Parent Co-Reading Survey

Co-reading with children on iPads: Parents' perceptions and practices

A Cooney Center QuickReport by Sarah Vaala and Lori Takeuchi

To follow up on insights revealed in the report *Comparing Parent-child Co-reading on Print, Basic, and Enhanced E-book Platforms*,[1] the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop conducted a QuickStudy to survey parents about reading books with their 2-to-6-year-old children. Given the rapid proliferation of new media technologies, our QuickStudy line of research is meant to explore emerging media in order to determine which research questions to pursue via more formal investigations and to generate conversations within the digital media and learning community.

In this survey we assessed family ownership of devices on which e-books can be read and included a set of questions about reading e-books with children since market research indicates these are emerging trends. Because the Apple iPad has demonstrated a quick and dominant rise in the marketplace,[2] this report delves into iPad owners' practices and perceptions surrounding the use of e-books in their kids' literacy development. Of parents who reported owning iPads (n = 462) a majority reported co-reading e-books with their children (72.5%). The parents in our sample were largely White/non-Hispanic, and relatively well-educated and affluent (see Table 1 on page 6), which reflects recent national estimates of iPad ownership as well.[3]

We found noteworthy patterns of perceptions and use of e-books among the families in this sample who own iPads. These patterns, we believe, warrant broader conversations and pose important questions for researchers and designers.

Finding 1: iPad owners who read e-books with their children see certain features as helpful for early readers, and others as distracting

We asked iPad owners who read e-books with their children (n = 335) what they think about the value of certain children's e-book features for helping children learn to read. Figure 1 displays the range of parental perceptions across six features that are commonly found in children's e-book and book app titles.

Figure 1: Perceptions of children's e-book features among iPad owners who co-read e-books
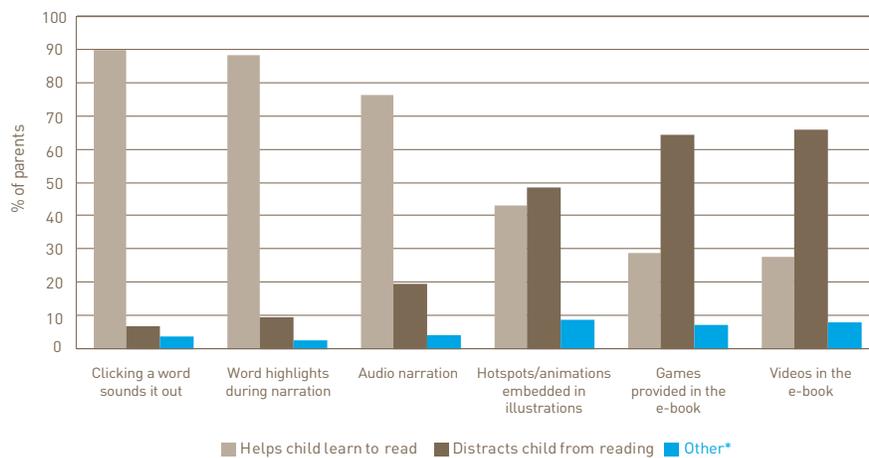

*Note: "Other" category encompasses beliefs that a feature: does not help child learn to read or distract child from reading; can help and distract; or was not familiar to parent.

Finding 1, continued

The widespread belief that audio narration can be helpful for children learning to read is also reflected in reports of families' use of this feature. The majority of parents reported that they use audio narration at least sometimes when co-reading with their children. It was even more common for their children to apply this feature when using e-books on their own (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Use of audio narration feature

