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ABSTRACT

An attitude profile of fifth-grade school children on reading versus television watching was prepared, which also collected data on the physical access to books and television sets. Using a questionnaire, the data from 124 responses were compared with the body of existing research findings. It was found that most of the television watching time is for entertainment, and it has only a minimal effect on school work in general and reading in specific.
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A SURVEY OF CERTAIN ATTITUDES
TOWARD READING AND TELEVISION IN FIFTH-GRADERS

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Television is an extremely large part of the American way of life. To American children, the television set becomes a close partner, a friend that is "never too busy to talk to our children."¹ To assess television's relation to education in terms of how much time is spent watching, Nolte states:

It has been estimated that the average American child watches more television before he starts school than he will spend in classes throughout his school years.²

Children begin to exhibit television preferences by age three, and by age six have developed strong likings for certain programs.³ Research has suggested that the television programs watched are not educational in nature. Out of 111 television shows watched by a group of San Francisco elementary school children, only four of these shows could be con-

¹D. G. Bennett, "The Effect of Domestic Television Viewing upon the Academic Performance of the Child," Visual Education, (April, 1974), p. 30.

²Sherry L. Nolte, "A Comparison of Seventh Grade Students and Television Preferences," Dissertation Abstracts, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, Inc.), p. 100-A.

³Joan T. Feeley, "Television and Children's Reading," Elementary English, (March, 1973), p. 147.

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sidered "educational."⁴ Childers concluded there is very little supervision over televiewing and that the three hours a day spent in front of the television set should not go to waste.⁵

The more that teachers understand about what television does to children, and what children think about what they watch, the better able they will be to use television as a tool. Aside from encouraging their students to watch programs with a high informational content, teachers can incorporate tele-viewing subject matter into daily lessons to maximize individual interest. Television programs, on occasion, are even capable of stimulating interest in reading, especially in the area of the program's content.⁶

The importance of reading, not only to children but to functioning adults as well, need not be documented. Depending on the program, television can promote an interest in reading:

Television can be both an indirect and a direct stimulus to reading. Indirectly it arouses curiosity in certain fields of interest, and directly it arouses interest through dramatizing or reviewing books.⁷

⁴Bennett, op. cit., p. 26.

⁵Perry R. Childers and James Ross, "The Relationship between Viewing Television and Student Achievement," The Journal of Educational Research, LXVI (March, 1973), p. 319.

⁶Mary Jane Gray, "The Effect of Home Televiewing on School Children," Elementary English, LXVI (March, 1969), p. 308.

⁷Gray, loc. cit.

Promoting this interest in reading should be high on the list of the elementary school teachers' goals.

This paper addresses itself to finding out how much time is spent watching television and how much time is spent reading, what the attitude of the fifth-grader was toward reading vs. television, and the physical access to books and television sets that was available. The specific questions asked are listed in the Appendix.

The term "television" is used to denote commercial television. No distinction is made between Public Broadcasting (Educational Television) and commercial television. Broadcasts viewed during school hours were not considered.

The term "reading" was used to include the reading of newspapers, magazines, comic books, fiction and non-fiction books, and any other printed matter available to the children. No distinction was made between levels of reading and no attempt was made to ascertain the popularity of one reading area over another (for example, fantasy vs. adventure). Reading done in school was not considered.

The term "students" or "fifth-graders" will represent the 124 fifth-graders used in this study. These were all from middle-class homes in a suburb of the Chicago area. All of the children were Caucasian, and the group represented all levels of reading ability.

The research prior to this study does not report unanimous results. Some conclusions seem to waver on the issue of what the relationship between reading and television is, but the consensus is that television does not curtail it:

Evidence of the effects of other mass media, particularly radio and television, is mixed. As a new, powerful medium of communication is introduced to a culture, the use of more established media such as the printed word may at first be curtailed and then tend to be renewed as the new medium becomes culturally assimilated.⁸

Children, by the time they reach the fifth grade, are viewing up to three hours of television a night.⁹ For this three hours of television watching, a rather high estimate of one hour of reading is given by Witty.¹⁰ Schramm, et. al., noted that while the average number of hours watched is useful, there are children who are watching television more than four hours and some less than 30 minutes.¹¹

⁸Robert Ebel (ed.), Encyclopedia of Educational Research, American Educational Research Association, (New York: MacMillan, 1969), p. 1072.

⁹Gray, op. cit., p. 302.

¹⁰Feeley, op. cit., p. 142.

¹¹Wilbur Schramm, "The Effects of Television on Children and Adolescents: An Annotated Bibliography with an Overview of Research Results," Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, (U.N.E.S.C.O.: 1964), p. 21.

