Time-on-Task During Independent Reading: The Effect of the Use of iPads on Student Accountability and Time-on-Task

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A Master's Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science in Education-Reading

Major Advisor's Signature						
Date						

University of Wisconsin-River Falls 2013

Abstract

Independent reading within the classroom literacy block is an important aspect of learning to read and may be effective if the time is used well. With the introduction of new literacies due to access to e-readers, iPods, iPads, tablets and books on computers, independent reading is changing. The purpose of this study was to examine time-on-task during independent reading time in a second grade classroom with paper books compared to time-on-task with e-readers. Students were given a pre and post-study reading attitude survey. Students were observed during independent reading during their regular classroom literacy block while reading paper books. iPads were later introduced as an option for reading during this independent time. A comparison of the results indicated that student's time-on-task did not increase with the iPads, however, the time spent reading increased. While students may be engaged with the features available on ereaders, there needs to be more research to determine the effects, positive or negative, on literacy learning. Further research was conducted in a third grade class to determine if student accountability for their independent reading time would increase their time-on-task. Overall the students in this group were on task. Appropriately-leveled reading material seemed to increase time-on-task more than the accountability requirement for these readers.

Keywords: time-on-task, independent reading, accountability, iPad, technology

Time-on-Task During Independent Reading:

The Effect of the Use of iPads on Student Accountability and Time-on-Task

Introduction

Independent reading is an activity that occurs daily in the classrooms of elementary and intermediate schools across the nation. While the format of this independent reading time may differ slightly in the time allocated and the amount of teacher interaction with students, the intent is to provide readers practice to strengthen their skills. The reading curriculum used in the district where I teach is LEAD21 published by Wright Group (2010). The format of the program lends itself to be used with The Daily 5, a classroom structure for language arts instruction developed by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser (Boushey & Moser, 2006). The Daily 5 components are Readto -Self, Read-to-Someone, Word Work, Listen-to-Reading, and Work on Writing. These activities are carried out by students independently while the teacher works with small groups or individuals. Read-to-Self is independent reading practice and Read-to-Someone is an opportunity to read aloud with a peer to practice fluency and reading strategies, as well as, to enjoy a variety of material. The focus of this research was on the Read-to-Self time in a second grade classroom conducted in the spring of the year. When students are asked what text is, they inevitably pull their hands up below their chins, peer down and mimic typing on a cell phone. They say, "You know, texting on your phone!" Due to students' increasing use of iPads, iPods, e-readers and other electronic devices the researcher examined student time- on -task with text and wondered if the use of an iPad as an e-reader would change the amount of time spent on-task when compared to time-on-task reading a traditional print book. As a result, the Read-to-Someone choice became very popular after iPads were introduced in the classroom. Further research conducted in the fall of the following school year in a self-contained third grade classroom with some of the same

students from the previous study focused on student time-on-task during Read-to- Self before and after student accountability measures were introduced. The researcher also wondered if accountability of this independent time would increase the amount of time-on-task. The reading level of the material was also tracked to determine if readability would affect time-on-task, as well.

Review of the Literature

Independent Reading Time

Many educators agree that students benefit from time spent reading. Among the benefits are increased vocabulary, increased fluency in word recognition, and improved comprehension (Yopp & Yopp, 2003). They noted, "It is important that teachers allocate time for reading, and it is equally important that they ensure students actually read during that time" (Yopp & Yopp, 2003, p. 284). Programs such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Independent Reading (IR) have been used for many years, and educators have differing opinions on whether this independent reading time is useful in improving student reading achievement. The goal of the structured programs is to give students time with self-selected materials to foster engagement. The teacher's role is to model good reading, guide text selection, model strategies and give feedback (Trudel, 2008). The aspects of IR that seem to foster growth are student reflection and student records of their reading. For instance, studies have found that students tend to be more engaged during reading time when they provide reflections on what they have read (Kelly, 1990). Researchers found that peer discussion or teacher conferencing added to SSR may increase reading scores slightly. It is thought that older students who can read benefit more from independent reading time than younger students who are still learning to read (Ruetzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008).

Further, researchers have found SSR to be helpful to students of average reading ability but not to above- or below-average readers (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008). Questions regarding the role of the teacher during independent reading models remain as do questions regarding what students benefit from independent reading time. If teachers are modeling reading behavior while their students are reading independently, they are not able to monitor their students to be sure they are reading.

