

# How can the reading of an e-book, using cell phones as the e-reader of choice, enhance boys' enthusiasm and success in reading?

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## Abstract

It is widely felt that adolescent boys are increasingly reluctant to read for pleasure. However, boys respond positively to the technological devices surrounding them. Therefore, it seemed logical to develop an action research project investigating whether the use of e-readers might have a positive effect on boys' enthusiasm for reading. Smartphones were selected as the preferred e-reading platform. Volunteers from grade 9 formed a library club to give regular feedback regarding their e-reading experiences. The research was conducted over several months during which boys were encouraged to select e-books of their choice for their leisure reading. This was a new experience for these boys, many of whom responded enthusiastically. The data were analyzed with reference to both the boys' enthusiasm and success in reading and, although the findings were not always positive, it would appear that using e-readers, specifically smartphones as e-readers, is worth pursuing as part of a wider library service. It gives boys both the opportunity to read at times they previously could not and the motivation to read more regularly.

## Introduction

International research notes growing concern regarding the decline in teenage reading generally and boys' reading in particular (NEA 2007; OECD 2009). According to Smith & Wilhelm (2002), adolescent boys are generally perceived as viewing reading as a solitary, 'nerdy' and feminine activity. This is perhaps especially true at an all-boys boarding school where days are heavily structured, sport is compulsory, and boys feel that their leisure time is extremely limited and precious to them. Within this context, a 2009 Hilton College Library survey<sup>1</sup> found that 41% of boys visited the library 'a few times' or 'hardly ever'. In addition, boys are often quick to describe themselves as non-readers, even when they are able readers,

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<sup>1</sup> Surveyed 244 boys from all grades

as this is simply not an activity they see as having value. In contrast, adolescent boys are generally perceived to take naturally and enthusiastically to the use of technology (Prensky 2006). Given these assumptions, it seems appropriate to investigate the use of technology in an attempt to support boys' reading. Unfortunately, the purchase of e-readers, although becoming more affordable, remains expensive in South African Rands<sup>2</sup>, therefore this research specifically targets how the reading of e-books using cell phones,<sup>3</sup> as the e-reader of choice, could enhance boys' enthusiasm and success in reading. Harnessing boys' enthusiasm for technology, with the possibility of accessing more free time for leisure reading, seems worthwhile if a positive change in boys' responses to reading is seen.

## **Literature Review**

The gap in reading skills between adolescent boys and girls has been a topic of discussion for many years. Smith and Wilhelm (2002, p.1) state "Without question, the widest current gender gap for learning achievement recorded by standardized measures is in the area of literacy".

It is generally held that boys begin reading later, read less, value reading less, lag behind girls on "almost every literacy measure in every country and culture from which data [are] available" (ibid, p.2) and define themselves as non-readers very early with nearly 50% doing so by high school (Smith & Wilhelm 2002; Senior 2005; Tyre 2008; Gallagher 2009; Booth 2006; Brummitt-Yale 2008; OECD 2010).

The reasons for this gender reading gap are not entirely clear. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) suggest strong biological and cultural factors and, along with Gallagher (2009) and Booth (2006), query present instructional methods and educational environments as being detrimental to boys' reading appreciation and success. However, reading and communication skills are seen as vital to achieving success in both today's classroom and economic environment. As Tyre notes (2008, p.283), "Learning to love reading is a most crucial precondition to student success" while Gallagher (2009, p.35), says that there is "a strong correlation between time spent reading and performance in standardized reading tests". At the same time, employers are requiring a progressively more literate labour force as the decade

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<sup>2</sup> The cheapest Kindle at \$139 costing about R1400 once postage has been included

<sup>3</sup> Although the devices used throughout this research are more correctly described as smartphones, the more generic terms "cell phones" has also been used.

1996-2006 has seen a 14% increase in the literacy requirements for all occupations (Gallagher 2009, p.115).

Smith and Wilhelm (2002), while cautioning against generalizations, note that reading is perceived by some boys as a time-consuming, solitary, feminine activity while computers are seen as a major tool for socialization. They comment on the conflict boys feel between being seen as competent and being social, a view endorsed by Ashton (2005). They also note that boys are perceived as being more “enthusiastic about reading electronic texts” (ibid, p.11). However, Booth (2006) cautions that boys may be reading more than we give them credit for and emphasizes that they may be reading texts and in formats that schools do not generally deem worthy of support. Boys might see offering them the choice of reading electronically as a more masculine, social and worthwhile activity.

Mobile devices of various kinds have become ubiquitous, with the average [American] teenager owning 3.5 such devices (Lenhart et al 2010), and, according to the 2010 Kaiser Family Foundation study (Gillard 2010), 85% of high school students have cell phones, while 31% have smartphones (Project Tomorrow 2010, p.6). Indeed, cell phones are the “most widely distributed information device in the world” (Truncanco 2009, p.2), and students state “a clear preference for using mobile devices that allow them to work un-tethered from traditional school boundaries”, with smartphones being students’ device of choice [64%] over a laptop or net book [46%] (Project Tomorrow 2010, p.6).

