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PY 105

**Developmental Paper**

**Section 1:**

A major topic in the press today is the effect of television and other media on babies’ development. Ambitious parents have even sought out media claiming to make their children smarter in hopes of getting their child ahead. Because it is a fairly new issue, there is not a great deal of research so it is unclear if TV time for young children is beneficial or detrimental to children’s learning.

The popular press agrees that the names of baby videos, such as Baby Einstein, are misleading. Many parents believe showing their babies these videos will make them exponentially smarter, but these videos were not designed to turn children into “Baby Einstein”. They were designed to “engage babies” and inspire “a baby’s natural curiosity” (“About Baby Einstein,” n.d.). Most popular baby videos “have rapid scene changes and quick edits, and no appearance of ‘parent-ese’ type speaking” which is the opposite of what would be used to promote language (Park, 2007).

According to research done by Frederick Zimmerman and Dr. Dimitri Christakis, baby DVDs and videos may actually hinder a baby’s language development. In their study, “every hour per day spent watching baby DVDs and videos, infants learned six to eight fewer new vocabulary words than babies who never watched the videos” (Park 2007). In another study done by Marie Evan Schmidt at the Center on Media & Child Health at Children’s Hospital Boston, researchers found no correlation between babies watching TV and their cognitive development (Park, 2009).

The popular press has come to the conclusion that watching television is not beneficial. Forcing a baby to watch videos, such as “Baby Einstein”, is not going to make a baby any more intelligent (Guernsey 2007). Face-to-face interaction with babies is the best way to increase their language skills. Simple things, such as reading to them and just playing with them, will make babies brighter and happier (Park 2007).

**Section 2:**

Because of the rise in popularity of baby videos claiming to make babies more intelligent, Frederick J. Zimmerman, Dimitri A. Christakis, and Andrew N. Meltzoff conducted a study to “test the association of media exposure with language development in children under age 2”(Zimmerman, Christakis, & Meltzoff, 2007).

They conducted this study by surveying 1008 parents of children 2 to 24 months old by telephone, and asking them certain questions not only for data but to help control the variables. They asked about child and parent demographics to control the possible effects of race and financial situation affecting the outcome of the study. They also asked about the child-parent interactions, which are known to impact a child’s cognitive development. The final questions they asked were about “the child’s viewing of several content types of television and DVDs/videos” which were then separated in four categories: baby videos, children’s educational shows, movies and children’s non educational TV, and grownup TV.

Researchers found reading and telling stories to children 2 to 24 months old was associated with an increase in their language development, and baby DVD viewing was associated with a significant decrease in their CDI scores meaning these babies were significantly behind in language development (Zimmerman et al., 2007). This was an observational study and in no way can show causation. It can only show association and lay the groundwork for new experimentation.

These researchers concluded that the association between baby DVD watching and lower vocabulary scores could mean many things. For example, it could mean parents turn to baby DVDs when their child’s language development is behind, and therefore the scores of babies watching more would be lower than the national average. It could also mean parents use the baby videos to keep babies occupied rather than playing with them which would also explain the lower scores (Zimmerman et al., 2007). The data does not directly show that baby DVDs cause a decrease in language development in babies 8 to 16 months, but it is a possibility.

This study has opened the door for all new types of research on the effects of media on a baby’s development. There is not evidence now to say that baby DVDs are detrimental to a child’s learning development, and more research needs to be done. What can be seen in this data is these videos do not necessarily make babies any smarter as companies who make them claim.

**Section 3:**

**Baby Einstein: A Do or A Don’t**

Recently, baby videos and DVDs claiming to make your baby smarter are growing in popularity. It seems simple; sit your baby in front of the screen for an hour a day and watch their IQ skyrocket as they get older, but it’s leaving many people asking if these companies, such as Baby Einstein, are delivering what they promised.

The opinion of many people today is DVD viewing is actually making your baby fall behind in language development, a scary thought as the world is growing more and more competitive each year. Every parent wants the best for their child, but when it comes to these baby DVDs it can be confusing whether it’s a go or something parents should avoid.

There is very little research over the relationship between baby DVD viewing and their cognitive development, but one study by Frederick Zimmerman, Dimitri Christakis, and Andrew Meltzoff had some interesting findings. Babies 8 to 16 months old who watched baby videos scored significantly lower on language development tests than the national average (Zimmerman, Christakis, & Meltzoff, 2007). The researchers did not actually manipulate any of the variables in this study therefore causation cannot be placed. Their conclusion was there was an association between lower language development scores and watching baby videos. The cause of the lower scores is not necessarily due to watching the videos, but may be due to variables outside the researchers control. More research needs to be done to determine what is causing the lower scores.

What parents should take away from this research is the statement that these videos will make your baby smarter is not true. These videos are not going to make your children any smarter. Whether you allow your child to watch television designed for babies is up to you, but researchers agree that the best way to increase your child’s intelligence is to interact with them face-to-face, such as talking to them, reading to them, and playing with them, as much as you can.

Section 3

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