What children are heavy viewers? Those whose parents are heavy viewers; in the first six or eight years of viewing, the brighter children; after that the brighter children turn away, and the slower ones become heavier viewers; and children who have family troubles or unsatisfactory social relationships, from which they retreat to television.¹²

In 1965, Witty established that fifth-grade students in the Chicago area spend twenty-five hours a week on television.¹³

Who benefits from this television watching?

Apparently not the bright children. Gray says:

Bright children are more critical of mass media and more selective, give higher prestige to books and newspapers, and lower prestige to television and movies.¹⁴

Feeley notes that brighter children tend to fall behind their peers when they are heavy viewers.¹⁵ On the other hand, those students who are very young or are very dull tend to gain from television watching.¹⁶ Feeley cites Schramm in that ". . . Less intelligent heavy users would probably be slightly better informed than if they were non-users."¹⁷

¹² Ibid., p. 21.

¹³ Feeley, loc. cit.

¹⁴ Gray, op. cit., p. 305.

¹⁵ Feeley, op. cit., p. 143.

¹⁶ Schramm, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁷ Feeley, op. cit., p. 144.

Another group that probably gains from watching more television is the non-English speaking children.¹⁸ Although television does not lower the average grade point average:

But it would be a gross mis-representation of the data to hold that in the case of a given child his habits of watching television could not affect his school achievement.¹⁹

One other point of view is that television only replaces the activity that normally would subvert school. For example, comic books or baseball.²⁰

Does all of this television watching cut down on the number of books children normally read without the influence of television? Not according to the Oppenheim study. They found that over a five year period, children read the same number of books.²¹ Gray says that television tends to cut down on time spent reading as well as sports, hobbies and conversation.²² In a study by Starkey and Swinford, it was found that the better readers did watch less television, but the relationship was slight.²³

¹⁸Ibid., p. 143.

¹⁹Childers and Ross, op. cit., p. 317.

²⁰Ibid., p. 318.

²¹Bennett, op. cit., p. 30.

²²Gray, op. cit., p. 304.

²³John D. Starkey and Helen L. Swinford, "Reading? Does Television Viewing Time Affect It?" E.R.I.C. 1974, p. 2.

On the positive side, a British study found that television tends to broaden and mature the reading tastes of children.²⁴ Bennett found that it encourages the reading of "serious" books.²⁵

Vocabulary development in very young children has been seen to be 30% higher in pre-schoolers from television homes than those in non-television homes.²⁶ Unfortunately, this advantage disappears after a few years.²⁷ Perhaps this is due to subject matter presented to the children. In a study by Brumbaugh, where 400 children age six to twelve were asked to write down as many items seen on television commercials as they could, the eleven-year-olds averaged 50 items. Most of these were spelled correctly, even though the level of difficulty was higher than they were used to at school.²⁸

Why do children watch television? In his study, Satterfield found that the early use of television was al-

²⁴ Feeley, op. cit., p. 148.

²⁵ Bennett, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁶ Gray, op. cit., p. 304.

²⁷ Schramm, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 303.



most always for entertainment.²⁹ When presented with a choice between entertainment and education oriented programs, those designed for educational purposes are least likely to be watched.³⁰

To some extent, television also is a social tool, a family activity.³¹ For the most part, reading is an individual activity.

In the Himmelweit study of 1958, it was found that television fulfilled the following needs:

Easy availability . . . value as time-filler . . .
 the satisfaction of being in the know . . . security
 and re-assurance through familiar themes and for-
 mats . . . change, excitement, suspense . . . escape
 . . . identification . . . warm and friendly
 personalities.³²

Summing up, age and intelligence seem to be the main factors in how television will affect children.³³

²⁹ James R. Satterfield, "Televiwing Practices as a Function of Certain Personality Variables and Reading Achievement Levels of Middle Socio-Economic Status Fourth Grade Children," Dissertation Abstracts, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, Inc.), p. 100-A.

³⁰ Schramm, op. cit., p. 20.

³¹ Bennett, op. cit., p. 25.

³² Schramm, loc. cit.

³³ Feeley, op. cit., p. 142.

Schramm states that:

For most children, under most conditions, most television is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial.³⁴

The instrument in this investigation was designed and administered in early December, 1975. The survey questionnaire uses a Likert scale on 22 of the items, True or False on two of the items, and the remaining question determines the sex of the sample.

Each child was given a copy of the questionnaire and an answer sheet. Directions on how to fill out the answer sheet were given. One of the conditions of the survey was that it was not compulsory, and one sample (not included in the 124 = N) declined to fill out the sheet.