Furthermore, attitudes towards cell phone use for learning and teaching within classrooms is beginning to change, and the literature discusses numerous cell phone based m-learning projects covering a wide variety of subjects (Project Tomorrow 2010; Gillard 2010; Truncanco, 2009). Prensky (2006, p.3), suggests that this technology be more constructively engaged with as:

one of the most important tools for 21<sup>st</sup> century students is not the computer that we educators are trying so hard to integrate but the cell phone that so many of our schools currently ban.

With this in mind, it seems appropriate that my action research investigates enthusing boys to read more and to develop stronger reading skills using cell phone technology.

## **Research Context**

Hilton College is a full-boarding independent school catering for 550 year 8 – 12 boys in South Africa. Although the school has a rural setting, the boys are largely drawn from the urban wealthy elite of the country, with a growing expatriate component. The school mission statement supports a holistic education based on academic, spiritual, cultural and sporting development, with an environmental aspect becoming increasingly important. While the school does pride itself on its academic achievements, it is on the sporting fields that the most valued accolades seem to be sought by the boys themselves, their parents and a significant portion of the staff.

Although literacy is well supported within the curriculum and there is strong Library/English Department collaboration, reading in general, and leisure reading in particular, does not seem to find a ready space within many Hilton boys' lives. Furthermore, the library is not conveniently situated in relation to the Houses<sup>4</sup> or the classrooms. While cell phone use outside the House is strictly banned<sup>5</sup>, supporting reading on cell phones seemed particularly apt within this context as boys could access e-books from their Houses and they could make use of 45 minutes after lights out [21h15 – 22h00] during which silent use of mobile devices is tacitly accepted.

## **Research Approach**

Action research [AR] is particularly suitable for schools as the researcher is intimately involved in the process and vested in the potential impact that this research may have upon the pupils and, therefore, the researcher's professional effectiveness and job satisfaction. McNiff (2002) notes that action research is a "practical way of looking at your own work" and, therefore, affording the researcher an opportunity for self-reflection and self-evaluation, particularly as action research is open ended and cyclical in nature.

It is also relatively simple and, therefore, accessible to researchers who may be fairly inexperienced in this field. When conducted with rigour, AR results in credible findings for the 'amateur' researcher.

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<sup>4</sup> Boarding Houses are simply referred to as Houses (the House)

<sup>5</sup> Cell phones may only be used by boys within their Houses, usually only after sport which finishes at 17h00, and excluding prep (18h45 – 21h00) and may not be carried by a boy outside his House

This study was focused on using e-readers to engage adolescent boys in reading as a leisure activity. It was reliant upon volunteers who gave up precious free time to attend discussions as well as requiring them to use their personal devices for school-based research. As such, it was important that a largely qualitative methodology, such as AR, was used to gather data from pupils as their comments were critical factors in determining the success of using e-readers in increasing leisure reading enthusiasm.

### **Participants**

Grade 9 volunteers were sought, with 21 boys initially forming the Library Cellphone Reading Club (LCRC). Grade 9 was identified as a slightly less pressured group and, in addition, I had tutored a group of grade 9s, six of whom joined the LCRC.

Boys had to possess a smartphone<sup>6</sup>; this limited the group significantly, with many initial volunteers being eliminated<sup>7</sup>. It was initially hoped that the LCRC would mainly comprise of boys whom Kelley & Clausen-Grace called “I can, but I don’t want to readers”, that is, capable readers “who lack a true zeal for reading” (2009, p.317). However, many of these boys were reluctant to volunteer or did not possess the necessary smartphone.

Two boys withdrew by the second meeting<sup>8</sup>. The final composition of the LCRC consisted of eight boys from the streamed ‘A’ English class, five boys from the ‘additional English’ class<sup>9</sup> and the remaining six from ‘mixed ability’ classes. They were drawn from all five classes and from all the Houses.

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Once initial technical problems, both with the downloading of e-books to South Africa<sup>10</sup> and establishing which smartphones could support the e-book app, were sorted out, LCRC members were asked to complete a survey on Moodle<sup>11</sup> to gauge their attitudes towards

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<sup>6</sup> 17 boys had BlackBerrys, 1 iPhone and 1 iPodTouch

<sup>7</sup> This ethical dilemma may have been avoided if funding had been made available for devices, however, this was not part of the research scope and the intention was for boys to access their own devices.

<sup>8</sup> One because of technical problems with his phone and the other because he decided the whole concept of cell phone e-reading was a total “turn-off”.