Byron, Flawson, and Reutzel(2003) demonstrated that when classroom teachers monitored their students during SSR through brief interactions and accountability conferences, even the most disengaged students in the class remained on task for up to 3 weeks without additional monitoring visit. (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008, p.38).

With many models of independent reading time, students are encouraged to choose their own materials. When students are not taught how to determine what materials are at their instructional level or what is referred to as "good fit books" in the Daily 5 system, off-task behaviors may increase rendering this independent time useless for increasing student reading achievement. One study found that students spend the largest amount of time-on-task while working at their instructional level (containing 93-97% known words) (Treptow, 2006).

Digital Literacy: Defining Text

With the expanding use of electronic devices such as iPads, iPods, tablets, and cell phones, the definition of text is expanding as well. Along with this expansion comes the changing definition of what literacy means (Larson, 2009). Text is no longer just written messages.

Because today's students are engaged in multimodal experiences outside of school, far beyond the traditional paper, pencil, and print texts, schools must find a way to expose students to these forms of communication and literacies (Larson, 2009). Educators must be aware of the difference between technology integration which involves new literacies in a digital format and curricular integration. Research has indicated that much technology use in literacy classrooms is in the form of technological integration rather than curricular integration (Hutchinson, Beschorner, & Schmidt-Crawford, 2012).

The effects of e-books in literacy instruction are noted as "Rosenblatt's (1938/1995) transactional theory of reader response explains that each reader breathes life into the text through personal meaning- making and individual experiences. e-Books clearly offer new opportunities and extend possibilities for personal interpretation of and engagement with texts" (Hancock, 2008; Larson, 2009, p. 257). Examples of this engagement can be found in the form of voice and video recordings, drawings, and electronic notes within digital text.

e-Book Features: Do they enhance or detract from learning?

While researchers are finding increased engagement among students using iPads for reading, according to one study "there was not a corresponding rise in achievement. In fact, among young 'low' readers, their comprehension scores actually decreased" (Sheppard, 2011, p. 12). Sheppard also found that students were more interested in exploring the features of the iPads than they were in discussion of the reading. In this case, the technology was clearly a distraction from the comprehension/synthesis of the material being read. Other educators have cited similar experiences where the features of the e-readers have become a distraction. "The music and games that are loaded into kids' e-books can end up being more distracting that useful," says Lisa Guermsey, director of the Early Education Initiative at the New America Foundation. "The technology is so exciting that the conversation focuses on what button to push instead of the content" (Deam, 2013, p. 80). Making annotations and highlighting with an iPad are easier than

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making notes in a traditional book, but sharing devices among classes or with other students within a class makes this task one more item needing to be managed. It was also found to be a distraction by researchers that students are able to modify settings. This can be especially distracting when multiple groups are sharing devices, and settings, such as language, need to be adjusted for different users (Sheppard, 2011).

Other studies have confirmed more positive aspects of the use of iPads such as increased vocabularies in pre-kindergarteners who are not native English speakers. Kim Floyd, a kindergarten teacher, has seen success with increased engagement among her students. The children are excited when she brings the iPads out. The devices have been used to help children "understand words by highlighting and defining those they struggle with," (Deam, 2013, p. 80) and her kindergarten students "have vocabularies more typical of second graders" (Deam, 2013, p. 80).

Some reluctant readers feel more comfortable with an e-reader because those around them can't see what they are reading, eliminating embarrassment related to reading levels, a common piece of elementary literacy programs. Further, high school students have been found to use devices as dictionaries and thesauri. Being able to use these features discretely as a means to gain information was viewed as a positive aspect of using devices (Crichton, Pegler, & White, 2012). Another feature, enjoyed by some reluctant readers and many grade-level readers, is the presentation of graphic novels. The second-grade students observed by this researcher spent more time with the graphic novels available on the iPads than many of the other choices, and they were more likely to read the selection in its entirety. According to Deam, one mother found her reluctant fourth-grade son attracted to the graphic novels on a Nook© reader. Knowing the

child as a visual learner, she planned to use the technology to help hook him in ways that traditional literature could not (Deam, 2013).

e-Books or Traditional Books: What do students prefer?

