COONEY CENTER SANDBOX

Reading Reimagined

Partner
Advanced Education Research & Development Fund (AERDF)

Product
Through Reading Reimagined, AERDF is producing an evidence-based edtech intervention to support literacy development for struggling readers between 9—13 years old.

Goals
Our shared goal was to inform product development to help tweens who struggle with decoding to improve their reading skills through age appropriate, culturally relevant, interest-based experiences and content.

Research questions
The Reading Reimagined team sought to understand the motivations, interests, reading habits, reading identity, and barriers to reading for 9—13-year-old reluctant readers.

Child-centered Approach
The Joan Ganz Cooney Center recruited 11 9—13-year-old children from across the US; all were identified as reluctant readers by their caregivers. We held two 2-hour workshops online to engage the children using the cooperative inquiry method of participatory design; they were active participants in making design recommendations.
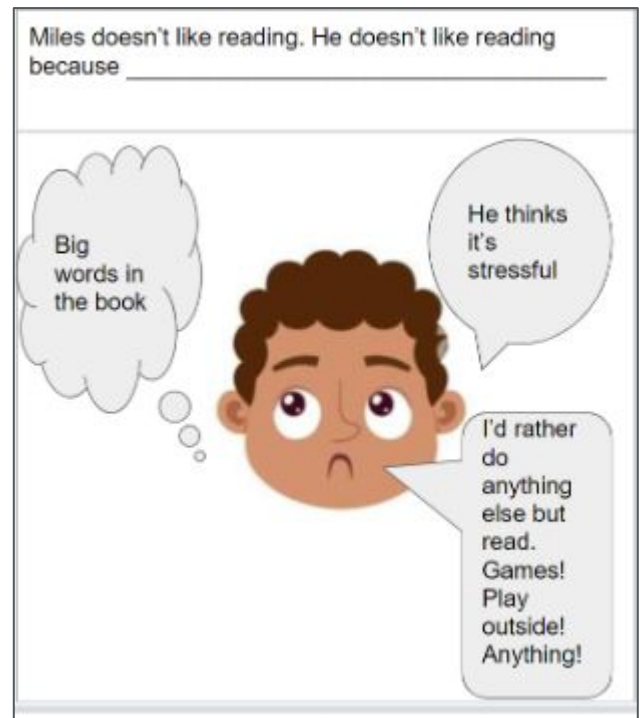
"[Mason] resists reading at all costs. Part of this is a lack of desire to sit still, and part of it is that no one has given him a satisfactory reason to believe that reading is valuable. Especially now, with ChatGPT, he seems to think he will never have to read or write on his own."

—Parent of 13-year-old participant

Findings & Recommendations

1

Finding
Children reported that one barrier to reading was stress caused by the speed at which they were expected to read or answer comprehension questions, and the anxiety they have when they see "big words."

Recommendations
Create an intervention or app to break the tension users feel around reading. This could be by providing calming options or relief through humor. Participants also mentioned that music could be used to support focus, mood, and mindfulness.

2

Finding
Children were often unmotivated by existing literacy apps that were designed for younger users.

Recommendations
Highlight dynamic, interesting content including stories with adventure or that incorporate surprising, random, or weird elements. Older learners also want ways to "swap out" content that is not interesting to them.

3

Finding
Children want to see more inclusive digital spaces for them and their peers.

Recommendations
Offer avatars with diverse racial and gender identities. Include supports for readers with learning differences. These could include ways to change the speed of the game or audio options for some of the text so that all children can, for example, understand the rules or instructions.

Miles becomes a better reader by your technology. How do we know this?

He starts suggesting books to people! He can help his friends understand parts of books they don't understand.

He can summarize a book or explain a line to someone who doesn't understand it.

He even starts pre-ordering books!

"It needs to be dyslexia-friendly. I have dyslexia and I have seen a lot of games like this. My friends say they're really fun but they're not dyslexia-friendly so there's no reading option where you click a button and it reads the word for you. A lot of kids with dyslexia would probably want to play it but they couldn't read the words that well. It needs to read some of the words for you. "

—Ella, 10-year-old participant

The Cooney Center Sandbox is a design and innovation lab that helps digital media innovators create products that are good for kids.

SESAME WORKSHOP
Joan Ganz Cooney Center

Learn more: cooneycenter.org/sandbox
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Our Partner:

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