Legend: ■ Parent child co-reading ■ Child reading alone
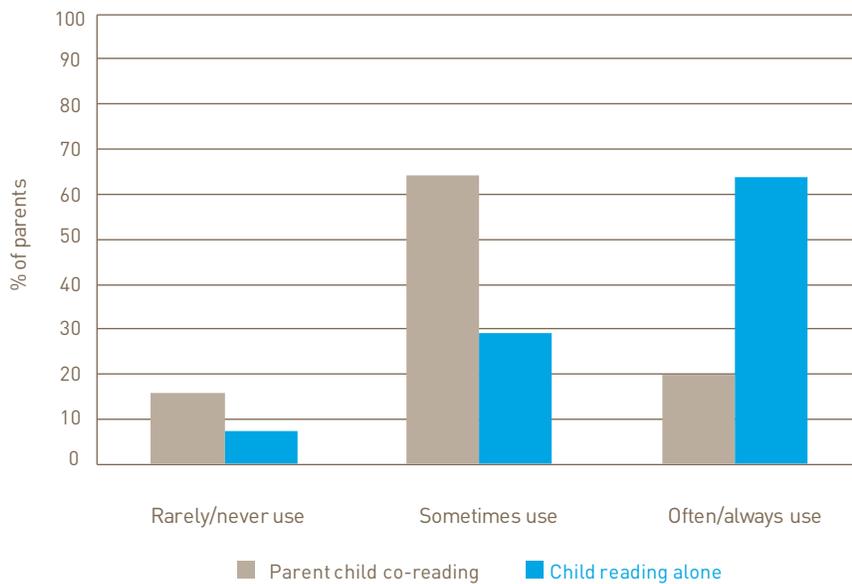
> **Finding 2: Parents with iPads vary in their perceptions and expectations of the experience of reading e-books with their children**

We asked iPad-owning parents a set of questions to gauge their perceptions of e-books and print books, and detected differences between those who read e-books with their children and those who do not (see Figure 3). Those who read e-books with their children, for example, tend to feel that the features in e-books can help children learn to read on their own. As shown in Figure 4, these parents are also more likely to let their children use the iPad for other activities too. The iPad owners who do not co-read e-books with their children were more likely to express a strong preference for the feel of print books and concern about the screen time associated with children's e-book use.

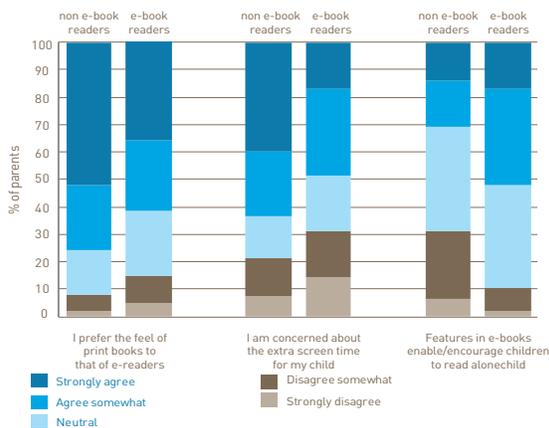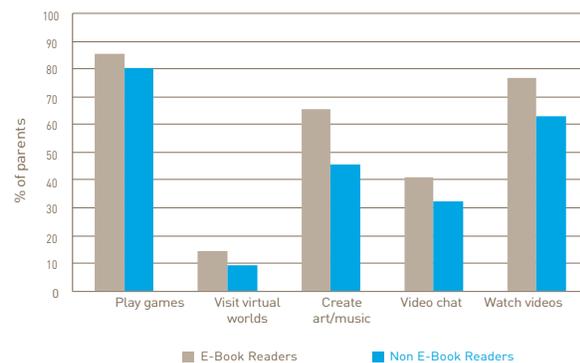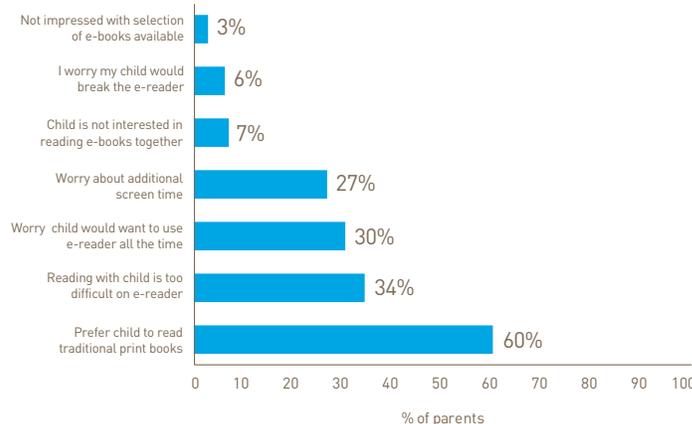**Figure 3: Perceptions of children's e-books among parents who do not co-read e-books**

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neutral
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree

Figure 4: Does your child use your e-reader for any of the following activities?

