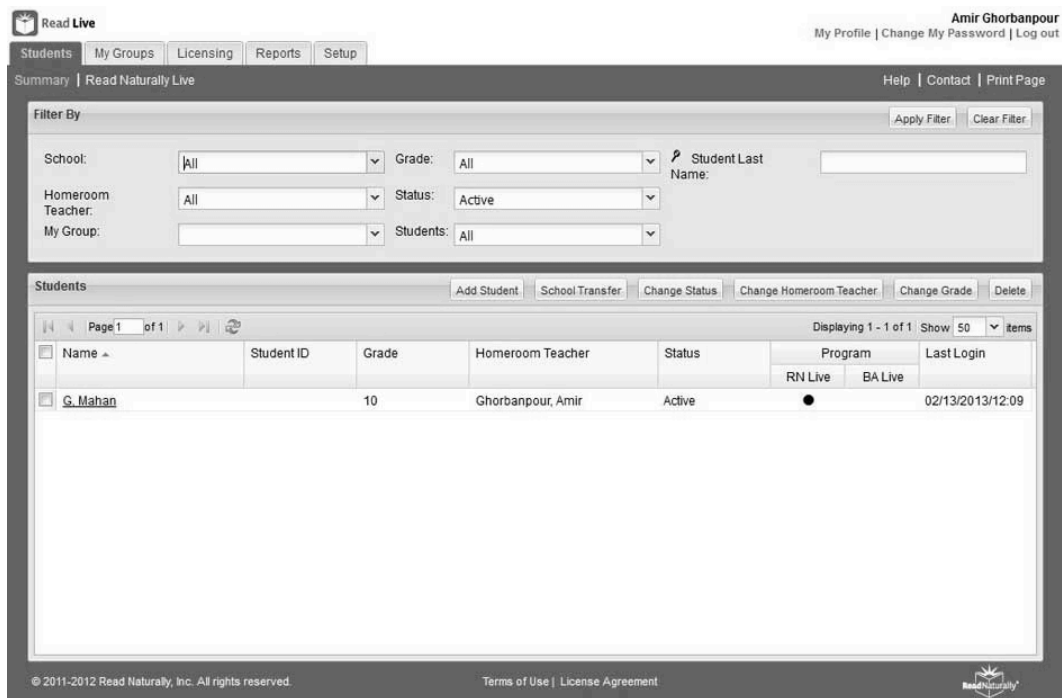


Figure 2. *Read Live account administrator's page*

After having assigned licenses to students, teachers can place learners into the program. Students must be placed individually into the correct level and series, and assigned appropriate goals in Read Naturally Live. Correct placement of the students is very important to their success throughout the program.

The reading materials included in Read Naturally Live are in a two part series: the sequenced series and the phonics series, which features simple phonics rules. Read Naturally Live includes a placement test (see Figure 3.) that functions based on the student's performance on a reading passage. The student reads the passage (see Figure 4.) in a specific period of time (e.g., one minute) and the teacher counts the words missed or the errors made. When the time is over, by clicking on the last word read by the student, the program calculates the number of words read, then recommends a series and level appropriate to that particular learner. The teacher can alternatively decide to manually select the series, level, and goal for the given student.

Read Naturally Live Student Placement

Student: Mahan G

Estimate this student's reading level, and then select the corresponding placement testing level from the list. Click Next to continue.

Series available for each placement testing level

| Placement Testing Level | Sequenced Series | Phonics Series |
|-------------------------|------------------|--|
| 1.0 | 1.0 | 0.8a short a, o, i 0.8b short u, e, and mixed |
| 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.3a long vowels with silent e 1.3b long vowel pairs |
| 2.0 | 2.0 | 1.8a digraphs 1.8b blends |
| 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.3a r-controlled and soft c/g 2.3b other letter combinations |
| 3.0 | 3.0 | 2.6a short a, e, i 2.6b short o, u, and mixed 2.7a long a, e, i 2.7b long o, u, and mixed |
| 3.5 | 3.5 | |
| 4.0 | 4.0 | |

Close Print Placement Stories Next

Figure 3. Read Naturally Live student placement

Read Naturally Live Student Placement 4.0

Student: Mahan G

Start Timing Cancel Timing Reading Guide On / Off What do I do?