In a study done by Lotta C. Larson (2009), fifth-grade students read electronic versions of books. In a pre-reading survey some of the students were agreeable to the format while others expressed a preference for traditional books. During the readings, all of the students interacted with the text through the use of tools provided in the electronic format. After using e-books, the fifth-grade readers preferred the format in large part due to the ease of interacting with the text through the use of e-tools. The young students this researcher observed were very interested in using the dictionary feature to hear words pronounced and the word definitions read aloud as the text was highlighted. In a study done by Larson (2009), second graders also took advantage of the advanced functions of e-readers to adjust fonts and listen to difficult passages (Agosto, 2012). Some suggest that in the future as e-books become more common in society, children may come to prefer the format over paper books; however, for now, it appears children are equally comfortable with both formats if quality instruction is provided (Agosto, 2012). As reported "Sally Maynard(a teacher) loaned e-books to six children ages seven to twelve and their parents and studied their use. At the end of the two-week period, all of the adults expressed preferences for reading paper books, but the children's preferences were split, with half preferring paper books and half preferring e-books" (Agosto, 2012, p. 39).

Drawbacks

Some of the drawbacks of using an iPad are the required use of electricity to keep the devices charged, availability of reading materials, apps, synchronizing content onto a class set of devices, management of shared devices, and access to the internet (Crichton et al., 2012).

Obviously, planning for the care of the iPad takes more consideration than that of a traditional print book. Students need to be taught how to handle the device to keep it in working order. It is time-consuming to synchronize books onto the devices and this needs to be taken into consideration when planning for classroom use. According to Crichton et al. (2012),

Our findings suggest the IT support people and school-based administration must grapple with three significant issues. First, they must establish a digital commons through which the iDevices are synced, powered, maintained, and managed. Second, they must manage the iTunes account that organizes all apps loaded onto individual devices and support the sharing of content. Thirdly, these devices offer teachers greater independence in terms of updates and determining selection of apps (applications) than is traditionally the case. (p. 27).

Many books are not yet available in the e-reader format, nor do districts have budgets established to buy these books. Media Specialists are struggling to weigh the benefits of purchasing print books to which any child may have access. Spending their dollars on e-books, that can only be accessed by those with devices, or the sparse number of devices available in the district where one-one devices are not yet available is also a consideration (K. Newman, personal communication, April 6, 2013).

Conclusion

Due to the iPad having just become available in 2010, there is still much research needing to be done, over time, to determine how e-reading effects the engagement and growth of learners. At this point there does not seem to be strong evidence to support the use of iPads or to refute their effectiveness. It seems that student attitudes toward reading are more indicative of their reading achievement than the use of an e-reader. Even with the use of technology, parent

participation and teacher effectiveness will play an important role in educational outcomes for our learners. "Technology will never replace good parenting and good teachers" (Deam, 2013, p. 80).

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the pilot study were sixteen second grade students from one self-contained classroom; nine boys and seven girls. There were no minority students in the group, nor students with special needs. Students in the follow-up study were eight third grade students from one self-contained classroom; four boys and four girls. There were no minority students in the group, nor students with special needs. Four students were at or above grade level in their reading ability and four students were below grade level in their reading ability.

Setting

The pilot study took place in a rural, Midwest elementary school with a student population of 412 in Pre-K through Grade Two. There are five sessions of half-day Pre-K, six sections of kindergarten, six sections of first grade and seven sections of second grade in the building. Students were observed in their regular second grade classroom during their language arts block. A total of eight reading sessions were observed before the iPads were introduced and nine reading sessions were observed after the iPads were introduced. The follow-up study took place in the same rural Midwest community in the intermediate school with a student population of 357 in grades three through five. There are six sessions of third grade, five sections of fourth grade and, five sections of fifth grade in the building. Students were observed in their regular third grade classroom during their language arts block. A total of six reading sessions were

observed before accountability measures were introduced and six reading sessions were observed after the measures were introduced.

Materials

Pilot study students were given the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (See Appendix A) before observations began and again after the observations were complete. Four iPads with the Storia application from Scholastic were used in the pilot study. The Storia application has an electronic library where students may choose the e-books they read during Read-to-Self time. There were fourteen books and one magazine from which to choose. The reading levels of the materials ranged from G-N using the Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading levels. A stop watch was used to record the time students were on-task during observations. In the follow-up study, students were also given the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey before observations begun and again after the observations were complete. Students used their self-selected reading materials, which were kept in their own book boxes, during Read-to-Self time. The reading levels of the materials ranged from J-Q using the Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading levels. A stop watch was used to record the time students were on-task during observations.

