iPads in the Classroom for Literacy Instruction

Angie Selner
St. John Fisher College

How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?
Follow this and additional works at: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations.

This document is posted at http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/24 and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjfc.edu.
iPads in the Classroom for Literacy Instruction

Abstract
This study examined the benefits of using the iPad in the special education classroom for literacy instruction. Research was conducted in a self-contained special education classroom setting. Data was collected through formal and informal observations in the classroom as well as from teacher questionnaires. The findings showed that the students in the special education classroom benefited greatly from using the iPad to reinforce instruction. In order to determine the full potential of the iPad in the classroom for literacy instruction more research needs to be conducted.

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
MS in Literacy Education

Department
Education

First Supervisor
Joellen Maples

Subject Categories
Education

This thesis is available at Fisher Digital Publications: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/24
iPads in the Classroom for Literacy Instruction

By:

Angie Selner

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences
St. John Fisher College

August 2011
ABSTRACT

This study examined the benefits of using the iPad in the special education classroom for literacy instruction. Research was conducted in a self-contained special education classroom setting. Data was collected through formal and informal observations in the classroom as well as from teacher questionnaires. The findings showed that the students in the special education classroom benefited greatly from using the iPad to reinforce instruction. In order to determine the full potential of the iPad in the classroom for literacy instruction more research needs to be conducted.
WEB 2.0- iPADS IN THE CLASSROOM FOR LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Technology is advancing every day and the possibilities are becoming endless with tools available to teachers and students. Web 2.0 is transforming classroom curriculum all over the United States. Education professionals are beginning to implement technologies into their lesson plans across the curriculum. However, many teachers are apprehensive to implement these new literacies because they have not been educated on how to use the tools. Many tools, like SMART boards or interactive whiteboards provide students with a different media for learning. According to Oliver (2010) Web 2.0 refers to the current generation of Internet applications that allow users to collaboratively generate their own content. Schultz and Simkins (2010) define Web 2.0 as a wide range of easy to use online tools that make doing everyday work and communication on the web practical for anyone (p.12). Web 2.0 is rapidly changing the face of the original web.

Technology is present in most classrooms at all grade levels, anything from computers to iPods. It is important that teachers know what tools they have available to them when it comes to technology. Web 2.0 Students at all different levels will benefit from the incorporation of technology into their everyday lives. Web 2.0 is becoming more and more common in the classroom curriculum across all grade levels. Almost all classrooms have computers available to the students as well as an interactive whiteboard in each classroom. Teachers across all grade levels implement these new literacies into their daily classroom activities.

Many education professionals do not know all of the benefits of incorporating Web 2.0 into their classroom instruction due to lack of training. iPads are new literacies that are just starting to be used in the classrooms. This research will demonstrate how iPads can be incorporated into the classroom. The students and education professionals will all benefit from
the research. Without the exploration of iPads the children who would benefit from them will not be able to explore the new literacies.

It is important that new literacies, such as the iPad, are researched because there are many students that could benefit from having these in their classrooms. Without exploring the new literacies, such as the iPad, education professionals will not see how the students will benefit from the implementation of iPads in the classroom for literacy instruction.

This study involved one third grade student, reading specialist, psychologist, teacher’s assistant, special education teacher and a regular education classroom teacher. The student participated in three informal observations during the reading and writing block. The faculty that participated answered questions on a questionnaire. The data was analyzed to see what the possible benefits or drawbacks were of using the iPad in the classroom for literacy instruction. My research indicated that the student benefited from using the iPad in the classroom and was more motivated to do school work when he was given the choice to use his iPad. However, there is a lack of funding to buy more iPads for other classrooms in the school. Lastly, my research indicated that there was a lack of professional development on how to set up and use the iPad.

**Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this paper literacy can be defined best as the acquisition of Discourse through interactions with technologies and students’ communities. Gee (1989) defines literacy as “control of secondary Discourses, where Discourses are socially accepted association among using language, of thinking, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network” (pg. 18). According to Gee, discourses are they ways we think, act, and talk within a setting. Children discover and invent literacy as they
participate actively in a literate society. Children obtain discourses from their environments. The
discourse children obtain at home is their primary Discourse according to Gee (1989). Home
and school lives are contributors to a child’s literacy acquisition. A child that interacts with a
computer will acquire a different primary Discourse than a child who does not have access to a
computer. New literacies, such as technology, also have a significant role in the literacy
acquisition of a child. Literacy is the foundation of all learning.

New Literacy Theory

Lanskhear and Knobel’s new literacy theory most closely relates to the study of Web 2.0. New
literacies can be defined as new and changing ways of producing, distributing, exchanging
and receiving texts by electronic means (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). The iPad is a wireless way
for students to use Web 2.0 applications to distribute, exchange, and receive messages. In
addition, the iPad allows the students to download applications that can be used to communicate
with their peers and teachers. These new literacies allow the students to be part of their learning.
Web 2.0 applications allow the students to interact with their peers as well as their teachers.
Larson and Marsh (2005) argue that children need to use new literacies and technology to be
successful in the classroom. In addition, Larson and Marsh (2005) argue that New Literacy
Studies helps us to understand everyday life and literacy learning occurs in and out of the school
setting. In addition, Larson and Marsh (2005) argue that children become more competent when
using digital literacies at a young age. Often times a children will know more about a computer
than their teacher because they grew up immersed in technology. Students need to know how to
use new literacy tools in order to be successful.
Sociocultural Theory

The sociocultural learning theory implies that children learn and acquire new knowledge from their surrounding environment. In order for children to be active members in their school and home environments they must first understand how to communicate. With the advancement of technology the way children communicate is changing. The iPad allows children to acquire literacy in a different way. According to Cielocha, Dean and Handsfield (2009) “From a sociocultural perspective, the literacy tools people use do not have inherent value or meaning. Instead, they are understood in terms of their affordances for achieving particular purposes in different social contexts” (p. 41). Web 2.0 applications and the iPad allow students and teachers to be actively engaged in the learning process. In addition, both students and teachers are part of the learning process. The use of the iPad and Web 2.0 applications help children acquire literacy in different way as well expose them to the new wave of learning.

Research Question

New literacy tools are being created all the time. Technology is advancing every day, touch screen technology in particular. It is important that teachers and students know the resources that are available to them. Many education professionals do not always have time to explore all the benefits of using new literacies in their classrooms. Therefore, this research will provide the education professionals with information that will help them develop not only literacy lessons but across curriculum. Given that literacy acquisition occurs through social interactions and technology, this action research project asks, how can iPads be incorporated into
literacy instruction in the special education classroom setting and what are the benefits of using iPads for literacy instruction?

**Literature Review**

**Introduction**

Web 2.0 and wireless literacies are the new buzz word in the education world. There is no agreed upon definition of the term Web 2.0. The term encompasses so many different technologies, such as the iPod and most recently the iPad which allows individuals a mobile way of interacting with Web 2.0 applications. Cielocha, Dean, and Handsfield (2007) state “Web 2.0 tools enable users to create, edit, manipulate, and collaborate online” (p. 40). The term encompasses many different forms of technologies. Some of these include wikis, blogs, social network sites, digital storytelling and interactive whiteboards. This literature review will discuss how technology is evolving at a rapid pace as well as focus on how these applications are and can be used in literacy education. First, I will explore the evolution of interactive technologies in the classroom. Next, I will discuss how Web 2.0 applications and new literacy tools are interactive and allow for collaboration. Finally, the research indicates that there is a lack of professional development for teachers on how to use these applications in their classrooms to help guide instruction. The research indicates that Web 2.0 applications and new literacy tools help drive instruction and are very beneficial to the students when used properly in the classroom. Web 2.0 applications and the iPad allow students to be active participants in the learning process.
Evolution of Technology