Legend:
- E-Book Readers
- Non E-Book Readers

We queried the iPad owners who say they do not co-read e-books with their children on why they refrain from this activity, and a majority indicated that they simply prefer their children to read traditional print books (see Figure 5). However, it is worth noting that a sizable 34.4% of these parents say that it's just too difficult to read with a child on digital devices, and nearly as many are worried the child would start to want to use the iPad all the time.

Figure 5: Reasons parents do not co-read e-books with their children

| Reason	% of parents
Not impressed with selection of e-books available	3%
I worry my child would break the e-reader	6%
Child is not interested in reading e-books together	7%
Worry about additional screen time	27%
Worry child would want to use e-reader all the time	30%
Reading with child is too difficult on e-reader	34%
Prefer child to read traditional print books	60%

Finding 3: Reading e-books has not replaced reading print books together in families with iPads

A majority of the iPad owners who read e-books with their kids say they still prefer reading print books with them (see Figure 6). In fact, 89.9% of these parents report that they read mostly print books and some e-books with their children, compared to 7.5% who say they read print books and e-books equally with their children, and 2.7% who read mostly or exclusively e-books. While many parents who do not co-read e-books worry that their children would want to use their iPad all the time, the majority of parents who do read e-books with their children believe their children actually prefer reading print books together.

Figure 6: Which format do you and your child prefer reading together?

Parent prefers   Child prefers
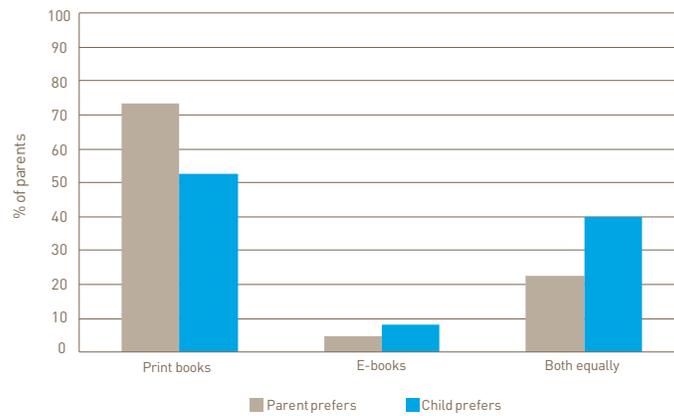
Context appears to matter, however. Most parents who co-read e-books, for instance, report that they prefer co-reading e-books with their children as much as or more than print books when traveling or commuting together (see Figure 7). Most parents also let their children use their iPads to read e-books alone at least occasionally when they have something else that requires their attention (see Figure 8).

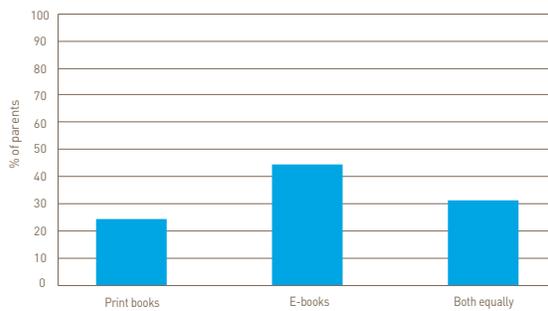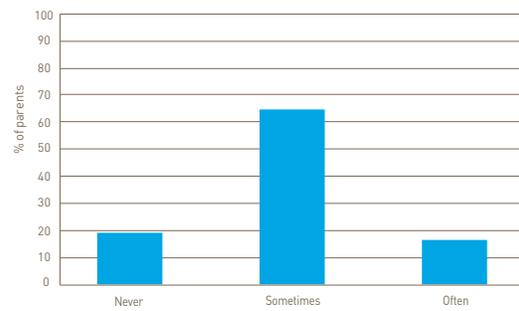**Figure 7: Which format do you prefer when traveling or commuting with your child?**

Figure 8: I give my child an e-book to read alone if I have something else to attend to

Taken together, these preliminary findings suggest that many parents likely perceive children's print books and e-books differently, particularly in terms the experience and expectations of co-reading. Moreover, in practice, e-books may be playing a different role in homes than print books are. Print books appear to serve as iPad owners' preferred co-reading medium even in homes where e-books are available. E-books, on the other hand, may play supporting roles for developing kids' literacy skills particularly when a parent can't be around to read to them or when families are outside of the home. The present findings surface further questions to pursue in subsequent investigations:

- This survey focused on co-reading practices. What patterns of perceptions and behaviors exist among owners of iPads and other devices with regards to children's solo use of e-books?

