Audio-Visual-Ebooks-Pbooks: Which Is Best For Our Children?

Jodie Mapes

Southeastern Louisiana University

Dr. Rebecca Parton

ETEC 695

24 November 2011

Audio-Visual-Ebooks-Pbooks: Which is Best for Our Children?

As we move through the 21st Century, we better not blink or we will miss another technological breakthrough. Technology has brought us to the point of accessing books by means of computers or electronic devices known as e-books. However exciting it may be, it has the educational system and parents wondering how it will affect our young readers as they journey through their education. Many are questioning the educational benefits of listening to and/or viewing books by means of electronic devices. As with most things, there are pros and cons of using audio-visual books in comparison to traditional paper books. The issues that have surfaced are from the feel, smell, and visual aesthetics of the books to accessibility, cost, and benefits of comprehension and listening skills for different types of learners, whether they are auditory, visual, or tactile learners.

You may ask, “How can the feel, smell, and visual aesthetics of a book affect educational needs and outcomes?” According to an article in MultiMedia & Internet @ Schools, Stephen Abrams (2010) points out that “when we look at learning styles, we must acknowledge that some learners need the touch and smell experience to lock down comprehension and retention. A lot of research supports smell as a major element in memory.” Although some may prefer to see a book as the author or artist intended it to be viewed, “many young readers do better with accommodations such as, changing the font size and amount of information per page” (p. 13-16). Therefore, the use of e-books can aide educators in differentiating lesson plans to fit the various learning styles of our students. A recent article in the School Library Journal, entitled "Are Ebooks Any Good?" tells the success “story of Julie Hume, a reading specialist in University City, MO, received a grant to conduct an experiment. She works with children in grades 3-5 who struggle with reading fluency. At the beginning of the school year, she divided the children randomly into two groups: a TumbeBooks treatment group and a control group. The *TumbleBooks* group "spent time at a computer, reading and listening to ebooks that were either at or just above their reading level." The other group "received the same reading interventions that she had used in the past, with Hume sitting at a table and assisting them as they read along in their paper books.” (Guernsey, n.d., p. 2) Humes’s goal was to see which group would show the most improvement? Guernsey said, “When Hume decided to experiment with ebooks, she had an inkling that the narration and animation might help, but she wanted to be sure. Hume tested her two randomized groups before they started their reading intervention programs to get a baseline of their abilities. And she assesses them on a regular basis, using texts that are different from what the children hear on *Tumblebooks* or in her traditional small-group reading sessions. Three months after starting the project, the average fluency rate for the Tumblebook group was 23 percentage points higher than that of the control group” (Guernsey, n.d., p. 5).

According to the article by Guernsey, “Humes credits the success to the ebooks’ ability to narrate the story, while allowing students to feel like they’re in control of what and when they read. However, she isn’t ready to proclaim that all children’s books should go digital. “I think *Tumblebooks* should be for intervention only,” she says. For confidence-building and self-esteem, she explains, the electronic book is unparalleled. But at some point, she says, you have to stop “the hand-holding.”

Using grants from the U.S. Department of Education, Jeremy Brueck, of Akron, Ohio is one of the first to do research in children’s digital reading and explore how electronic materials should be used in early childhood programs. He cautions librarians, teachers, and parents to really evaluate electronic titles prior to investing funds into something that may not be beneficial in “helping our young children to learn and become engaged in a story” (Guernsey,n.d., p. 3).

Whether we are ready or not, technology is here and rapidly taking us into the future. It is up to us to continuously evaluate and assess the quality of the technology that our students use and embrace it, if it is educationally beneficial. Because there are many to choose from, we can be picky and we should set stiff guidelines in which to use in order to best choose programs, sites, or software that are sound and educationally beneficial. Neirtec published a report intended to help educators understand, evaluate, and implement effective uses of technology within K-6 reading programs. This report is based on research that is currently available on potential ways to embed technology into the curriculum to enhance reading instruction in the elementary grades. The report by Neirtec states that “E-books, with features designed specifically to support children learning to read fluently, can provide multiple supports for fluency instruction, including the ability to:

* provide a model of fluent oral reading;
* provide on-demand or automated help in decoding individual words, so that a problem with a few words does not disrupt the child reading;
* provide visual highlighting of phrases to guide the child in learning to read with expression;
* allow beginning readers to tackle more varied and challenging texts with additional support for pronunciation and meaning, thereby allowing them to “read” on their own more successfully and gain additional experience with text (Neirtec, n.d., p. 8).

The Neirtec report says another potential use for ebooks and hypertext is instructing

students in text comprehension strategies from the early stages of reading. The report stated that, “Electronic books have also been found to have value with older children who have learning disabilities. An early study of this technology found that upper elementary students with learning disabilities could dramatically improve their comprehension and word recognition skills by working with electronic talking books” (Neirtec, n.d., p. 11).