Over the past hundred plus years, technology in the classroom has advanced tremendously. By today’s standards the chalkboards used in classrooms would be considered to be extremely prehistoric. After the chalkboards and slates came the pencil. The pencil was considered a new technology during the 1900’s. The pencil allowed students to write on paper to create a document that could be saved. Technology continued to evolve, in 1925 the film projector and radio were introduced to the classroom. New York City’s Board of Education was the first to send lessons to schools through radio streams. Over the next few decades “school on the air” began to broadcast programs to millions of American students. The film projector was followed by the overhead projector, headphones, video tapes, television, hand held calculator, and the computer in 1980. During the 1980’s it was very rare to see a computer in the classroom, there was only one computer for every 92 students. Today there is one computer for every 4 students (Evolution of classroom technology, 2011). Technology continued to evolve in the late 1980’s when the CD-ROM drive was created. This device allowed many items to be stored, for example an entire encyclopedia could be stored on the CD-ROM. The CD-ROM would prove to be only the beginning of the ever changing world of technology.

The role of technology continued changing in the classroom over the next two decades. It is no longer uncommon to see a classroom with a desk top computer. Students are no longer just using a pencil or pen. Furthermore, technology has become more interactive. In 1999, the interactive whiteboard (IWB) was created. The IWB allows students and teachers to manipulate information on a touch screen projector. The IWB is interactive because students and teachers use the touch screen sensor to move things around. Pagget and Shenton (2007) found that many of the teachers they interviewed discussed how the IWB allowed them to be creative when
developing lesson plans. In addition, Pagget and Shenton (2007) state “Teaching and learning in the primary school needs to reflect this change. Potentially IWB’s can offer a multimodal approach to teaching literacy and, in practice, our research suggests that the potential is being realized” (p. 134). Therefore it is important that education professionals keep up with the latest technology because the students could greatly benefit from the multimodal approach. However, the IWB, has its limitations because it is not portable. Furthermore, the technology world continued to evolve with the creation of the iPod touch. This device allowed students to manipulate and move things using a touch screen sensor. The iPod is a portable device that is small enough to fit inside a student’s pocket and most recently the iPad was created as another portable device with a touch screen sensor. The iPad is a larger version of the iPod Touch.

One could say that Thomas Edison’s prediction in 1925 that “books will soon be obsolete in schools, scholars will be soon instructed through the eye” (Spence, B., 2011) is proving to be true with the evolution of technology in the classroom.

Web 2.0 Applications and iPad are Interactive

All of the Web 2.0 applications and new literacy tools such as the iPad allow students and teacher to be interactive in the learning process. Students are no longer required to obtain new knowledge from a text book. Web 2.0 applications such as blogs, wikis, WebQuests, and digital storytelling allow students to be interactive. Blogs and wikis allow students and teachers to create pages, edit, and add information. Students and teachers can comment on another persons’ wiki or blog. For example, Cielocha, Dean and Handsfield (2009) provide the example of Kristen, a teacher who replaced response binders with blogs. Kristen found a site (BlogSpot) and allowed the students to sign in using her account. The blog allowed the students to be interactive in their learning because they were able to use the blog as a way of responding to literature rather
than just writing. In addition, Kristen was able to respond back and forth with the students, making the learning interactive because the students were typing their responses rather than writing them out in pencil.

Digital storytelling is another new literacy tool that allows students to be interactive in the learning process. Greenidge and Sylvester’s (2009) research on digital storytelling discusses how the students are part of the process. The students in the study completed the traditional writing process steps before they published their digital stories. The students had to complete the prewriting, editing, and revising before they published their story on the computer.

Allows for Collaboration

Web 2.0 applications and the iPad allow students to collaborate with their peers during the learning process. Web 2.0 applications such as the iPad allow the students learn from each other. Many of the WebQuests are content based therefore some of the students may not know as much as the other student(s) who may have more background knowledge or vice versa. A teacher may use a WebQuest to introduce a new topic in science or social studies. Boyd and Ikpeze’s (2006) research of WebQuests demonstrates how the students worked together to complete a WebQuest. Students collaborate while using the WebQuest because students need to work together in order to navigate the WebQuest and complete the notes to go along with the WebQuest.