As the child read the question, it was also read aloud. Ample time was allowed to mark each response and questions concerning the survey were answered. Two samples did not mark answer Number 18.

The next five tables represent the non-evaluative data. The table with the percentages has been rounded off by the computer to the nearest hundredth. This will account for an occasional total that exceeds 100%. The error in any individual sample of percentages should not exceed .004%.

³⁴ Schramm, op. cit., p. 21.

TABLE 1
Raw Scores

Question #	A	B	C	D	E
1	54	70			
2	99	25			
3	86	38			
4	18	18	55	12	21
5	26	59	39	00	00
6	79	31	09	04	01
7	49	27	1	27	02
8	49	41	24	08	02
9	27	41	36	10	10
10	67	29	19	09	00
11	04	15	51	15	39
12	62	32	18	07	05
13	02	04	27	35	56
14	42	30	37	07	08
15	25	10	27	19	43

TABLE 1 (cont'd)

Raw Scores

Question #	A	B	C	D	E
16	92	25	07	00	00
17	44	26	41	05	08
*18	32	41	29	17	03
19	19	23	40	28	14
20	49	29	23	15	08
21	24	36	25	26	13
22	46	35	19	14	10
23	39	40	30	11	04
24	38	47	26	09	04
25	75	33	11	03	02

* Two samples did not mark a choice for this question.

TABLE 2

The Measures of Central Tendency
and Standard Deviation

Question #	Mean	Median	Mode	Sd (σ)
1	*	*	*	*
2	*	*	*	*
3	*	*	*	*
4	3.00	2.97	3	1.23
5	2.11	2.11	2	0.72
6	1.52	1.29	1	0.83
7	2.24	1.98	1	1.23
8	1.98	1.82	1	1.00
9	2.48	2.35	2	1.16
10	1.76	1.43	1	0.97
11	3.57	3.34	3	1.15
12	1.88	1.50	1	1.11
13	4.12	4.33	5	0.97
14	2.27	2.18	1	1.18
15	3.36	3.50	5	1.52

TABLE 2 (cont'd)

The Measures of Central Tendency
and Standard Deviation

Question #	Mean	Median	Mode	Sd (σ)
16	1.31	1.17	1	0.58
17	2.25	2.19	1	1.17
18	2.33	2.21	2	1.09
19	2.96	3.00	3	1.22
20	2.23	1.95	1	1.27
21	2.74	2.58	2	1.28
22	2.25	1.96	1	1.29
23	2.20	2.08	2	1.08
24	2.15	2.01	2	1.04
25	1.58	1.33	1	0.88

TABLE 3
Percentage of Answer Selection

Question #	A	B	C	D	E
1	43.5	56.5			
2	79.8	20.2			
3	69.4	30.6			
4	14.5	14.5	44.4	09.7	16.9
5	21.0	47.6	31.5	00.0	00.0
6	63.7	25.0	07.3	03.2	00.8
7	39.5	21.8	15.3	21.8	01.6
8	39.5	33.1	19.4	06.5	01.6
9	21.8	33.1	29.0	08.1	08.1
10	54.0	23.4	15.3	07.3	00.0
11	03.2	12.1	41.1	12.1	31.5
12	50.0	25.8	14.5	05.6	04.0
13	01.6	03.2	21.8	28.2	45.2
14	33.9	24.2	29.8	05.6	06.5
15	20.2	08.1	21.8	15.3	34.7

TABLE 3
Percentage of Answer Selection

Question #	A	B	C	D	E
16	74.2	20.2	05.6	00.0	00.0
17	35.5	21.0	33.1	04.0	06.5
*18	25.8	33.1	23.4	13.7	02.4
19	15.3	18.5	32.3	22.6	11.3
20	39.5	23.4	18.5	12.1	06.5
21	19.4	29.0	20.2	21.0	10.5
22	37.1	28.2	15.3	11.3	08.1
23	31.5	32.3	24.2	08.9	03.2
24	30.6	37.9	21.0	07.3	03.2
25	60.5	26.6	08.9	02.4	01.6

* Two samples, totaling 1.6% of the population did not answer this question.