The *TumbleBooksLibrary* is a collection of storybooks that are animated and read aloud. Some have sound effects and music added, as well. *TumbleBooks* are proving to be useful in a group setting to address different learning styles, as well as incorporating technology into the curriculum. The students enjoy listening to the stories using different voices, accents, and dialects. The students are able to hear the proper pronunciation of unknown words. There are quizzes, games, and lesson plans for each *TumbleBook*. The students can use the *TumbleBooks* independently in the classroom and at home access is available if the school has a subscription to it. The words are highlighted as the text is narrated. The sound can be turned-off in order for the reader to read silently and still enjoy the animation of the storybook. *TumbleReadables* is an extension of the *TumbleBookLibrary*. It is a collection of read-along titles for elementary, middle, and high school students. The online text and audio narration is adjustable. The collection features chapter books, early readers, YA/Teen Novels, high interest/low level books for both middle school and high school students, plus classics of American and English literature. (*TumbleReadables*)

*TumbleBooksLibrary and TumbleReadables* are two of many paid-subscription sites that provide ebooks. Another popular paid site is Scholastic BookFlix, which offers non-fiction and fiction stories paired together based on topic. Many schools and public libraries subscribe to e-book websites for their patrons to use. Most of our public libraries offer audio books and e-books to be checked-out the same way as traditional books. There are some ebook sites that do not cost anything, like Storyline Online, which is sponsored by the Screen Actors Guild Foundation and another is the International Children’s Digital Library offers nearly 4,500 free books.

With more school districts across the country buying Interactive Whiteboards for the individual classrooms, the electronic book is being viewed by students on large screens. The schools and libraries are dividing their money between buying traditional paper books and ebook subscriptions. Many classrooms are now equipped with computers and the ebook is a way to let more students view a title without having to purchase as many copies. Our students are engaged with technology on a daily basis in their lives by using cell phones, ipods, electronic tablets, electronic readers, computers, and gaming devices. Some students may not even consider picking up a book to read, however if they are told in the classroom that they can go on the computer to read a book, they may be more apt to get interested in books. As audio-visual technology is increasingly becoming more important in our classrooms, it is even more vital for us to make sure that when we use all this new technology that there is a clear purpose in it. In an article in Edutopia, educators are cautioned that “audio books are not for every student. They’re too fast or slow for some, and too cumbersome for those who prefer to read only on paper” (Rubenstein, 2011, p. 1). Even though there is an increase in people using electronic technology, paper books aren’t going anywhere. We still enjoy the way a real book feels, looks, and even smells. Paper books are still cheaper and easier to obtain for everyone. Byk notes that, “Audio-visual technology has an important role to play in the modern classroom, but teachers who rely too much on technology may actually inhibit learning. It’s the law of diminishing returns: you can only get so much useful enjoyment and assistance from a machine. The personal relationship between teacher and student is ultimately more valuable and rewarding in a brick and mortar classroom environment” (2011, p.2).

References

Abram, S. (2010). P-Books vs. Ebooks: Are There Education Issues?. *School Library Journal*, *17*(6), 13-16. Retrieved November 22, 2011, from the Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text database.

BookFlix -- Login. (n.d.). *Authentication Server*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://auth.grolier.com/login/bookflix/login.php

Byk, J. (n.d.). The Uses of Audio-Visual Aids in Teaching | eHow.com. *eHow | How to Videos, Articles & More - Discover the expert in you. | eHow.com*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://www.ehow.com/about\_5454141\_uses-audiovisual-aids-teaching.html

Coeus. (n.d.). Ebooks Vs. Paper Books: The Pros and Cons. *Coeus on HubPages*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://coeus.hubpages.com/hub/Ebooks-Versus-Paper-Books-The-Pros-and-Cons

Fadel, C. (n.d.). Multimodal Learning Through Media: What the Research Says. *Cisco Systems*. Retrieved November 23, 2011, from http://www.cisco.com/web/strategy/docs/education/Multimodal-Learning-Through-Media.pdf

Guernsey, L. (n.d.). Are Ebooks Any Good?. *Home*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/slj/printissuecurrentissue/890540-427/are\_ebooks\_any\_good.html.csp

Rubenstein, G. (n.d.). Listening to Literature: Struggling Readers Respond to Recorded Books | Edutopia. *K-12 Education & Learning Innovations with Proven Strategies that Work | Edutopia*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://www.edutopia.org/listening-literature

Technology and Teaching Children to Read. (n.d.). *NEIRTEC - Northeast and the Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://www.neirtec.org/reading\_report/report.htm

The Benefits of Listening vs. Reading a Book. (n.d.). *Audio Book Update | Audiobook Reviews & Audiobook News*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://audiobookupdate.com/benefits-listening-reading-book/

The Disadvantage Of Using Books On Tape With Young Children | LIVESTRONG.COM. (n.d.). *LIVESTRONG.COM - Lose Weight & Get Fit with Diet, Nutrition & Fitness Tools | LIVESTRONG.COM*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://www.livestrong.com/article/280975-the-disadvantage-of-using-books-on-tape-with-young-children/

The Literacy Benefits of Audio Books for Your Kids. (n.d.). *Audio Book Update | Audiobook Reviews & Audiobook News*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://audiobookupdate.com/the-literacy-benefits-of-audio-books-for-your-kids/

TumbleReadables. (n.d.). *TumbleReadables*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://www.tumblereadables.com/

Tumblebooks - eBooks for eKids!. (n.d.). *Tumblebooks - eBooks for eKids!*. Retrieved November 24, 2011, from http://www.tumblebooks.com