Wikis also allow for collaboration. Pang (2009) states “Wikis over collaborative capabilities often not found in the core of learning management systems. This tool might serve as a useful supplement I not a replacement for sequentially based discussion threads found in these systems” (p. 751). Wikis allow students to work together to add and edit information to a page.
One of the examples that Pang (2009) provides on how wikis can be used in the classroom is literature circles. Students would be given a book and they would use the wiki to discuss the book. Each person in the group would be responsible for one role in the group. For example, one student may be the discussion director; they would be responsible for posting discussion questions on the wiki. The whole group is responsible for adding and editing information on the wiki, therefore, making it collaborative. In addition to literature circles Pang (2009) discusses how wikis can be used for student portfolios, science projects, group research reports and other writing assignments. Callaway, Felvegi, and Matthew (2009) also discuss how wikis harness a group’s collaborative, creative energy to produce shared knowledge that benefits everyone.

Wikis and blogs are applications that students and their peers to add and edit information from home. For example, over a holiday break students would be able to respond to their literature circle group while the read chapters assigned over the break. In addition, teachers would still be able to communicate with their students outside of the school setting with the blogs and wikis. All of the Web 2.0 applications can be accessed from home allowing the students to collaborate outside of the school setting.

Digital storytelling is another Web 2.0 application that allows for collaboration in the learning process. Greenidge and Sylvester’s (2009) study discusses how the students went through the writing process before they created their final copy of their story on the computer. Furthermore, digital storytelling allows for collaboration because student could work together to create a story. Each person in the group could be responsible for a different part of the writing process. Digital storytelling allows students to learn from each other as they create their stories.
The iPad also allows for collaboration among students and their peers. Many of the Web 2.0 applications can be used on the iPad. For example, student participating in literature circles would be able to blog using their iPad rather than logging onto a desktop or laptop computer. In addition to using the iPad for blogging the students can also link their iPads together and play learning games against one another from their own iPads. The students can also use the iPad to buddy read with the iBooks application. This application allows students to choose and book and take turns reading different pages from their iPads. The iPad has much potential for collaboration in the learning process.

**Lack of Professional Development**

There are many new literacy tools available to teachers however; many of the teachers do not take advantage of these new literacies due to a lack of professional development. Boyd and Ikpeze (2006) found during their study of WebQuests that both students and teachers had a difficult time navigating the WebQuests because they were not exposed to any type of training. One of the issues they came across during their research was that the students had never been exposed to a WebQuest prior to the lesson. Therefore, the students and their teacher spent a majority of the time trying to navigate the WebQuest. In addition, Greenidge and Sylvester (2009) found during their research that many of the teachers were not trained on how to use digital storytelling in their classrooms. As technology is advancing and new literacy tools are becoming available teachers and students are not being properly trained on how to use these tools. The students in both Greenidge and Sylvester (2009) and Boyd and Ikpeze’s (2006) studies did not see the true potential that the Web 2.0 applications have in the learning process.
The iPad may also cause these same outcomes because it is the latest technology in the classroom. Like the teachers in Boyd and Ikpeze’s (2006) study the students and teachers that use the iPad for instruction may become overwhelmed because of the touch screen features and small screen. With any new literacy tool teachers should be trained on how to use the applications so that there is not any time wasted when their students use these new learning tools.

The iPad is one of the newest technologies being implemented into the school setting. Web 2.0 applications and the iPad allow students to learn in a non-traditional way. It is important that teachers and other education professionals are kept up to date on all the New Literacy tools that are available to enhance the learning process.

Methods

Context

The research for this study will occur at Elmer Intermediate School (pseudonym) in western New York. The research will occur with 4 students who live in the suburbs or village of a town in western New York. Most of the students live at home with both parents. The socioeconomic status of most of the families is middle or working class. According to the district website, 16% of the student in the district qualify for free and reduced lunch. About 94% of the students in the district are white and 2%-3% are African American or Hispanic. The classroom is an 8:1:1 self contained classroom for children with emotional and behavioral problems. The classroom has only one girl and five boys. All of the students placed in the self-contained classroom are considered to be well below grade average. There is a special education teacher, psychologist, and a teacher’s aide in the classroom. 90% of the classroom receives free or reduced lunch.
Participants

Josh, an eight year old white male participated in the study. Josh was placed in this classroom due to behavioral and emotional issues. Josh lives at home with his mom, dad, and younger brother. He is the oldest child in his family. His parents are very involved with his education. Josh was placed in the 8:1:1 classroom setting after he finished his first grade school year. Josh would rather talk to adults than play with the other kids during recess. He has shown tremendous growth this year according to his classroom teachers.