TABLE 4

Levels of Significance
 Crosstabulation of Variable 1 With Variables 2-25

<u>Question #</u>	<u>Significance</u>	<u>Question #</u>	<u>Significance</u>
1	****	16	.0679
2	.8613	17	.0090
3	.2311	18	.4035
4	.2949	19	.6320
5	.3326	20	.0385
6	.0344	21	.2900
7	.1377	22	.0171
8	.0152	23	.7668
9	.1318	24	.3278
10	.1414	25	.2817
11	.1347		
12	.0073		
13	.1933		
14	.0569		
15	.5325		

TABLE 5

Percentage of Male and Female Answer
Selection on Questions Significant to .05

Question #		A	B	C	D	E
6	F	51.9	33.3	13.0	01.9	00.0
	M	72.9	18.6	02.9	04.3	01.4
8	F	33.3	40.7	11.1	13.0	01.9
	M	44.3	27.1	25.7	01.4	01.4
12	F	38.9	37.0	11.1	11.1	01.9
	M	58.6	17.1	17.1	01.4	05.7
17	F	22.2	25.9	33.3	09.3	09.3
	M	45.7	17.1	32.9	00.0	04.3
20	F	33.3	27.8	11.1	20.4	07.4
	M	44.3	20.0	24.3	05.7	05.7
22	F	35.2	25.9	07.4	16.7	14.8
	M	38.6	30.0	21.4	07.1	02.9

In the sample, the males out-numbered the females 70 to 54. The reading background questions showed that only 38 did not have a library card for a public library. The majority of the sample, 49, said they read seven or more books a year, followed by 27 who read five or six. The majority of the children, 105, agreed or strongly agreed that they had a lot of books around the house.

Sixty-three percent of the sample either almost always or usually got a good reading evaluation on their report cards. It is interesting to note that the distribution on report card evaluations and self-evaluations were very close.

On the television side of the questionnaire, nearly 80 percent of the sample had a color television at home. Sixty-eight percent had more than one working television set. Everyone had at least one working television.

The average television watching, per night, came out to three hours. The girls watched less television than the boys did. The mean response for girls was 2.10 (just under three hours,) and the response from the boys was 1.88 (just over three hours). There was an inconsistency between the average nightly viewing and the average weekly viewing. In Question 10, 23 children said they averaged less than 15 hours of television a week. When

the low nightly total was multiplied times seven, it indicated that the number of low weekly viewers should have been 34.

On the question dealing with parental restriction of television watching, 28 percent of the children said that their parents limited tele-viewing either often or very often. On the other side of the scale, fifty percent rated their restriction as "not often" or "almost never."

When asked if their parents thought they watched too much television, the average response was the midpoint of the scale. Asked the same question about reading, they disagreed that their parents thought too much of their time was spent reading.

The questions relating to printed media indicated a preference rank ordering of comic books, newspapers, libraries, and magazines (with comic books being the most popular). There was no more than a half a category separating the most and the least popular selection. As might be expected, the boys rated comic books higher than the girls did. The average male response was right at the "agree" point, while the girls were midpoint between "agree" and "undecided."

When asked about the importance of being able to read well, the average reply was between "agree" and

"strongly agree," leaning toward the strongly agree side. In reply to Question 22, the average response was agreement that their parents enjoyed reading and did so a great deal. The girls in the sample showed a mean of 2.50, while the boys rated their parents at 2.00 (right at the "agree" selection).

Another question that revealed a difference between the boys and the girls was where the statement: "I enjoy watching television whenever I can" was made. The overall response was between "strongly agree" and "agree." The boys tended to agree more to this statement by .22 of a category. The mean response was 1.43 for the boys and 1.65 for the girls.

The response to the statement affirming most of their evenings were spent watching television was closer to "agree" than "undecided." When asked if they thought that television was getting better and better, the answer was closer to "undecided" than "agree."

The questions that asked them to choose reading or television as a preference, revealed that television did much better than reading. When asked the question directly, the average response agreed that television watching was more enjoyable than reading. The boys felt more strongly in this area, with a mean response of 2.09. The girls averaged 2.41.

The thought of turning off the television in favor of reading was answered between the "undecided" and "disagree" categories. The response to "I would rather see a story presented on television than read it in a book" was in keeping with the other television vs. reading results. The group average was in favor of the statement with an average just above "agree." Again, the boys were more enthusiastic with a mean response of 1.78. The girls averaged 2.00.

In conclusion, the group of fifth-graders that answered this questionnaire seemed to be in keeping with results one would expect from information supplied by earlier research efforts. This machine we call television takes up three hours of voluntary time from our children. It appears that this time pretty much goes to entertainment and has only a minimal effect on school work in general and reading in specific.

Perhaps if parents and educators paid more attention to this televiewing activity, and the individuals producing the shows were to strive for a higher level of product, the three hours spent on television could be more fully integrated with the printed media at the classroom level.