<sup>9</sup> i.e. identified as needing some remedial English support

<sup>10</sup> We experienced an inability to source an appropriate e-book supplier. It would appear that BlackBerry South Africa had not finalized license agreements which would enable South African BlackBerry owners to access e-books from various sites. The site we used was initially rejected on the basis that their teenage selection was fairly limited, however, this has developed enormously since mid 2010

<sup>11</sup> The school’s Learning Management System

reading in general, their reading habits and their expectations regarding using cell phones as e-readers. They were then allowed to select and download their first e-book. An online account had been created to which all LCRC boys had access<sup>12</sup>. The boys were handed journals in which to keep an informal log of their reading and observations. The LCRC members and I swapped cell phone numbers and email addresses. They were encouraged to keep in contact with me in whichever manner best suited them. Feedback was received via informal discussions and journals. The boys were interviewed in small groups regarding their e-reading experiences, including reactions from fellow pupils and staff as well as expectations for the summer holiday. These interviews were recorded and transcribed.

During their holiday only three boys maintained adequate journals, two boys made use of email, none of the boys used SMS, although all LCRC boys were messaged during this time to encourage them to continue reading.

Seven scheduled weekly meetings were held in the first term of the 2011 academic year<sup>13</sup>. All boys completed their journal entries during these meetings, as this was to become a more reliable method of ensuring feedback. Individual interviews were also conducted during these meetings as well as informal group discussions. A final survey was then undertaken, followed up by individual interviews being conducted. I also kept an informal journal throughout this time, noting boys' reactions and comments. These techniques enabled fairly rich and layered data to be collected.

This research relied heavily, but not exclusively, on collecting qualitative data. Some quantitative data was gathered from the surveys; however, most of the data derived from the surveys, group discussions, interviews, journals and observations were largely qualitative. Qualitative data is, by nature, more descriptive and subjective and as it was the boys' opinions and feelings that were of importance, the data relied heavily upon their 'voices'.

Data analysis was continuous throughout the data collection period and included identifying various themes. Large colour-coded spreadsheets were created for each theme, with tick boxes for various categories identified within that theme. Data were then transcribed and

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<sup>12</sup> Boys could select e-books of their choice online and download them into the site 'library', they then needed to notify me of their selection so that I could go ahead and complete the purchase in order for them to download the book onto their cell phones.

<sup>13</sup> Our academic year runs from January to December, LCRC boys returned in 2011 into grade 10.

categorized into these themes. The boys' comments were highlighted in the same themed colour-coding in order to establish patterns. Where appropriate, data were transformed into graphs to better illustrate emergent trends or attitudes.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

The technical aspects of reading e-books in the difficult telecommunication environment we experience in South Africa meant that the participants in this study could only use a web-based e-book provider. That is, they could not download the full e-book onto their smartphones to have available to read at their leisure. This hampered an important aspect of this study – the read anywhere, anytime, anyplace concept.

Functionality of the e-book contributed to some of the boys being uncomfortable with the reading experience. Most websites selling e-books are designed for the individual user and a single online account had been set up to which LCRC members had access. This caused problems when boys were reading the same title<sup>14</sup>, as the e-book would open at the last reader's bookmark<sup>15</sup>. While chapters were hyperlinked, and even this link was not immediately apparent, re-locating their place involved time-consuming scrolling. All the boys who experienced this cited it as a major disadvantage, commenting that "*It took me a whole prep to find my place again*", and "*Someone else is reading this book too, so it is irritating to constantly [have to] find my place*", "[it was] *confusing*", and that it was "*difficult to stop and start [reading]*", while for one participant, it was "*the only negative*" to cell phone reading. Two boys reported that they "*could not be bothered*" to find their places again and simply gave up reading the e-book. This situation could have been avoided by creating individual accounts; however, the cost factor would have had to be taken into account.

Smartphone e-reading on the chosen app involved continuous scrolling and this contributed little to the boys' enjoyment of the experience. At least nine boys commenting negatively on scrolling versus pagination and the ability to turn pages, with comments such as "*scrolling down is not comfortable*", "[it is] *irritating to scroll down*" and "*it's difficult to page through without confusion*". Not knowing how far 'into' the e-book they were at any time also

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<sup>14</sup> For example, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was read by seven boys and *The Hunger Games* by nine

<sup>15</sup> These e-books are not 'stored' on the cell phone but are downloaded from the website each time the boy wishes to access his e-book.

irritated some of the boys<sup>16</sup>. While one boy enjoyed this feature, observing “*you have no clue where you are in the book at any time so when the book finishes you are amazed at how quickly you read it and how much you enjoyed it*”, most of the boys found it disconcerting, noting “*this bugs me as I want to know how much and how fast I should read*”, and “*that’s one downside, you can’t see how far you are in the book*”. Furthermore, many boys indicated that they would normally have skipped pages while reading and others liked to page back to re-read a difficult or confusing section. One comment, echoed by other boys, noted, “*In such a complicated book I can’t page back and read again, it takes too long*”. Perhaps if the boys were more familiar with the medium, these issues would not have been so problematic. However, due to the scrolling function some boys felt that the chapters went by more quickly, with ten boys reporting that cell phone e-reading allowed them to read faster and more easily.

