

The Great E-Book Debate

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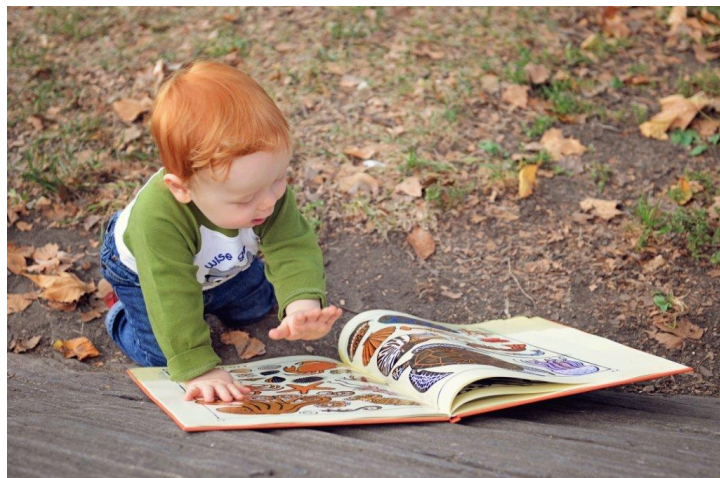
The recent *New York Times* article “[Is E-Reading to Your Toddler Story Time or Simply Screen Time?](#)” asked provocative questions about the impact of reading e-books to children under two years old. With the e-book industry growing in leaps and bounds, and more and more titles becoming available all the time, many parents assume that if it’s available on the market it must be good for kids. We owe it to ourselves and especially to our children to consider the possible implications of our practices. Ultimately, we need to ask as a community how e-reading is shaping the experience of young readers.

The article captured the crux of the dilemma. On the one hand, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says that children should not have screen time before they’re two. The AAP also says we should read to our children every day. It makes you wonder, do e-books count as “books” or screen time? More importantly, when we read e-books rather than printed books are we nurturing or impeding reading development?

There are no easy answers, as the current research lags behind practice. So it will be years before we begin to articulate impacts on lifelong reading behaviors. A 2013 study of children age three to five at Temple University, however, determined that individuals whose parents read e-books had lower reading comprehension than those who read traditional books. Temple researchers cited “dialogic reading,” or the back and forth text discussion between adult and child, as a factor contributing to reading success. The article also referred to the work of Patricia Kuhl, a director at the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences at the University of Washington, whose research compared language learning in nine-month-old babies when taught by adults vs. DVDs. The DVDs had no impact on learning, while the teachers made lasting impacts.

Where does all this quasi-information leave us as parents and educators? We need to ask ourselves, what am I really teaching when I read to a child, in particular a child under two? Am I mindfully pulling together the building blocks of reading comprehension? Only partially. As a mother of three boys now 12, 13, and 15, and an early childhood educator, my reading goals were twofold: to pass on a lust for literature and develop a loving relationship between us.

There’s no better way than reading to your child to give them a varied and colorful vocabulary, a deep interest in story and ideas, and to build empathy with characters and people. And this covers reading no matter what the medium. If you want a curious child you need to model curiosity yourself and what better way than through sharing a text? The close physical bond of cuddling together over a book (or e-book) sets the groundwork for deep affection. Set aside the guilt. Am I reading enough? Am I reading the right books? And now, am I reading with the right tool? Sharing the wonder is sharing the wonder. Intellectual companionship begins at birth, a child and an adult learning side by side and enjoying the marvels of the world together. Let’s give the research more time to unfold before we start beating ourselves up as we enjoy (e)reading to our kids.





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