A P P E N D I X

1. I AM A:
A) FEMALE. B) MALE.
2. AT OUR HOUSE, WE HAVE A WORKING COLOR TELEVISION SET.
A) TRUE. B) FALSE.
3. I HAVE A LIBRARY CARD FOR A LIBRARY OTHER THAN THE ONE AT SCHOOL.
A) TRUE. B) FALSE.
4. I LIKE TO LEAF THROUGH MAGAZINES AND LOOK FOR INTERESTING ARTICLES TO READ.
A) VERY OFTEN. B) OFTEN. C) ONCE IN A WHILE. D) NOT OFTEN. E) ALMOST NEVER.
5. AT OUR HOUSE, WE HAVE:
A) 3 OR MORE WORKING T.V. SETS. B) 2 WORKING T.V. SETS. C) 1 WORKING T.V. SET.
D) 1 OR MORE T.V. SETS, BUT THEY ARE ALL BROKEN. E) NO T.V. SETS AT ALL.
6. I ENJOY WATCHING TELEVISION WHENEVER I CAN.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
7. ~~NOT COUNTING MY SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS, EACH YEAR I USUALLY READ:~~
A) SEVEN OR MORE BOOKS. B) 5 OR 6 BOOKS. C) 3 OR 4 BOOKS. D) 1 OR 2 BOOKS.
E) NO BOOKS.
8. ON AN AVERAGE NIGHT, I USUALLY WATCH:
A) 4 OR MORE HOURS OF TELEVISION. B) 3 HOURS OF TELEVISION. C) 2 HOURS OF
TELEVISION. D) 1 HOUR OF TELEVISION. E) NO TELEVISION.
9. I CAN USUALLY FIND SOMETHING IN THE NEWSPAPER THAT I ENJOY READING ABOUT.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
10. IF I ADDED UP THE HOURS OF TELEVISION ALL WEEK, IT WOULD COME OUT TO:
A) 22 OR MORE HOURS. B) 15 - 21 HOURS. C) 8 - 14 HOURS. D) 1 - 7 HOURS.
E) NONE.
11. SOMETIMES, I LIKE TO TURN OFF THE T.V. AND READ ONE OF MY FAVORITE BOOKS OR
MAGAZINES.
A) VERY OFTEN. B) OFTEN. C) ONCE IN A WHILE. D) NOT OFTEN. E) ALMOST NEVER.
12. I WOULD RATHER SEE A STORY PRESENTED ON TELEVISION THAN READ IT IN A BOOK.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
13. MY PARENTS THINK THAT I SPEND TOO MUCH TIME READING.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
14. I THINK THAT ~~THE SHOWS ON TELEVISION ARE GETTING BETTER AND BETTER.~~
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
15. MY PARENTS PUT A LIMIT ON THE AMOUNT OF TELEVISION I CAN WATCH.
A) VERY OFTEN. B) OFTEN. C) ONCE IN A WHILE. D) NOT OFTEN. E) ALMOST NEVER.

16. I THINK THAT BEING ABLE TO READ WELL IS:
A) VERY IMPORTANT. B) IMPORTANT. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) UNIMPORTANT.
E) VERY UNIMPORTANT.
17. I ENJOY READING COMIC BOOKS:
A) VERY OFTEN. B) OFTEN. C) ONCE IN A WHILE. D) NOT OFTEN. E) ALMOST NEVER.
18. I SPEND MOST OF MY EVENINGS WATCHING TELEVISION.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
19. MY PARENTS THINK I SPEND TOO MUCH TIME WATCHING TELEVISION.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
20. I LIKE TO WATCH TELEVISION MORE THAN I LIKE TO READ.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
21. I OFTEN SPEND TIME IN THE LIBRARY LOOKING FOR SOMETHING I WOULD ENJOY READING.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
22. AT LEAST ONE OF MY PARENTS ENJOYS READING, AND DOES SO A LOT.
A) ALMOST ALWAYS. B) VERY OFTEN. C) UNDECIDED. D) NOT VERY OFTEN.
E) ALMOST NEVER.
23. I USUALLY GET A GOOD EVALUATION IN READING ON MY REPORT CARD.
A) ALMOST ALWAYS. B) VERY OFTEN. C) ONCE IN A WHILE. D) NOT OFTEN.
E) ALMOST NEVER.
24. I THINK THAT MY READING ABILITY IS VERY GOOD.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.
25. AT OUR HOME, WE HAVE A LOT OF BOOKS AROUND.
A) I STRONGLY AGREE. B) I AGREE. C) I AM UNDECIDED. D) I DISAGREE.
E) I STRONGLY DISAGREE.

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