Spiral Island

Many people dream of living on a tropical island. Richart Sowa made this dream a reality—by constructing his own island! Sowa wanted to live in a way that did not hurt the environment. In the 1990s, he began collecting plastic bottles along the coast of Mexico. Over time, he gathered more than 250,000 of them. Using nets to hold the bottles together, Sowa made the base of a floating artificial island. He placed wood on top of this base and then covered it with sand. Sowa also planted trees for shade, plus fruits and vegetables for food. The plants' roots grew around the underwater bottles and made the island's base more stable.

Sowa called his creation Spiral Island. The island was

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Timing Results

Words read:

Enter the number of words the student missed:

Timing Score (words correct per minute):

Figure 4. Read Naturally Live student placement (sample reading test)

Read Naturally Live also allows teachers to generate reports of students' performance to keep track of their progress over time, and to document the performance of a given student, a class, or a school. Example reports can be seen in Figure 5.

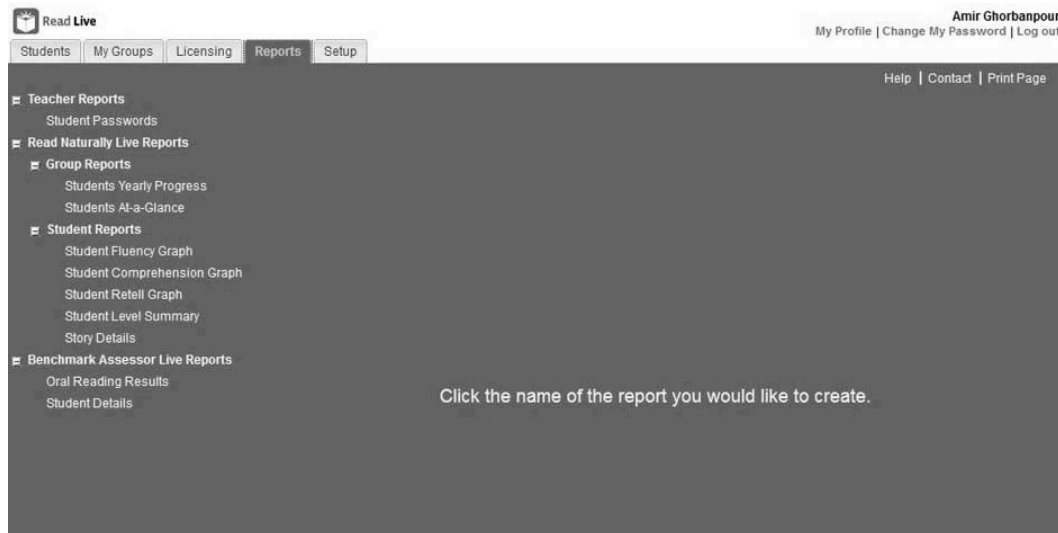


Figure 5. *Read Live reports page*

Like teachers and other staff members, students use the log in page and a user name and password of their own to enter their account. After logging in, students click on the Read Naturally Live icon and are then directed to a page of stories (relevant to their tier) from which to choose. Students are then directed through the steps of the program to accomplish reading-related activities of each unit. The different sections of each unit (story) are:

Key Words: In this step some key words of the story are displayed on the page, and the student is prompted to read the words along with the audio. The student will see the words again later in the next steps of the lesson.

Prediction: The student is asked to write a prediction about the story based on the key words, the title, and a provided picture. At the end of the lesson, the teacher will assess if the answer is correct or not.

Cold Timing: This step consists of a vocabulary game named Wordtastic, as seen in Figure 6, and the Cold Timing feature (see Figure 7), in which the student reads the passage on her/his own or in the presence of the teacher as a primary means of assessing reading speed and fluency. If the teacher is not present at this stage, the student identifies her/his own errors. In Wordtastic, the student is given a word at a time and three choices from which to select a synonym or antonym of that word. This

activity may provide a good vocabulary exercise for the student to better understand the meaning of the words before proceeding to further steps.