Wendy, the special education teacher in the 8:1:1 classroom also participated in this study. She has been teaching special education in the district for about 8 years. She began her teaching career as a physical education teacher and obtained her Master’s degree in special education.

Susan, a reading specialist at the Intermediate School participated in the study. She has a Master’s degree in literacy education. She began her career at the high school level and has been working at the Intermediate School for about 7 years. She has always been a reading teacher and worked with students at all grade levels.

Leslie, a third grade teacher participated in the research study. She does not have a literacy background. She is the science lead teacher for the building. She has been teaching in the district for 5 years.

Adrienne, a school psychologist for the 8:1:1 classroom has been with the district for 2 years. She has a Master’s degree in school psychology. Adrienne works with all of the students in the 8:1:1 classroom offering counseling as well as giving support to the classroom teacher.
Elaine, the teacher’s aide in the 8:1:1 classroom has been with the district for over 5 years. She has worked at various grade levels. This is her second year working in the 8:1:1 classroom. She provides support to the classroom teacher and psychologist.

**Researcher Stance**

As a researcher, I am currently the building substitute at the Intermediate School where the research is being done. I have had experience working with the students in the classroom prior to this research study. I am working on obtaining my Master’s Degree in Literacy Education and hold a Master’s Degree in Childhood and Special Education. During this time of this action research I acted as a participant observer, Mills (2011) defines this as the observation as well as engagement in activities and providing information. Being a participant observer may have an impact on how Josh (a pseudonym) interacts with the iPad. Josh may act differently with the iPad because he knows that I am observing him.

**Method**

During the study I used a variety of data collection methods. The study focused on the benefits of using the iPad in the classroom for literacy instruction. The study also focused on how the iPad can be implemented into the classroom at the elementary level. Throughout the study I observed the students in their classroom while they use the iPads for reading and writing in addition to other subjects. I observed how the students interacted with the iPad as well as their interaction with the other students and teachers in the classroom during this time.

During this study I also collected questionnaires from the teachers and staff at the school. The information from the questionnaires was used to examine the teachers and staff’s attitude towards incorporating the iPads into the classroom. The questionnaires were used to examine the benefits or drawbacks of using the iPads in the classroom. The questionnaire examined how the
participant uses the iPad in the classroom and how the students respond to the iPad. In addition, the questionnaire examined if the participants received any professional development training on how to use the iPad. Finally, the questionnaire examined how the participant feels about using the latest technology. All of the responses will be used to examine the benefits and limitations of using the iPad in the classroom.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

When doing the research it was important to ensure that the study is credible and qualitative. Mills (2011) defines credibility as the ability to take into account the complexities that may present themselves throughout the study. In order to make sure that this study is credible I completed many informal observations and discussions with the students and teachers in the classroom, practicing persistent observation (Mills). The many observations helped to ensure that the study was valid. In addition, I also established referential adequacy with the data (Mills) that I collected during my research. I also did prolonged participation at the study site (Mills) in order to overcome any pre conceived notions that I may have about the classroom.

I made sure that the study had transferability. According to Mills (2011), transferability, refers to the truth of the study. In order to make sure the study had transferability I collected descriptive data (Mills). I made sure to develop detailed descriptions of the context (Mills). The detailed descriptions allowed me to better interpret the data.

The study also had dependability. Mills (2011) defines dependability as the stability of the data collected. I overlapped methods (Mills) such as the student and teacher questionnaires and interview with the students and teachers that are participating in the research study. I also established an audit trail (Mills) that helped me examine the process of data collection. My
critical colleague helped me to make sure that my research was dependable. The data that I collected also helped me to ensure that the research was dependable.