Procedures

In both the pilot study and the follow-up study a letter was sent home with students to explain the study and gain parent permission for their children to participate. Students were then observed during independent reading time in their regular classroom a total of 17 sessions over a six week period in the pilot study. The total amount of time the students were participating in Read-to-Self was recorded, and a stop watch was used to record the total amount of time the student were on-task during the reading. Time-on-task was considered the actual time students were engage with the text and pictures in their reading materials. The percentage of time on task

was then calculated. Paper books were self- selected by students from their classroom library and the school library. After eight sessions of observation, the researcher introduced the class to iPads. Students were given the basic instructions for safe handling and operation of the devices. Reading materials were self-selected by students from the Storia library application which was on each iPad. A few of the titles children had to choose form included *Bad Pets, True Tales of Misbehaving Animals, A Jigsaw Jones Mystery: The Case of Hermie the Missing Hamster, Scooby-Doo! Camp Fear, True or False; Mammals, National GeographicKids; Sea Turtles, and Ready, Freddy! Tooth Trouble. After the iPads were introduced, the students were observed for nine more sessions during the independent reading time during the classroom literacy block.*

In the follow-up study students were observed during independent reading time in their regular classroom a total of 12 sessions over a five-week period. The total amount of time students participated in Read-to-Self was recorded and a stop watch was used to record the total amount of time each student was on-task during the reading. The percentage of time on task was then calculated. After six sessions of observation, the researcher introduced the students to written and electronic methods to demonstrate accountability for their time during Read-to-Self. Written recording forms and voice recording apps on the iPod were provided. Students were given instructions to record a summary including characters, setting, problems and solutions of their readings daily. The reading logs were examined with the student by the researcher at which time, students were asked basic comprehension questions regarding their material. Reading materials were self-selected by students from their book boxes. After the accountability measures were introduced, the students were observed for six more sessions during the independent reading time during the classroom literacy block. During both observations periods, before and

after accountability measures, the researcher checked in with students while they were reading to check comprehension and fluency with the material.

Findings and Results

In the pilot study, quantitative data show that students were on-task 68% of the time during independent reading while reading with paper books. The average length of the reading time was 4.28 minutes. While reading e-books on the iPads students were on-task 57% of the time. The average length of the reading time was 7.24 minutes. While the percentage of time-on-task went down 11% after the introduction of the iPads, the time spent reading actually increased, on average, 2.96 minutes per session. (See Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.)

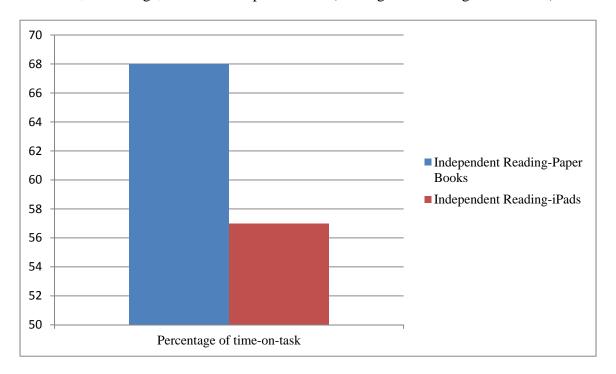


Figure 1

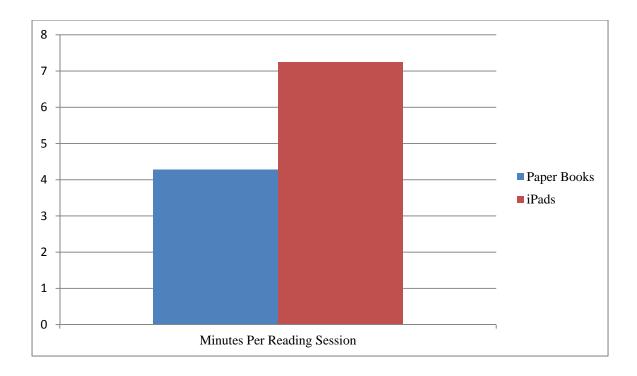


Figure 2

The qualitative data collected in the pilot study with the pre- and post-study Elementary Reading Attitude Survey are shown in Figure 3 below. Of the fourteen students who completed both surveys, the full scale raw scores increased for six students, decreased for five students and remained the same for three students. Attitudes regarding recreational reading increased favorably for six students, decreased for five students and remained the same for three students. Regarding academic reading attitudes, nine students decreased, three increased and two stayed the same. Eleven of the fourteen children had access to iPads or other devices at home. Of those eleven students, ten have read books on their device. On the pre-study *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* eleven of fourteen students indicated they enjoyed Read-to-Self. The results on the post-study survey indicated ten of the fourteen students enjoyed Read-to-Self.