Eight boys commented on problems relating to battery life. While batteries would last an adequate time, boys did not always remember to charge their phones, which hampered their anytime, anyplace reading experience.

Distraction was another, not unexpected, issue that interfered with the boys’ engagement with the reading process. One participant observed that “*I struggled to concentrate with all the other applications on the phone. I found myself drifting further and further away from reading. I would be constantly interrupted by BBMs<sup>17</sup>*”. This was echoed by almost all the boys. Four found that they could ignore the incoming messages quite easily, or that replying to them did not overly interrupt their reading. The disruption caused by messaging was very detrimental to the boys’ ability to get into a meaningful flow. They were also keenly aware that they were bound not to respond to these messages during school or prep time<sup>18</sup> and, for some, this became an issue on its own, with boys reporting “*I am very tempted to SMS, BBM or MXIT [in class] but I try very hard not to*” and “*I would try very, very hard not to get distracted but the harder I try the more the messages [loomed] large in my mind*”. Distraction, without doubt, was one of the biggest disadvantages to using cell phones as e-readers. The boys’ responses to questions in the pre and post e-reading surveys, as to how easily they become distracted when reading, reflected this change (see Table 3G in appendix)

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<sup>16</sup> While the iPhone does have a bar giving indication of progress, the BlackBerrys do not

<sup>17</sup> BlackBerry Messages

<sup>18</sup> All boys had signed contracts which stipulated the conditions relating to them being able to have their cell phones with them at all times.

, with eight answering ‘often’ [up from 5 in the pre e-reading survey] and four ‘hardly ever’ [down from 6].

Cell phones are vulnerable to theft and damage and, during the course of this research, nine of the possible nineteen cell phones were out of commission at **some** stage<sup>19</sup>. Naturally this hampered their e-reading, as one boy noted, “*and that was the end of my reading*” after leaping into the pool with his cell phone. This rather high ‘casualty’ factor should be considered when thinking of smartphone use in education, whether for reading or wider classroom use.

Interestingly, the small screen size was not a particular impediment, with only three boys commenting negatively on this.

Another aspect of functionality that boys responded to strongly was reading from a backlit screen. An aspect of this did contribute to lessening the enjoyment of using e-readers to engage and enhance their reading experience, as only 4 boys did not complain of eyestrain. While a few boys reported that this diminished as they became accustomed to cell phone e-reading, most mentioned this problem several times during the research. Two boys also experienced related headaches. However, thirteen boys viewed the ability to read at night due to the cell phone’s back light, as definitely enhancing their reading experience. Boys noted that “*in a busy day where I would not be able to read, this allowed me to read for a bit after lights out*”, and “*the time I want to read is at night and I can read nice and slow and not have to start and stop. In class I feel rushed and have to re-read sometimes*”, “*I read every night*” and “*I like the way I can read in the dark. I read till like 12 o’clock at night. Even though it’s past late prep*”. A few boys were too tired to read at night and one boy disliked the brightness of the light shining into his face in the dark.

While the Hilton College staff had been notified of this research, and all LCRC boys carried cards indicating that they had permission to carry and read off their cell phones, six boys reported being harassed by either staff or seniors. Two boys had their cell phones confiscated for extended periods by seniors for reading during prep and one participant reported that the teachers “*don’t trust you, they are always checking up on you and this almost discourages*

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<sup>19</sup> Two were stolen, three had technical faults, two were upgraded which involved re-downloading apps and e-books and two fell into water. Seven of these incidents happened over the holiday.

you". Although boys also reported positive interaction with staff, three boys noted that they felt very aware of the teacher's attention on them while e-reading.

As the research used cell phone e-readers in an attempt to engage boys in reading, there were perceptions that the boys were 'on the phone' too much. Four boys commented that their parents expressed these concerns while one boy reported that during the holidays his mother was "getting mad" with him and eventually she took his phone away "cos she said I was anti-social". Interestingly, twelve of the boys made comments on the perception of reading off a cell phone. They felt it was "weird", "just doesn't feel right", and "not natural" with one participant commenting that he felt conflicted: "I'm feeling clever because I'm reading, but a cell phone is meant to be bad".

