Should There Be Limits on Students’ Screen Time?

**Yes**

I am from the *Sesame Street* generation and watched a lot of TV in my day. In fact, I remember beautiful summer days spent sitting inside in front of a screen. In defense of my parents, I’m not sure we had the kind of research we have today.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says, “Limit your children’s use of TV, movies, and video and computer games to no more than one or two hours per day.” Enough said.

Most of us would agree that childhood obesity is an issue in our country, and screen time contributes to this problem. Excessive screen time also contributes to mental health issues. According to Scott M. Shannon, author of *Please Don’t Label My Child*, 80% of the world’s stimulant medication is used in the United States to treat mental health issues such as ADHD. Shannon says, “If an environment is positive … the brain will respond with enhanced dendritic interconnections, cerebral blood vessels, self-regulation, and sense of well-being.”

**No**

Readers may be shocked to find me arguing the contrary case against conventional wisdom. Nonetheless, I believe we should not limit screen time for the following reasons:

*It is wrong to be capriciously mean to children.* Adults need to do everything possible to create relationships with children based on reciprocal respect and care. Arbitrary rules only escalate intergenerational tension. Every parent knows making something “forbidden fruit” only raises its attractive powers.

*Children only do things for long periods of time that they find interesting.* It is the role of educators to understand that attraction and find ways to channel a student’s capacity for intensity in richer directions.

*Educators have (limited) jurisdiction over classrooms and playgrounds, not living rooms.* Who deputized you Barney Fife? Your job title might be technology coordinator, but it’s not video game police.

Rick Weinberg

Gary Stager
cognitive depth, and emotional reserve. But ... if the environment is negative, conflictual, insensitive, disengaged, abusive, or inappropriately stimulated (which includes too much screen time), the brain will hardwire patterns of aggression, dysphoria, dysregulation, and learning problems that may become a lifelong pattern.”

In addition, the more TV a child watches, the more opportunities they have to be exposed to inappropriate images. Even when I watch family shows and sports with my children, I am surprised by the sexual explicitness of reality TV, the ever-present erectile dysfunction commercials, and how women are depicted in beer advertisements.

Nowadays, it is basically impossible to calculate the amount of your child’s screen time. Screens already fit in our children’s pockets, and chips just continue to get smaller, cheaper, and more ubiquitous. Even minivan advertisements argue that harmony in the automobile is a given because of the existence of headrest-mounted DVD players. All that means is that we now have the option to mind-numb our children instead of engaging them in conversation about license plates from other states, playing 20 Questions or I Spy, or making up stories.

Don’t get me wrong—children can benefit from strategic uses of screen time. Shows such as Sesame Street, Modern Marvels, and the HBO show Master Class are all great sources of educational content. But just so I am clear, “paying attention” to educational movies to the point of acting comatose may not be the kind of engagement we are looking for.

With all things, there is a need for balance. As educators, we must not only be aware of how screen time fits the classroom curriculum, but also its part in the whole-day educational process, including home, school, and childcare. It is critical to use class time to its fullest and to use computers for only the highest levels of cognitive thought and learning. That means we should use computers only to enhance the curriculum and not just because we need a break from classroom management or because grades are due the next day.

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