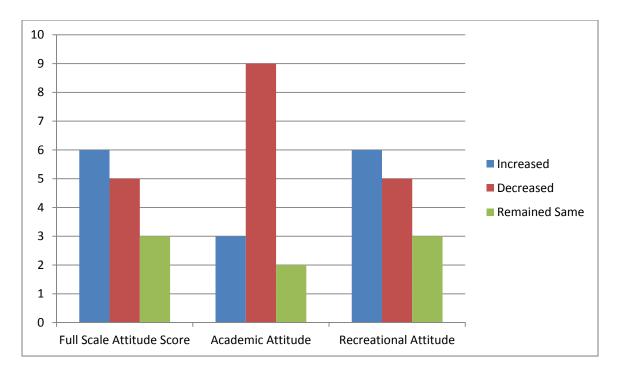


Figure 3

The quantitative data collected in the follow-up study show that at or above grade level students were on on-task 92% of the time during independent reading before accountability measures were introduced, and this same group was on-task 99% of the time during independent reading after accountability measures were introduced. These students were reading appropriately leveled material 100% of the time.

Students reading below grade level in were on-task 85% of the time during independent reading before accountability measures were introduced. This same group's time-on-task dropped to 81% of the time after accountability measures were introduced. This group was reading appropriately leveled material 45% of the time. (See figure 4 below.)

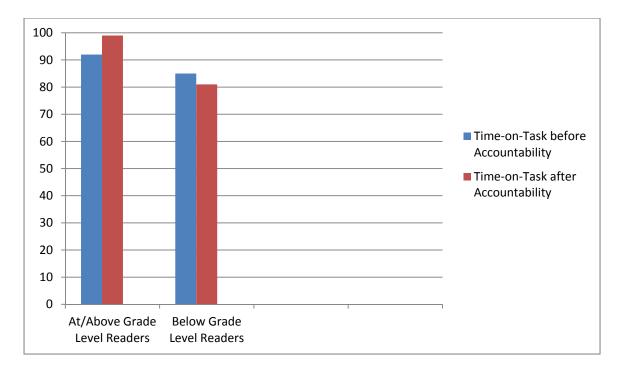
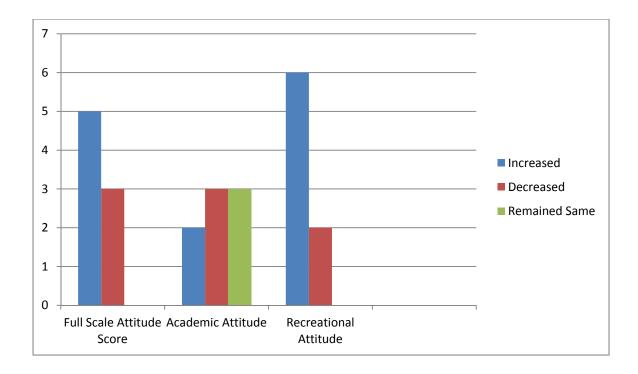


Figure 4

The qualitative data collected with pre- and post-study *Elementary Reading Attitude*Survey are shown in Figure 5 below. Of the eight students studied, the full scale scores increased favorably for five students and decreased for three students. Academic reading attitudes increased favorably for two students, decreased for three students and remained the same for three students. Attitudes regarding recreational reading increased favorably for six students and decreased for two students. 100% of the students reading at or above grade level indicated a positive change in their view of recreational reading, while only 50% of the students reading below grade level indicated a positive change in their view of recreational reading.



Interpretation and Analysis

Figure 5

Pilot study results show the average time-on-task during independent reading did not increase for the whole group, however, the amount of time the students spent reading during read-to-self did increase after the introduction of the iPads. Time-on-task was the amount of time students were actually engaged with text or illustrations. The amount of time spent reading was the total amount of time students were in the designated areas within the classroom for Read-to-Self and Read-to-Someone. The average amount of time students spent on this activity before iPads were introduced was four minutes. The time increased to seven minutes after the iPads were introduced. This would seem to indicate students are more engaged with the text. A side effect of the iPads was a significant increase in the number of students choosing Read-to-Self as one of their rotations during the literacy block. During Read-to-Self before iPads there were rarely more than three children on the reading rug. After the iPads were introduced, the number increased significantly. There were always four students because there were four iPads. Most

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days there were three or four children reading paper books on the rug, just waiting for their turn with the iPad. If they did not get a turn, they were happy to look over the shoulder of the students who did have the iPads. One positive effect of using iPads as e-readers was a significant increase in the processing and sharing of information. The students were reading aloud to each other, making connections to the readings and having rich conversations. While students were not actually engaged with the text on the page and reading in the traditional sense, the researcher had a hard time viewing this behavior as off–task even though the data reported are strictly the amount of time students are reading quietly to themselves.