All 19 boys viewed the convenience related to the cell phone's mobility and the ready accessibility of books "at your fingertips" as a positive factor in enhancing their enthusiasm for reading. They reported that having the ability to read anywhere, anyplace, anytime was very motivating, commenting that they could read while "waiting for Mom to call" and "I can just whip my phone out at any time during the day and read", "one of the things I like about this is that you can read almost any book that comes to mind. It's so much easier than carrying around a book", and "I loved this because I would never have gone out to look for a book". Five boys reported that this mobility and accessibility easily overcame any negative e-reading aspects, noting that this feature was the most significant factor in increasing their motivation to read. Seven boys mentioned that the downloading was simple and the e-book easy to work.

Only two boys did not reach the minimum target of reading at least two books for this research, while three boys read more than five books<sup>20</sup>. Seventeen of the boys reported to have enjoyed at least one of the books they selected for e-reading, commenting that "I loved that book so much and have started the second one", "it was awesome", and "[it was] the best book". Ten boys did feel that they read more than they would normally have done, with one participant reporting "I have read much more than I usually read, I normally read 1 book per year and I have already read 3 in half the time." Four boys said they read less, largely

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<sup>20</sup> Over all 63 books were read, although 5 of these were not completed.

due to cell phones providing too many distractions<sup>21</sup>. While a majority of boys did not feel more enthusiastic about reading, there was, nevertheless, a significant minority of seven boys were more enthused (see Table 1 in appendix).

When asked to give a rating out of 10<sup>22</sup>, two boys rated this experience 10/10; the lowest was 4/10, with the average rating being 7.3. Overall the boys did seem to enjoy the experience of cell phone e-reading. Eight answered affirmatively to the question ‘Did using your cell phone as an e-reader make reading a more enjoyable experience?’ However, seven ticked ‘unsure’, with two boys commenting that they “*like[d] the idea a lot more than doing it*”, and four boys felt that e-reading impacted negatively on their reading enjoyment (see Table 2 in appendix). Boys reported that they felt “*more competent*” readers when using a cell phone as an e-reader feeling they “*looked cool*”, “*felt good*” and one participant noted “*I felt quite proud of myself reading on my phone, doing something other people weren’t doing*” and they were doing “*something new*” and not being “*conventional*”. There was a slight shift in their attitudes towards reading from pre to post survey with three boys ticking “reading is more important than ever for success” [up from 0] on the post e-reading survey and two ticking ‘reading is not as important as it used to be for success’ [down from 5], while all the rest selected ‘reading is important for success’. However, it was interesting to note that there was almost no change in their perceptions of themselves as readers over this period.

Fourteen boys felt that they would continue reading on their cell phones should the library continue to support this initiative, although these boys would like to read books in both electronic and paper formats. Thirteen felt the library should support cell phone reading as part of a wider library service to the entire school. While some boys felt the e-book selection was limited and three boys found it easier to select books in the library where they could browse the shelves, most boys had no problems selecting books online. In addition, boys liked “*not having to go through the whole hassle of going to the library*” and some noted that books could be intimidating, especially when they appeared large and thick, while e-books were not intimidating at all.

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<sup>21</sup> The boy using the iPhone had problems as all the purchased books downloaded each time an e-book was accessed, this proved very expensive, irritating and counter-productive, with the boy concluding “Using the .. app is a pain”.

<sup>22</sup> 10/10 being enthusiastic and would definitely continue reading on your cell phone, 5/10 it was average and 1/10 glad the research is over and you will never have to read on your cell phone again

According to Kelley & Clausen-Grace (2009, p.313), “engaged reading is a critical goal for educators” as it is these readers who achieve at higher levels and might be described as successful readers. They define engagement as the “level of cognitive involvement” invested in the process and describe engaged readers as those who “actively interact with the text, seeking to understand what they have read. They avoid distractions and socially interact with others regarding text” (ibid). In order to try and establish levels of reading engagement, LCRC members were asked the same set of questions in both surveys<sup>23</sup>. While no firm conclusions are suggested, it does appear that the boys may have read in a slightly less engaged manner as it seems that they were less inclined to engage with or picture the characters when e-reading. They were more distracted and seem to have carried on reading even though they didn’t really understand their text fully (Tables 3A-3H in appendix). These aspects could be explained by incoming messages and the inability to easily re-read pages due to the scrolling feature as discussed above. One participant was pleased that he felt he read faster on the cell phone, however, he thought he read more inaccurately, to such an extent that he re-read *The Hunger Games* in book format as he felt he had “*missed things*” when initially reading the e-book.

An important, and not wholly unexpected finding, was that the length of time boys could usually concentrate when leisure reading also changed dramatically with ten boys being able to read for less time. Eight of these reported that e-reading on cell phones more than halved the time they were usually able to remain absorbed in reading (see Table 4 in appendix). Interestingly, three boys maintained that they could read twice as long when e-reading as compared to reading conventional books.