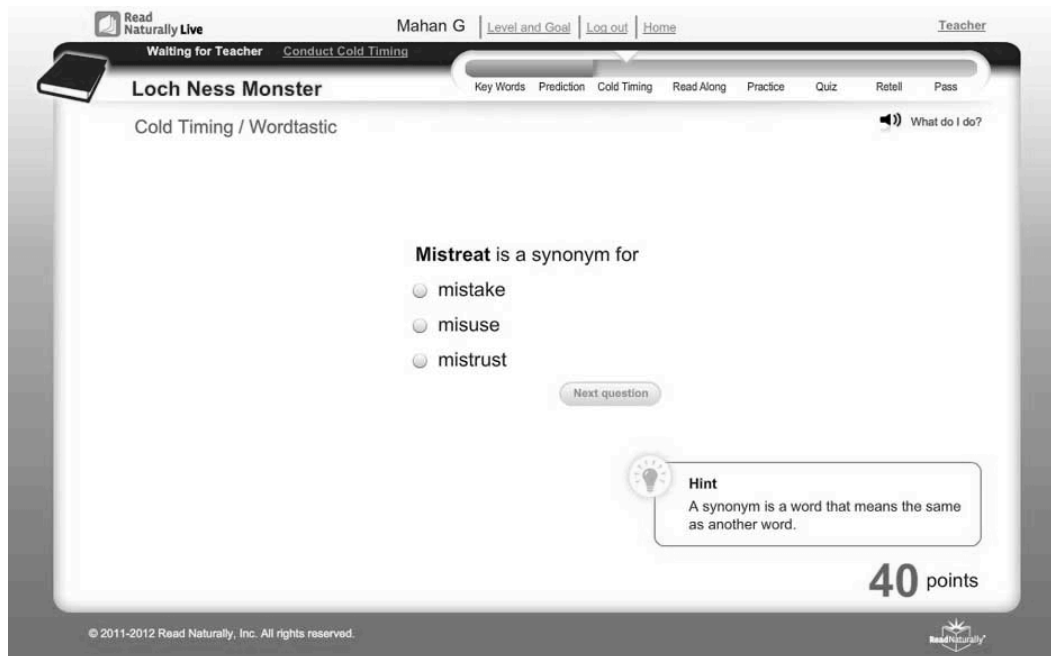


Figure 6. Wordtastic

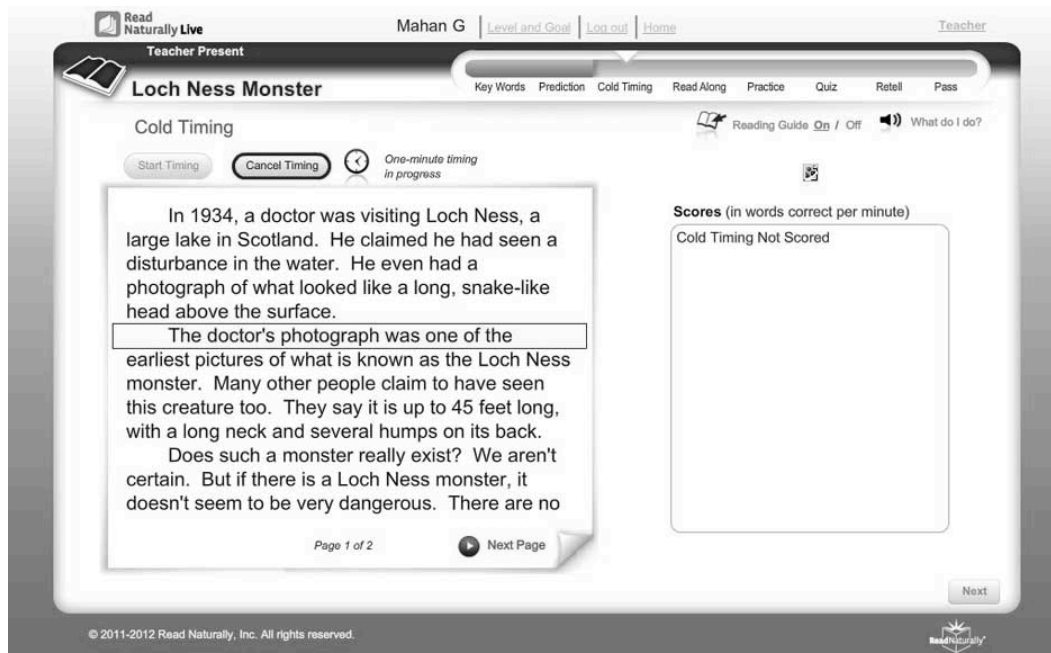


Figure 7. Cold Timing (teacher present)

Evaluation

The Read Naturally Live developers assert that the program is based on three strategies that research has shown improve reading proficiency: teacher modelling, repeated reading, and progress monitoring. My evaluation of the program is divided by these strategies and addresses how well Read Naturally Live promotes them in learners' reading skills development.