- Do similar e-book perception and co-reading patterns exist among different samples of parents (for example, among samples of fathers or parents from different socio-economic circumstances?).

- What role do specific e-book features play in children's co-reading and solo reading experiences?

  o What makes some parents perceive various features (e.g., embedded hotspots and animations) as helpful and others perceive them as distracting?

  o How do individual features aid or undermine the reading experience and children's literacy development? Is the influence consistent across diverse reading contexts and when engaged with varying content (e.g., a preliterate child reading alone; when reading with a parent; when reading with a sibling; while reading various types of stories)?

  o Do parents' and children's perceptions of features change as they become more familiar with the device and with the specific e-book? Does the effectiveness of a feature change with exposure?

- Do similar patterns exist for families who own other types of devices for reading children's e-books?

We conducted this QuickStudy research during a period of incredible market growth of a new platform, and parents are still trying to figure out how e-books fit into daily routines and family values. Meanwhile, e-book designers are still figuring out how to best design books for these digital platforms and for literacy development more specifically. Our perspective is that we have yet to see best practices emerge from e-book designers. We must also keep in mind that this survey analysis merely presents a snapshot in time—parent sentiments and behaviors will evolve as kids' e-books do and as they gain familiarity with e-books and devices for reading e-books.

About the QuickStudy

STUDY PURPOSE

We designed the current survey to explore co-reading perceptions and practices among parents with preschool-age children (2-to 6-year-olds) in an increasingly digital age. Our goals were to determine the need for larger-scale research on the topic and to generate research questions for follow-up work. In particular, we wondered how parents' perceptions and practices regarding e-books might differ along the lines of device ownership and children's e-book use.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• How are parents today reading books with their children?

• What are parents' perceptions of e-books compared to print books for preschool-age children's learning and engagement?

• What factors make parents choose to read or to not read e-books with their preschool-age children?

METHODS

This study is an online cross-sectional survey of 1,226 parents/guardians of children between the ages of 2 and 6. We recruited participants through emails and announcements on the websites of Cooney Center partner organizations which parents frequent and through social media announcements on Cooney Center channels. Parents with more than one child in our target age range were asked to answer with regards to only one child. We collected all data between February and July of 2012 using Survey Monkey. Participation required 15 to 20 minutes to complete the survey.

The survey was designed to be applicable to parents with children in our target range. Branching questions were included which were relevant to specific groups of participants based on device ownership and whether they co-read e-books with their children.

PARTICIPANTS

In total, 1,417 parents completed at least part of the survey. Of those, 1,226 participants completed enough of the survey to yield useable data. The current analysis pertains only to the subset parents that own at least one iPad (n = 462), including those who do read e-books with their children (n = 335), and those who do not read e-books with their children (n = 127). The majority of these participants were mothers (87.9%), and 53% reported that their target child was a boy. As shown in Table 1, parents in this study were typically well educated, affluent, married, and White/non-Hispanic. Though our sample is not representative of parents with the US population, owners of e-readers and devices for reading e-books are also not representative of the US population. According to Pew Research Center[1], e-reader and tablet ownership is strongly correlated with income and education.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analyses for this study included frequency tallies and percentages, as well as descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations. Cross tabulations with chi square tests were used to determine differences between observed and expected frequencies in nominal or dichotomous items. T-tests for significant differences in means were used with ordinal-level items that were asked of both groups of parents (those who co-read e-books and those who do not), including the demographic, reading behavior, and e-book perception items.[2] Where significant differences in means were found t values and corresponding p values are noted in endnotes.

