

Child Psychology
Activity: TV/Video for Infants

In this exercise, you will learn more about an current hot topic in child psychology: how educational videos and television for infants might affect development. Although shows like Sesame Street have been around since the 1960s, their target audience is preschool children. The production and marketing of videos and television shows/channels specifically for infants did not begin until the mid 1990s, when they quickly blossomed into a multimillion-dollar business. In this exercise, you will develop your understanding and personal view on this topic by researching the topic, reading and discussing a collection of sources, and responding to writing prompts.

In-class on Friday: Choose your group of 4 classmates, and divide the research areas below among your group.

For Monday: First, write your individual response to question #1 in the packet. Then, each member should research his/her area. Write your response to question #2, and prepare a 1-page handout; email to group members (and me) and bring printed copies.

In-class on Monday: You will meet with your group and discuss a) your responses to question 1, and b) what you found in your research (sharing samples). As time permits, you can discuss and start responding to questions #3-6 together.

By Wednesday: Finish writing your responses to the packet questions (including question #7, your final individual position on the topic).

Research Areas

Product:

Go to the websites of multiple companies that produce video for infants. Read through their promotional material: how are these products marketed, and what claims do they make about their impact on infants? Also read parent comments/testimonials (on these and *external sites*: be sure to locate positive and negative comments). Are parents satisfied? What reasons do they give for their satisfaction and dissatisfaction?

Mainstream Media (Popular Press):

Search the mainstream media (well-known, reputable newspapers and magazines) for articles about the topic. Find 4 (preferably representing a variety of positions on the topic). What research do they cite? What controversies do they mention? What important events/trends do they discuss?

Scholarly Journals:

Read at least 2 scholarly articles on the topic (find on PsycInfo). Make sure to include DeLoache's (2010) experiment, and also choose at least one of Zimmerman's articles (he has a great review piece). You may find it helpful to read a few more abstracts or articles. What research designs have been used, and what were their findings? How are these methodologically strong or weak?

Advocacy Groups:

Go to the website of the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood. Read about the group: who are they, what is their mission? Also read specifically about their work with Baby Einstein: why did they target this product, and what have been the effects of their campaign regarding it?

Pre-writing

1. What is your opinion of products such as “Baby Einstein” and “Brainy Baby” (TV/video designed specifically for infants)? Would you buy these products for your own children, or give them as gifts to expectant mothers? Why or why not? What effects (if any) do you believe they have on children’s development?

Individual Research

Assigned area: _____

2a. What sources did you read within your assigned area? (List which websites if Product, which articles if Media/Scholarly, which documents if CCFC.)

b. What were the most interesting and/or surprising items you discovered in your sources?

c. What further avenues did your sources suggest that you might pursue in other areas (if your colleagues weren't already doing this for you)? For example, did a mainstream media piece refer to a scholarly article you could look up, or did an advocacy group mention events that might have been covered in the mainstream media?

Putting It All Together: Discussing Group Sources

3. *Marketing and Purchase:* How are infant video products marketed, and what claims do promotional materials currently make about their effects on children? Also, what are parents focused on - what issues (positive and negative) do they mention to justify their decision to use or not use the products?

4. *Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood:* Why did they target these products, and what have been the effects of their campaign?

5. *Mainstream media*: What are the main arguments made in the articles found? What important events/trends do they discuss?

6. *Scholarly articles*: What research methods have been applied to this topic? What methodological strengths and weaknesses does this research have?

Final Position

7. Now that you have read and discussed various opinion pieces and summaries of research in this area, what is your opinion of TV and video for infants? (Relate to this to four sources - cite! - and justify with any other knowledge of child development you can bring to bear.) Be sure to address both what decisions you have come to personally about using/gifting these products, and what policy decisions you believe are appropriate (or not).