Lastly, I ensured that my research study had conformability. Mills (2011) defines conformability as neutral data collection. In order to ensure that my research study had conformability I practiced triangulation (Mills) and practice reflexivity (Mills). In order to make sure that my research had triangulation I collected many forms of data including, informal observations, formal observations, and teacher questionnaires. In order to practice reflexivity I revealed any underlying assumptions or biases that I had and reflected on each of my observation sessions by taking notes after each session. There was a variety of data collected throughout the study that ensured that the study had conformability, dependability, transferability, and credibility.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

Before I began my research I collected informed consent and assent and protect the rights of each of the participants in the study. I gave a consent form to all of the teachers, staff, and informed assent forms to the students that I am going to collect data from. In addition, I obtained a signed parent consent form for the student, Josh (pseudonym), who participated in the research. I sent a letter home to parents to let them know that their child will be given a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. All teachers and staff who completed questionnaires will have their identity protected by removing their name from the questionnaire results.

**Data Collection**

There were multiple ways that data was collected. I performed many informal observations during the students’ reading and writing time. The observation data allowed me to see how the student interacted with his iPads. I kept a notebook with all of my notes from my
informal observations. In addition, I wrote down any other observations that I made during my research in the notebook. I discussed the ways that the child interacted with their iPads as well as note their attitudes towards reading and writing when the activities were on the iPad. I noted the teacher’s role in the classroom when the iPads were being used. The data allowed me to see how the student used the iPads in their classroom for literacy instruction as well as gave me an insight on how the teachers feel about using new literacies, such as the iPad, in the classroom for instruction.

**Findings and Discussion**

Given that literacy acquisition occurs through social interactions and technology, the research questions asked how can iPads be incorporated into literacy instruction in the special education classroom setting and what are the benefits of using iPads for literacy instruction. In order to obtain answers data was collected through informal and formal observations as well as questionnaires. Through careful examination of all the data collected these four themes emerged, iPads motivate students, many different ways to use the iPad in the classroom, lack of funding, and lack of professional development training on how to use the iPads for instruction.

**Motivation for Students**

The first theme that emerged from the data was that the iPad was motivating to the students. This theme became evident while completing the informal observations in the special education classroom. Josh, the student participant in this study appeared to be more apt to do the tasks he was given when he was able to use the iPad. When he had to write in his journal he was more resistant than when given the opportunity to type on his iPad. In addition, Josh was more motivated to complete tasks when he knew that during the reading and writing time there would
be a chance for him to use his iPad. Zora (2011) found that integrating the iPad into the classroom for math instruction her students were more apt to try new things and take risks when they were given the opportunity to use the iPad. Students are more motivated to give their all when they are given the chance to learn using the iPad.

One of the questionnaire responses was that many of the students in the classroom come to school now because they know they will be able to use the iPad when they get to school. In addition, one of the teachers explained that the students are more apt to do things when they are given the opportunity to do educational things on the iPad which in turn enhances their learning. The students in the special education classroom are held responsible for taking care of their iPad each day at school. The students are motivated to take care of their iPads because if they are found using them inappropriately they will lose their iPad.

In addition, the special education classroom uses the iPad as a motivator for the students’ behavior modification/management system. The students have the opportunity to earn up to twenty cents for activities throughout the day. After each activity the students are awarded anywhere up to twenty cents for their behavior during the activity. Next, the students add their points into their “piggy bank” on the iPad. When they have reached a certain amount of money they may go shopping in the school store to buy applications for their iPad. The students were motivated to earn all their points throughout the day so that they could use their iPad.

**Different ways to use the iPad**

The next theme that I identified while completing data analysis was that there are many different ways that the iPad can be used in the classroom. The questionnaire responses allowed me to see how the iPads were being used in the classroom in addition to the informal
observations in the special education classroom. After analyzing the data I found that many of the teachers used the iPad as a reward for good behavior. Furthermore, in the special education classroom the psychologist, teacher, and aide discussed how the students use their iPad to keep track of the money they earn throughout the day. According to the observation notes after each activity in the classroom the students are responsible for rating themselves for that particular activity. The teachers in the classroom then gave the students their rating, if the ratings matched the student was able to add two extra points (cents) to their piggy bank application. The piggy bank application made the student accountable for their behavior in the classroom.