Table 1. Characteristics of sample

	All iPad owners (N = 462)	Non e-book co-readers (n = 127)	E-book co-readers (n = 335)
Parent age mean ± SD, years	37.8 ± 5.7	38.5 ± 4.9	37.6± 6.0
Child age mean ± SD, years	4.2 ± 1.3	4.1 ± 1.4	4.2 ± 1.3
Parent race/ethnicity, n (%)			
White/non-Hispanic	356(77.1)	99(78.9)	257(76.7)
Hispanic	24(5.2)	7(5.5)	17(5.1)
Black/African American	5(1.1)	0(0.0)	5(1.5)
Asian	40(8.7)	12(9.4)	28(8.4)
Other[a]	37(8.0)	9(7.1)	28(8.4)
Marital Status, n (%)			
Married/Living as married	433(93.7)	119(93.7)	314(93.7)
Separated/Divorced/Single	17(3.7)	4(3.1)	13(3.9)
Refused/Missing	12(2.6)	4(3.1)	8(2.4)
Uses childcare, n (%)	342(74.0)	93(73.2)	249(74.3)
Education, n (%)			
High school diploma or less	6(1.3)	0(0)	6(1.8)
Some college/Associate's	23(5.0)	6(4.7)	17(5.1)
Four-year college degree	123(26.6)	26(20.5)	97(29.0)
Graduate school	301(65.2)	91(71.7)	210(62.7)
Refused/Missing	9(1.9)	4(3.1)	5(1.5)
Income, n (%)			
Less than $30,000	13(2.8)	2(1.6)	11(3.3)
$30,000 - $59,000	46(10.0)	13(10.2)	33(10.0)
$60,000 - $89,000	93(20.1)	24(18.9)	69(20.6)
$90,000 - $119,000	77(6.7)	23(18.1)	54(16.1)
$120,000 +	171(37.0)	49(38.6)	122(36.4)
Refused/Missing	62(13.4)	16(12.6)	46(13.7)

N = 462; [a] includes participants of mixed race

ENDNOTES

[i] Rainie, L., Zickuhr, K., Purcell, K., Madden, M. & Brenner, J. (2012, April). *The Rise of E-reading.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2012/04/04/the-rise-of-e-reading/

[ii] It is predicted that the iPad will claim more than half of the market share of all tablets sold around the globe in 2012—over 50 million (http://www.forbes.com/sites/canaccordgenuity/2012/01/06/apple-ipad-maintains-dominance-over-holiday-season/). Nielsen reports that 7 out of every 10 children in tablet-owning families used a tablet computer (http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/american-families-see-tablets-as-playmate-teacher-and-babysitter/).

[iii] comScore (2012, March). *iPad ownership grows among all U.S. income segments.* http://www.comscoredatamine.com/2012/03/ipad-ownership-grows-among-all-income-segments-in-the-u-s/

[iv] A series of t-tests were performed to test for significant differences in means on these items. Parents who do not co-read e-books on the iPad felt more strongly on average that they preferred the feel of print books (M = 4.14 on 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, SD = 1.12), compared to parents who do co-read (M = 3.67 SD = 1.17; $t(459)$ = 3.92, $p \leftarrow .001$). Parents who don't co-read e-books also tended to agree more strongly that they were concerned with the extra screen time reading e-books would mean for their children (M = 3.75 on 5-point scale, SD = 1.31), compared to iPad owners who do co-read e-books (M = 3.20 on 5-point scale, SD = 1.30; ; $t(454)$ = 3.96, $p \leftarrow .001$). Finally, parents who co-read e-books on their iPads feel more strongly on average that the features of e-books can enable/encourage children to read by themselves (M = 3.57 on 5-point scale, SD = 0.93), compared to iPad owners who do not co-read e-books (M = 3.07, SD = 1.11; $t(454)$ = 4.80, $p \leftarrow .001$).

[v] Only the differences in creating art/music (($Đ^2$ 1, N = 462) = 14.89, p $\leftarrow$ .001) and watching videos (($Đ^2$ 1, N = 462) = 8.79, p $\leftarrow$ .001) were statistically significant between groups.

[vi] Rainie, L. (2012, January). *Tablet and e-book reader ownership nearly double over the holiday gift-giving period.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. http://cms.pewresearch.org/pewinternet/files/2012/03/Pew_Tablets-and-e-readers-double-1.23.2012.pdf

[vii] Possible covariates were tested for an association with respondents' group membership (i.e., co-reading or not co-reading e-books) using chi square or t-test assessments depending on measurement level. None were found to be significant. The variables tested included: race/ethnicity, income, education, marital status, parent age, child age, parent gender, child gender, use of childcare, number of children in the home, number of print books in the home, co-reading frequency and time estimates, child's reading ability, and how long the respondent has owned device.
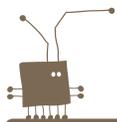
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the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop