POINT/COUNTERPOINT

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 den-

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dritic interconnections, cerebral blood vessels, self-regulation, 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 and 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 chip sizes 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.

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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.

—Rick Weinberg taught in alternative education for seven years before becoming a technology professional developer for Cattaraugus Allegany BOCES [WHAT DOES THIS STAND FOR?].

No

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 that 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.

It is preposterous to suggest that students get too much screen time in school. Even in schools with a laptop per child, computers tend to be

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quite underused, especially in constructive, creative ways. The average student in a Western industrialized nation uses a school computer less than an hour per week. Too often that paltry time is squandered on school concoctions like keyboarding instruction, tech literacy assessment, or making PowerPoint files on topics of no interest to the student or likely anyone else.

It seems odd that "ed tech professionals" would make blanket arguments about technology use. Perhaps we need a greater vision and better ability to articulate the value of computers in education.

It all depends on how you define "screen." Only an immature understanding of computing and its potential in the intellectual and creative development of children leads to prohibitions on "screen time." You never hear thoughtful adults complain about too much piano-ing or pencil-ing or paintbrushing-ing or book-ing. It is the

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Perusing the exhibit hall of an ed tech conference could easily lead one to want to keep children away from screens altogether. Confections like interactive whiteboards, clickers, and data management systems may produce an illusion of modernity, but they rob children of agency and a chance to achieve their full potential.

There is an alternative. Students using computers to compose music, program simulations, design video games, make films, conduct science experiments, and collaborate with experts need more screen time, not less. What if what children did with computers was good? That standard should replace all others.

Renowned computer scientist Seymour Papert might suggest that questioning the value of "screen time" is similar to asking, "Does wood make good houses?" or "Does paint make great art?" Educators helping children develop fluency in computing—where the computer is an intellectual laboratory and vehicle for self-expression that allows users to learn and create in ways unimaginable just a few years ago—never need to ask a question such as "Should we limit screen time?"

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