The timing of this research has had an impact on the results; technical difficulties as mentioned meant that the year-end exams began weeks after the launch of the LCRC. Some boys found it difficult to really make a start due to exam revision, although two boys read more than three books in this time. Impetus was then difficult to maintain during the six week holiday. In the group interviews, the boys were almost unanimous that reading was a “*school thing*” and that holidays were too exciting and busy for them to be bothered with reading. Holiday reading was “*as a last resort*”, however, in individual follow up interviews after the holidays, it became apparent that while reading was not a preferred holiday activity, all the

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<sup>23</sup> These results are based on 18 boys due to 1 boy misreading the question.

boys did read in the holidays <sup>24</sup> and fifteen boys had done some e-reading during this time. It would appear that for many of these boys, this reading was largely done in the first week. As one boy reported, “*even though I had my phone present and with me for most of the time [during the holidays] I did not have a particular urge to go [online] and download the book I had chosen. Even though the book started to get interesting and exciting, I had no urge whatsoever to read... I was having too much fun*”. Several other boys echoed this sentiment and it is interesting to note that not even the enticement of technology had any impact on this attitude. In addition, there were problems with damaged phones and occasional lack of connectivity during these holidays<sup>25</sup>.

When the boys returned in grade 10 in 2011, they returned to significant changes to their school routine<sup>26</sup>. In addition, all nineteen boys reported a much heavier work load. More than half the boys felt this had a significant impact on their leisure reading time with several boys reporting at various stages that they had not done any e-reading for at least a week at a time due to overwhelming academic and/or sports commitments. However, this prolonged research did mean that the possibility of motivating and enthusing boys to read using smartphone e-reading was tested under various conditions which lends authenticity to the findings.

## **Conclusion**

This research indicates that cell phone e-reading is unlikely to become even the most enthusiastic reader’s only format for reading. However, for some of the boys having an opportunity to use their cell-phones as e-readers did enhance their enthusiasm and success in reading. In addition to responding to the extreme mobility implicit in cell phone e-reading, the boys were motivated by having access to additional ‘after lights-out’ time for reading. While a portion of the boys were more enthusiastic about reading and did indeed read more, the concern would be that the boys may have read in a less engaged manner. However, while the level of engagement is an important gauge of success in reading, the mere willingness to read more should also be seen as a measure of successful reading, as time spent reading leads

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<sup>24</sup> 18 boys read magazines, 2 boys read on kindles, 2 boys were given books as Christmas presents which they enjoyed, an additional 4 boys read books which were already in their home environments

<sup>25</sup> Boys holidaying in remote areas of Mozambique, Tanzania & the Drakensberg had no connectivity and 3 boys on overseas holidays lacked connectivity due to not having access to ‘roaming’ during this time.

<sup>26</sup> New school times included an hour later start, lessons shortened from 50 minutes to 45, the doing away with “central hour” free time straight after school and an increased prep time, although other activities such as first squad fitness training, choir or extra lessons were permissible within first prep [18h45 – 19h45].

to success in reading (Gallagher 2009). Nevertheless, reading in this format has limitations, which some boys found significant.

An unexpected bonus was that several boys reported they enjoyed the communication that developed between LCRC members regarding e-books. It was also interesting to note that the four boys who least enjoyed e-reading had a wide spectrum of reading abilities coming from the streamed 'A', mixed ability and additional English classes.

Although there were limitations to enthrusting boys to read using technology that favoured ready accessibility and anytime, anyplace, anywhere reading, the findings of this first cycle of action research demonstrates that supporting smartphone e-reading has a significant impact on some boys' enthusiasm for and success in reading. As such, e-reading using smartphones is an addition to the school library's service which is worth supporting, particularly as it attempts to engage adolescents through using devices of their choice. Access to this e-book account has subsequently been opened to all interested boys, to which many boys responded enthusiastically. One way of dealing with the complications implicit in having a single online e-book account is to subscribe to software which integrates e-books into the circulation system, an initiative that Hilton College is now actively pursuing. However, supporting e-reading should also involve offering access to dedicated e-readers, which may have wider appeal to some boys. Our subsequent purchase of Kindles has been met with enthusiasm but the very real advantage of boys owning their own devices wherever possible has also been highlighted by the loss of several of these e-readers. However, it is worth exploring multiple avenues in an attempt to enthuse and motivate adolescent boys to read. As Johnson (2010 online) suggests, "the attitudes we as professional librarians adopt towards the post-literate [Net Generation] may well determine whether our libraries continue to exist".