Overall, the follow-up study students were on task 89% of the time they were observed, compared to 68% of the time for the students in the pilot study. This may be contributed to student maturation from the spring of second grade to the fall of third grade. The expectations of the classroom teacher may have also been a factor. The third grade students were held to a higher standard in regard to their behavior during their independent reading time. Another factor influencing student time-on-task was student choice of appropriately leveled material. Students reading at or above grade level chose appropriate books 100% of the time. Students reading below grade level chose books that were too difficult 45% of the time they were observed. This seems to be a significant factor in the amount of time spent on-task. Students were more distracted and spent more time flipping through their books when the material was too difficult.

Implications and Conclusions

Conclusions

The use of iPads was a motivating factor for many students as seen in the increase in the number of students choosing Read-to-Self. Students were eager and excited to explore the features of the iPads and needed little instruction to navigate the devices, which appeared very natural for the students. This seems to indicate that the implementation of the devices would be rather seamless for the students. Overall, the students spent more time reading with the iPads which may lead to increased fluency and reading skill levels.

A quality independent reading program functioning for the intended purpose of increasing student fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development requires teacher involvement to model expected behavior, check student comprehension, and ensure that students are reading materials appropriate for their reading levels. The follow-up study indicates that students are more engaged when the materials they are reading independently are at their level. While student time-on-task increased slightly for students reading at or above grade level after the introduction of accountability tools, the increase was not as great as the researcher first hypothesized. A few factors influencing these findings may include the overall high expectations within the classroom and high student engagement. Even the third graders reading below grade level were on-task significantly more than the students in the second grade classroom previously studied.

Applications

As iPads, other devices and more e-books become available to teachers and students this research may give teachers some insights on the effectiveness of technology to increase student motivation and the amount of time students are engaged during independent reading. There are

many ways iPads may be used to engage students during Read-to-Self, as well as, many other times during the day. Using the note taking features available with some apps and digital books to directly annotate within the stories and the availability of dictionaries within the iPads will be useful for students and can lead to increased comprehension and engagement. The color available in the e-texts and the ability to enlarge text and pictures are also features that students are eager to use in their learning.

Limitations

There were many scheduling issues due to late starts, snow days, field trips, and special events that limited the amount of time I was able to observe during the literacy block. There were some students who were not observed at all due to the scheduling or because the student did not choose Read-to-Self. The original intention of the researcher was to focus on four boys receiving reading interventions. However, also due to the scheduling constraints, there was not enough data collected on these individuals and the data from the whole class was more useful in determining the effects of using the iPad for independent reading. Some of the students' favorite book titles and series were not available on the Storia application, and I felt the library selections needed to be richer for the students. The students were not interested in reading chapter books on the e-reader. It was difficult to know if this was due to titles of low interest to the students or if it was more appealing for students to read e-books with the colorful pages and pictures found in the picture books and graphic novels available. It was also difficult to assess if students were reading materials at their independent level because they did not have book boxes that were checked by their classroom teacher to choose from during independent reading. The students would generally spend time choosing a book from the classroom library before they sat down to read. These books were not always at the appropriate level for the student.

While the follow-up study was conducted over a five week period, the total amount of time observed was only 145 minutes, with the average reading session observed to be ten minutes. Most reading programs suggest 30-40 minutes of independent reading be allotted for students. Scheduling restraints and curricular demands made it difficult to observe longer independent reading sessions. The implementation of the accountability piece was also not as strong as the researcher would have preferred. Students were not always allowed adequate time to record their reading experiences. It is the belief of the researcher that the accountability piece can provide students with authentic writing activities, group sharing, and speaking opportunities with proper implementation.