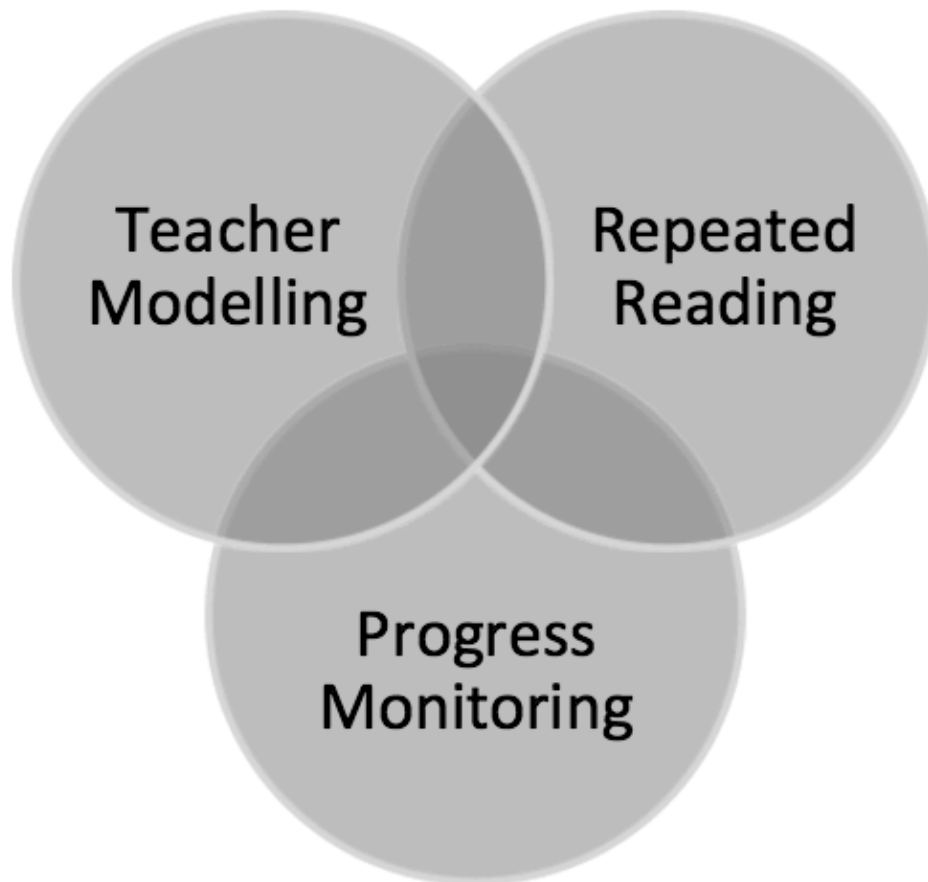


Figure 8. *Read Naturally Live strategy*

Teacher Modelling: In Read Naturally Live, a proficient reader models correct reading at a comfortable rate for the student. The student reads along while listening to a recording of a fluent reader (in the Read Along step). This helps the student learn the pronunciation of new words and encourages proper expression and phrasing. The student can listen to the audio model and practise along with it for as many times as needed.

Repeated Reading: Repeated reading is another strategy that research has shown improves reading fluency and comprehension (Meyer & Felton, 1999; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003; Tan & Nicholson, 1997). In Read Naturally Live, students practise reading a story until they can read it at the ideal reading rate goal set for them (in the Practice step).

Progress Monitoring: Read Naturally Live also allows monitoring of student progress. By doing so, students become more involved in their own learning process, and teachers remain aware of each student's progress. Students may monitor their progress by graphing the number of words read correctly before and after practising, and this visual representation motivates them to continue to read and improve.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that reading skills are of high importance for language learners, it is often the case that learners consider reading exercises time consuming and boring. Hence, there is a need to use innovative, interactive, and interesting ways to present the reading material to engage students more in the learning process. Computer technology and the Internet can be of great help in facilitating this engagement, because in an online environment, the interaction between the reader, the text, and the activity may be more dynamic and interactive (McEneaney, 2006).

All in all, Read Naturally Live, with its various challenging and scaffolded steps and interactive exercises, provides a powerful online tool to help students develop their reading skills while they enjoy the learning process. The program can help students improve reading fluency while at the same time focus on comprehension and vocabulary. In short, the program can be a great help for both teachers and students of English as first or second language to improve reading skills.

References

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About the Reviewer

Amir Ghorbanpour <amirgh1984@yahoo.com> holds an MA in TEFL from Payame Noor University of Tehran. He is currently an English instructor and educational web developer, and his research interests include educational technology, computer assisted language learning/teaching, and second language acquisition.

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