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## **Reflection**

*I have benefitted enormously from having the opportunity to conduct this research as it has necessitated reading widely on librarianship and reading. While this should be part of any professional's life, it is very easy to get snowed under with every day work and the endless listserv notifications can all too easily be left for "another time". For this I am indebted to the IBSC.*

*Having our academic year structured differently to most of the other researchers was a drawback that I think most of the South Africans experienced. Unless you are organized to start your research immediately, the end of the academic year is upon you which makes integrating research into boys' lives very difficult. It is clearly a huge advantage to be able to start at the beginning of an academic year. Also, the nature of library-based research meant that the reliability of 15 year-olds was important, not a commodity to be taken for granted; other teachers may have a 'captive' audience of their class before them. These factors did contribute towards a more stressful research environment.*

*What was really significant for me was the way boys responded to the extra attention they got from a staff member. They liked the fact that someone was interested in their reading and that within the group they talked about books. This rather obvious outcome is an important aspect to build upon.*

*This opportunity has encouraged me to continue developing the library to the benefit of the boys and in keeping with the 'tradition of excellence' the school prides itself on.*

## APPENDIX

**Table 1**

1. Do you feel that reading on your cell phone in any way changed your enthusiasm for reading?

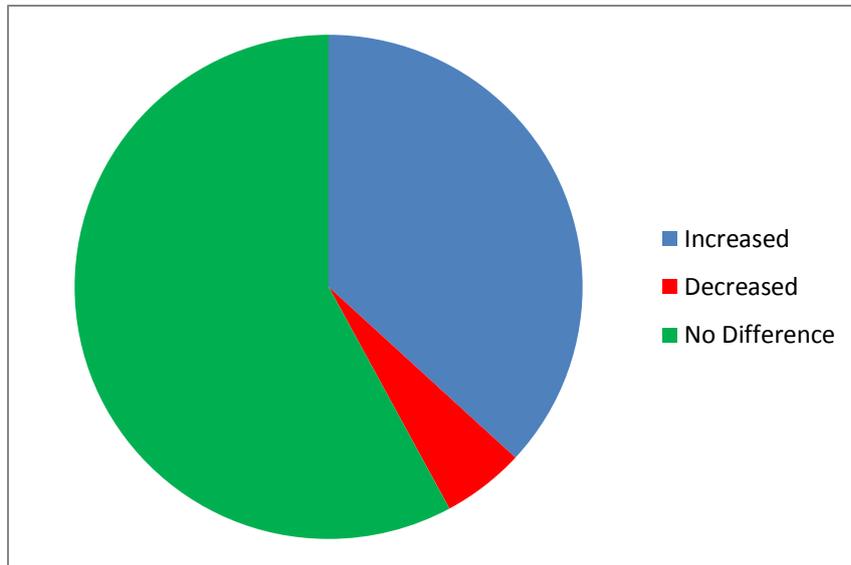


Figure 1

**Table 2**

2. Did using your cell phone as an e-reader make reading a more enjoyable experience?

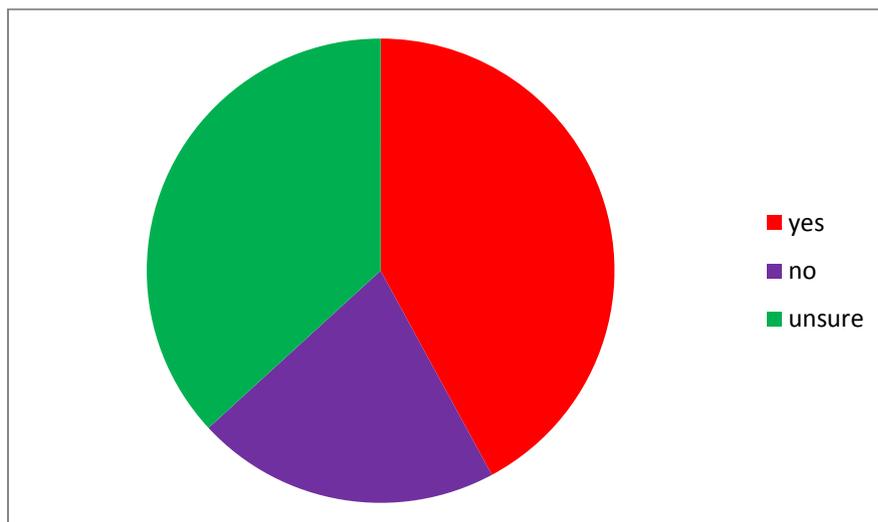


Figure 2

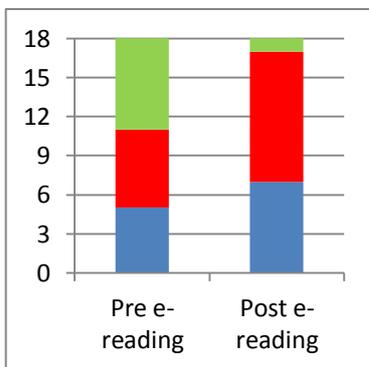
**Table 3**

**Pre e-reading - When you read do you:**

**Post e-reading - When you read on your cell phone do you:**

■ Hardly ever   ■ Sometimes   ■ Often

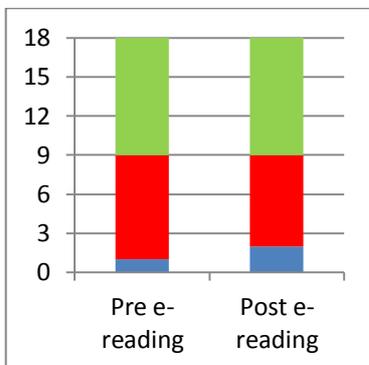
**Positive engagement - pre and post e-reading**