Reflection

When this project began I thought I would be able to evaluate not only the time-on-task, but also to analyze if the time-on-task was affected by the level of the reading material chosen by students. I realize this may be accomplished in a future study by focusing on just a few students and ensuring they have book boxes with materials at their independent reading levels. I also thought the use of the iPad would increase the amount of time-on-task significantly. While the amount of time actually spent during a reading session increased, the percentage of time-on-task decreased. The very delightful surprise that surfaced in the research was the amount of social processing related to reading that occurred after the iPads were introduced. The conversations were rich and relevant. Students enjoyed sharing what they were reading and made excellent self-to-text connections.

The follow-up study indicated that setting high classroom expectations, ensuring all students have appropriately leveled reading materials and a short comprehension check by the teacher were key to keeping students on-task during their independent reading time.

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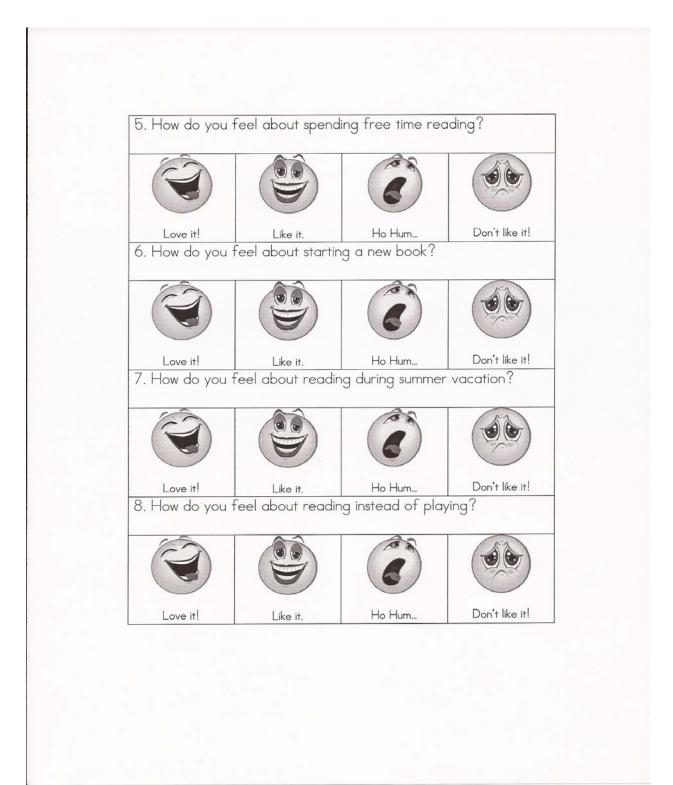
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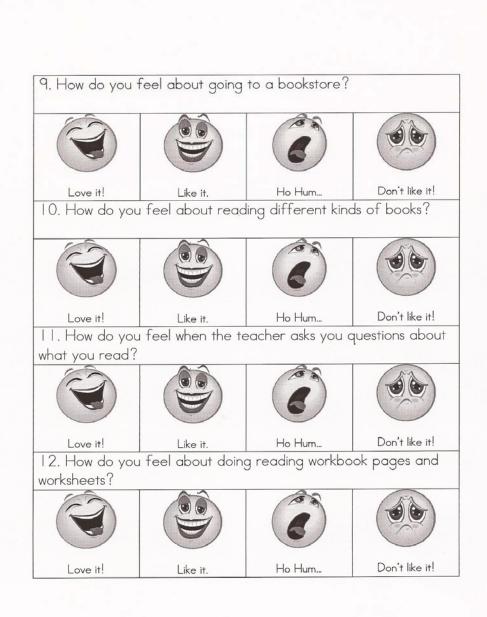
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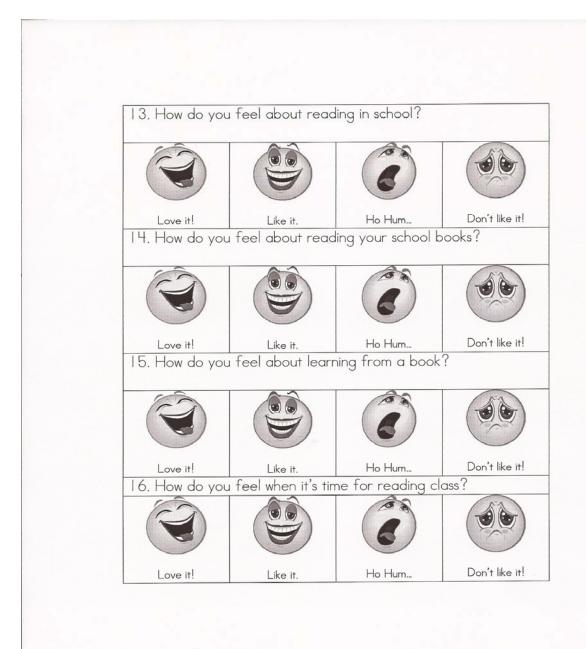
Appendix A

