What do I do now? Individualised literacy learning using the iPad

Executive Summary
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Introduction

Children and young people with chronic health conditions are at higher risk of educational underachievement than their healthy peers. These students are more likely to be absent from school, to disengage from learning prematurely and to fall behind their peers academically and socially. The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Education Institute provides both an evidence-informed teaching and learning program that aims to create learning environments across the hospital where patients are engaged, interested and curious, just as they would be if they were at school. RCH teachers create personalised learning opportunities to assist children and young people in their growth and development as learners, and to ensure that students remain engaged in appropriate educational pathways.

The research

The existing evidence suggests that at the least, iPads are an easy educational tool to use and are attractive and engaging even for young children. The research reports overwhelmingly that tablet devices have a positive impact on students’ engagement, motivation, enthusiasm, interest and independence. The evidence is weaker for their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes and it was with this in mind that the current study was conceived.

The key research question which was developed for this project was:

Do hospitalised children in the early years, who receive literacy support using a multi-modal book creation app on the iPad, as compared to those who receive literacy teaching as usual and without the use of an iPad, improve their emergent literacy skills more, as measured by the Concepts about Print test?

In addition, a secondary research question asked:

How do hospital-based teachers find the use of iPads in teaching emergent literacy skills to learners in the early years?

The project took a randomised control trial approach to recruiting students and offering them three teaching and learning sessions either in the intervention group, using iPads, or in the control group (non-iPad teaching). In addition we conducted a focus group with teachers to assess the acceptability and usefulness of the iPad as a teaching tool for teachers, students and parents.

Key findings

The project found some evidence that for students in the early years, teaching with the Book Creator iPad App is more effective than teaching as normal without the iPad App, as measured by the Concepts about Print test. The project also found that teachers find the iPad and the e-book creator app easy to use, useful and effective in teaching students about print literacy. An unexpected finding was that teachers’ participation in the research also prompted them to reflect on and adapt or focus their personal teaching practices.