

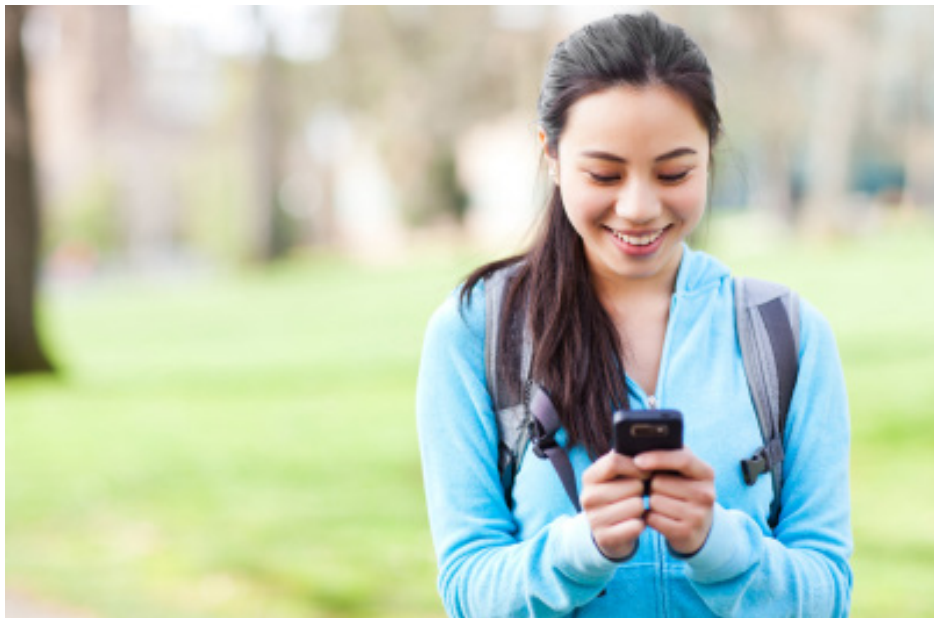
# Why You Should Let Students Have Unlimited Screentime

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There's a lot of debate about screentime for youth. Not only is it important for teachers to be familiar with the research, but Holly Flanders, CEO of Choice Parenting reminds us that parents, nannies, and any childcare provider must also be armed with accurate information. Flanders was recently quoted in the New York Post explaining why misinformation and misunderstanding can be a problem. "Most nanny relationships fail after a buildup of small issues that explode into something beyond repair." The same holds true for parent-teacher relationships.

So what should the adults raising our youth know about screentime? It may not be what you think.

Unlimited screentime is fine... if used responsibly.

This can be confusing advice. We live in a society that is taught to believe that everything should be used in moderation, but when it comes to technology, the rules are different. Balance is not key. It becomes more confusing when we get recommendations from places like the American Pediatric Association (APA) who say we must screentime must be limited and even eliminated for young people of certain ages.

Both are wrong.

The problem is that screens have been misunderstood by society and even by organizations like the APA. This was uncovered earlier this year when APA member Dimitri Christakis revealed that their research was conducted before anyone knew the iPad, or similar interactive screen devices, existed. The research is accurate for passive television viewing, but when it comes to interactive screens, there is no limit to the time young people should be spending interacting with screens.

Think about it. Would we ever discuss limiting book time? Would we ever tell children they're spending too much time learning? Would we say think critically, but only in moderation. No. We wouldn't and these are all types of learning that happens behind the screens.

Let's put in the context in a day in the life behind screens.

Imagine the day of 14-year-old Johnny.

Johnny wakes up and does some morning reading. He then goes on a nature walk at his local park to learn more about the local animal and plant life. He comes home and documents his findings. He does some research and discovers that the turtle population is in danger due to pollution. He shares what he learned with some environmental experts and they discuss possible solutions. Johnny decides to organize a clean-athon designed to bring awareness to the problem of littering and help address the issue.

Screens are embedded into the entire scenario above and without them, much of this would not be possible. Johnny used an app on his Android phone to identify wildlife. He recorded what he found with photos and videos that he used to document his findings. He used the internet to research his problems and he used Twitter to find environmental experts with whom he could discuss the problem and possible solutions. Johnny used Facebook events to organize the clean-athon and promoted the event on relevant pages and groups. Would we really want to limit Johnny's screentime? No!

Now, let's imagine the day of four-year-old Jessie.

Jessie's parents came to the United States one year ago. Before her parents even wake up, Jessie is ready to start her day by practicing her English. After breakfast she decides to spend some time developing her reading skills. Jessie helps mom cook lunch for the family. That afternoon she goes on a visit to the zoo with her parents. When she returns home, she works with her parents to write a story about what they saw. That evening Jessie plays some games with her Abuela back in Mexico. Before going to bed, Jessie and her mother sing along to some songs which will help them both learn English.

Like Johnny, Jessie had screens embedded into her day giving her opportunities that simply would not be possible without technology.

Jessie started her day with the Fun English App. She started learning before her parents even woke up and is working on learning a language her parents are learning too. Jessie used Footsteps 2 Brilliance which the pre-school she is going to in the fall gave to families to prepare them for the school year.

The school gives the app to all incoming students because the research shows that it significantly increases a child's ability to read and write. Jessie cooked lunch with her mom with the help of the Sara's Cooking Class app. It provides a great way to get young kids interested in cooking! With a wide variety of recipes kids are able to learn the basics of cutting, chopping, peeling, and cooking all sorts of food. That afternoon Jessie goes to the zoo and snaps lots of photos on mom's iPhone. When she gets home, Jessie and dad use Storybird to capture a story of Jessie's visit to the zoo. After that Jessie and her Abuela hop online to compete in a multi-player version of concentration. Tonight Grandma wins! Before bed, Jessie and her mom sing along to Kidzongs a simple sing along app that can help singers learn songs in English. Did Jessie spend too much time using her screen to learn? Not at all.

Like pencil and paper, screens have no intent. What's important is that we stop judging screens and start looking at and guiding young people in their use of screens. This matters in cases when an adult might come to a misunderstanding about a young person's use of screens. There is no such thing as too much screentime if screens are used responsibly. It is the responsibility of adults to help ensure young people are making the best use of those screens. Knowing what that means and looks like can help prevent a lot of misunderstandings between all those responsible for raising our children.

***Lisa Nielsen** writes for and speaks to audiences across the globe about learning innovatively and is frequently covered by local and national media for her views on "Passion (not data) Driven Learning," "Thinking Outside the Ban" to harness the power of technology for learning, and using the power of social media to provide a voice to educators and students. Ms. Nielsen has worked for more than a decade in various capacities to support learning in real and innovative ways that will prepare students for success. In addition to her award-winning blog, The Innovative Educator, Ms. Nielsen's writing is featured in places such as Huffington Post, Tech & Learning, ISTE Connects, ASCD Wholechild, MindShift, Leading & Learning, The Unplugged Mom, and is the author the book Teaching Generation Text.*

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