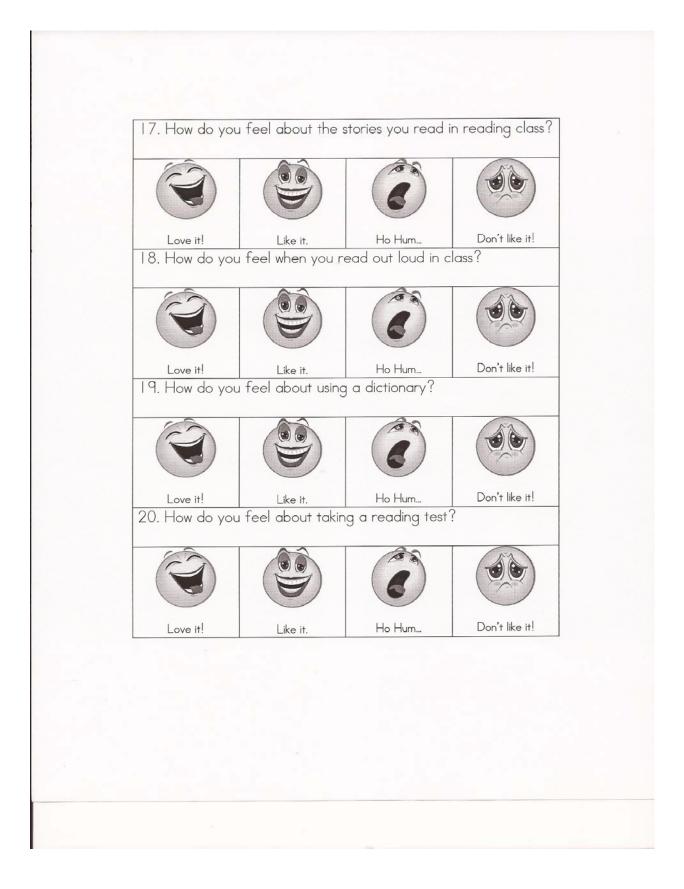
	Eleme		ing Attitude Survey ng Sheet	
Test Administrator r	ame			
Student				
			Date of Admini	istration
Grade Level				istration
	4 poin	Scorin	g Guide est face	
	4 poin 3 poin	ts Slight	ly smiling face	
	2 poin	its Mildly	upset face	
	1 poin	t Very i	ipset face	
Recreatio	nal Readir	ng	Academic	c Reading
Test Item Number	Number	r of Points	Test Item Number	Number of Points
1.			11.	
2.			12.	
3.			13.	
4. 5.			14. 15.	
6.			16.	
7.			17.	
8.			18.	
9.			19.	
10.			20.	
Raw Score			Raw Score	
Full Scale Ra	w Score (R	ecreational	+ Academic) =	
Percentile Ranks		Recreation	onal	
NOTE: Divide raw 80 to determine per		Academi	e	
		Full Scale	e	

	LEMENTARY READI	NG ATTITUDE SURVI	
Student		Grade	
1. How do you	feel when you re	ad a book on a r	ainy Saturday?
(2)		6	
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum	Don't like it!
2. How do you time?	feel when you re	ad a book in sch	ool during free
3		6	
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum	Don't like it!
3. How do you	feel about readin	ng for fun at hon	ne?
3			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum	Don't like it!
4. How do you	feel about gettin	g a book for a p	resent?
(2)		6	
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum	Don't like it!



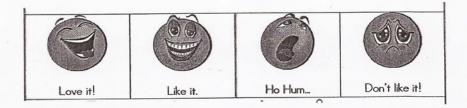




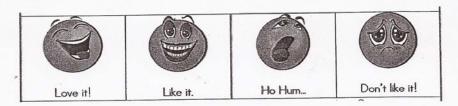


Reading in School

I enjoy Read to Self during reading class.



I use my time wisely during Read to Self.



I have read a book on an e-reader (Nook, Kindle, I-Pad, I-Pod, other electronic device)

YES

NO

My family has an e-reader (Nook, Kindle, I-Pad, I-Pod, other electronic device)

YES

NO