The students in the classroom were given a chance throughout the whole day to use their iPad during each subject. For example, the teacher led a guided writing lesson and then allowed the students to use their iPads to complete their stories. After the students participated in the guided reading lesson they had to choose a prompt from their writing journal. Josh chose to answer his journal prompt using the notepad application on his iPad. The notepad application allows students to word process writing pieces. In addition, the notepad application was used as a note taking device. For example, during sharing time the teacher had the students take notes on the presenter, answering the Who? What? When? Where? Why? questions.

The reading specialist uses the iPad for many different things such as a notepad, voice recorder, lesson playback, sight word applications, fluency app A-Z and emailing results of assessments to teacher’s right after meeting with a student. The voice recorder allowed Josh to record himself reading and listen to himself read, this application helped with Josh’s fluency. In addition, Josh also used the sight word application to practice identifying high frequency words. The fluency application is compiled of books at the students independent reading level. The
students choose a book from the list and read the book in order to increase fluency. Josh used this application at the end of the reading block if there was enough time.

When the reading specialist gives assessments such as the STAR reading test she is able to email the results to the teachers immediately after the student finishes because of the iPad. The STAR reading test is given at the beginning and end of the academic school year. The test measures the students reading skills, mostly comprehension. Furthermore, the iPad allows the reading specialist to conduct Wilson Reading lessons on the iPad which engages her students. Wilson Reading is a program designed to help struggling readers and writers. The teacher follows an instructional guide based on the students’ level. Josh received Wilson Reading Instruction daily.

Josh (a pseudonym), the student participant in the study, used reading applications such as sentence builder. This is a reading and writing application that allows the students to create sentences. The student gets to choose a level and then they create a grammatically correct sentence. In addition to the sentence builder there is also a story builder application that allows the students to record a story based on the picture prompt they are given. The sentence builder application helped him practice making complete sentences, a task he was reluctant to do when asked to do on paper. In addition to the sentence builder application he was also able to choose a book to listen to on the iPad. iBook is an application that allows the student to choose a book. They can choose to have the book read aloud to them or read the book independently. The iBook application allowed Josh to choose a story to listen to or read to himself. He often chose to listen to the stories. These are just a few of the ways I observed the iPad being used in the classroom.
Lack of Funding

While analyzing the data another theme appeared across the data. It is not surprise that the lack of funding theme emerged, especially in the tough economy that many school districts are facing. The iPads in the special education classroom are funded through a grant. However, the grant does not pay for the educational applications for the students. All of the professionals that filled out a questionnaire mentioned at least once that there was not enough district money to buy educational applications for their students to use. They were able to download the basic trial versions of some learning applications but those expired after a certain amount of usages.

Budget is the only factor holding many school districts back from purchasing iPads for classroom. Ritzko (2010), a fourth grade inclusion classroom teacher discusses that when it comes to getting their hands on items like the iPad they are limited by budget. In addition Ritzko (2010) states “ The notebooks we’re using now costs about $150 each, but the devices don’t allow for Web access”. Many school districts are in the same situations. Furthermore, In order to fund their classroom applications the teachers and students in the special education classroom began collecting cans and bottles in the winter until the end of the school year in order to buy different applications for their iPads. According to the questionnaire responses, when the teachers buy applications for their iPads they are only able to purchase the trial version due to the lack of funding for the full version. The trial version is limited and is disabled after a certain amount of usages whereas the full version allows the students to use it as many times as they would like and has all of the amenities.
Lack of Professional Development for Educational Professionals

Lastly, the theme identified was the lack of professional development on how to use new literacy tools such as the iPad. This theme also appeared in Boyd and Ikpeze’s (2007) research on WebQuests in the classroom. The students and teachers in the study had a difficult time navigating through the WebQuests which was similar to the student in this action research study. Greenidge and Sylvester (2009) found that many of the teachers in the study were not trained on how to use digital storytelling in the classroom. They also found that the students and teachers were not trained on how to use the applications in their classrooms. Furthermore, the data collected through this action research was that none of the educational professionals received any type of professional development on how to use the iPad. They were given their iPads and encouraged to explore them. In addition, their building principal demonstrated possible uses but allowed the teachers to play, download and practice different things on their iPads. Without proper training teachers do not know the full potential of the iPad and do not have the proper training on how to teach their students to use the iPads.