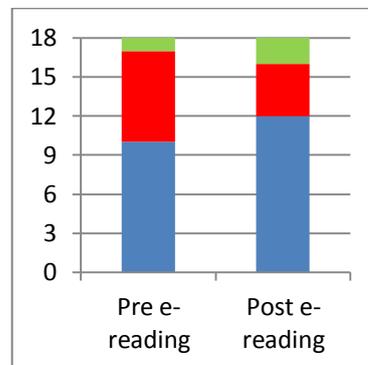
**3A** Mentally agree/disagree with, have a 'conversation' with the characters?



**3B** Picture the characters; have a 'video' of the action in your mind?

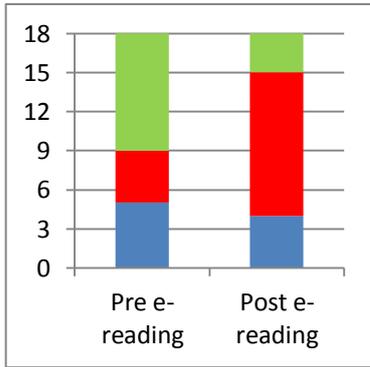


**3C** Predict what is going to happen?

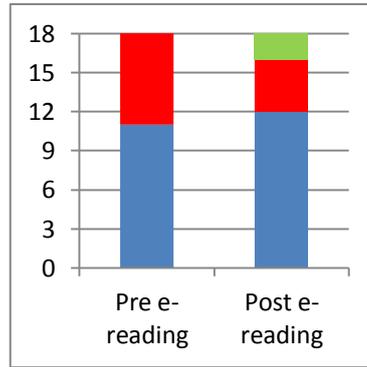


**3D** Look up the meaning of unfamiliar words or ask someone to explain?

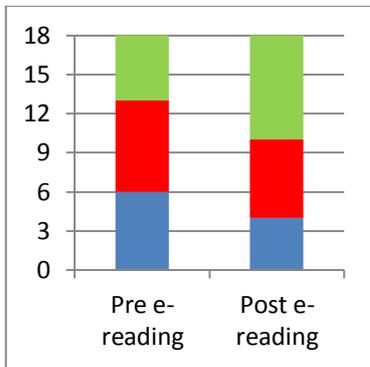
**Negative engagement – pre and post e-reading**



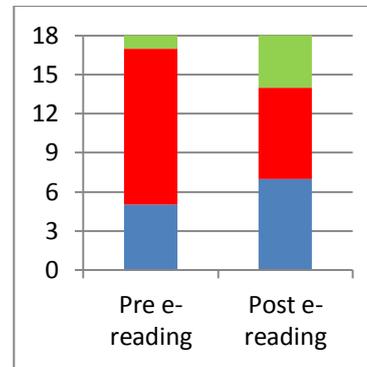
**3E.** Daydream about something else and suddenly realize you can't remember the last few pages you've read?



**3F.** Forget what you've read almost as soon as you've read it?



**3G.** Become distracted by noises etc?  
[Become distracted by incoming messages, noises etc]



**3H.** Carry on reading even if you don't 'get it'?

**Table 4**  
**Comparison between the time that boys felt they could concentrate while e-reading [before they needed a break or became distracted] vs reading conventional books.**

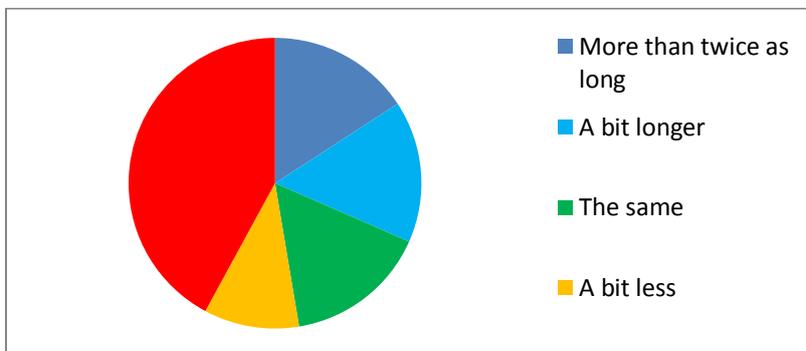


Figure 11