In addition, the data collected found that the teachers would have liked to receive some type of professional development training on how to use the iPad however, they still felt comfortable with using the basics on the iPad. According to the questionnaire, most teachers felt comfortable navigating the internet and finding the “App” store on their iPads. However, many teachers did not go beyond those points with the iPad due to the lack of professional development. Furthermore, after learning how to use the iPad and some of its potential the teacher’s comfort level increased for the teacher’s aide. All of the education professionals that filled out a questionnaire stated that they were comfortable with the basics on the iPad but would like to receive training on the potential of the iPad. The lack of professional development
training on how to use the iPads for instruction is a huge problem. The lack of training is a problem because many teachers could be improperly teaching their students how to use the iPad. In addition, many teachers may be hesitant to use the iPad in their classroom because they do not feel comfortable teaching their students using the iPad. Without professional development teachers and students are both missing out on technologically advanced educational tools.

**Implications**

The findings of my research have several implications for me as a future teacher. The iPad will help students develop new literacy skills. In addition, the iPad allows for a different avenue of learning for students. The findings of my research suggest that the iPad is a great teaching and learning resource for students.

The first implication is that the iPad is motivating to students. The theme of motivation was evident in the responses from the education professionals. The informal observations showed that the student was more apt to follow the classroom expectations when he was given the opportunity to use the iPad for reading and writing. This finding is important because integrating new literacies such as the iPad provides a different and new avenue of learning for students that may need differentiated instruction. Josh benefited from using the iPad because it was a different way to learning therefore he was motivated to participate because he was able to use the iPad to help him learn.

What I have learned through this action research is that the iPad has much potential in the classroom setting for instruction. The iPad is a device that is user friendly, many students know more about the iPads then the teacher does. However, during my action research I saw a few
ways the iPad was used for literacy instruction I would be interested to see many more ways the iPad can be used for literacy instruction. I suggest that future research be done that examines how the iPad can be integrated into literacy instruction as well as in the different content areas. Furthermore, I am left wondering if there are more literacy applications available for the iPad that help struggling readers and writings. In addition, I would also like to know if there are any training workshops on how to implement the iPad into the classroom for instruction.

One of the limitations of this action research was that I originally was going to have five student participants but only ended up with one student which may have had an effect on my findings. Another limitation is that my study was limited by grade level range. By involving students in grade levels K-12 I would have gotten a wider range of what literacy instruction on the iPad looks like.

After conducting my literature review and research I am left with many questions about using the iPad in the classroom for instruction. Due to the lack of funding I am left wondering what is going to happen when the grant money runs out what will happen to the iPads in the classroom? Will the teachers and students have to give up their iPads? In addition, I am left wondering what the outcome would have been if I had more participants in the study. I would have been interested to see if I had more student participants what the outcome would have been. I am also left wondering if I would have had the same outcomes if I conducted research in a regular education classroom. The last question I ask is Would the students benefit from taking a technology class solely based on using the iPad?
Conclusion

During the action research I found many benefits of using the iPad in the classroom for literacy instruction. The students in the special education classroom were more than capable of navigating different applications on the iPad. In some cases the students knew more about the iPad than the teacher did. With many school budgets being significantly reduced it is difficult to examine the benefits of using the iPad for literacy instruction. In addition, because the iPad is the latest technology many school districts cannot afford to buy one for each classroom. The iPad allows students to learn in a different way and allows them to have some independence in the learning process.
References


Hargadon, S. (2010). *The Role of Web 2.0 in Education*. Multimedia and Internet at Schools. 11-15


