

A STUDY OF TELEVISION VIEWING HABITS
OF MIDDLE GRADE CHILDREN

MASTER'S PROJECT

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by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The television set has become such a permanent fixture in the American household that studies concerned with the development and achievement of children must consider it as much a possible source of influence on their lives as the home, the parent, and the teacher.

The introduction of television in the 1950s not only became an important influence in children's lives, but it changed how children spent their time. Basically, television moved children out of their backyards, where they had been entertaining themselves, into their living rooms, where they were being entertained.

The 1950s were influenced by such shows as "Leave It To Beaver" and "Father Knows Best," which embraced the notion of two parent homes, where fathers worked and mothers stayed home to take care of the children.

Today, children are living in a new type of television environment. Children are influenced by the way television represents places and people rarely encountered in "real life," and by the widespread use of make-believe characters found in cartoons who are seldom

reflected in the reality of real people (Singer & Singer, 1986).

Not only has television's influence on children grown and changed over the years as television programs have changed, but so has the amount of time children spend in front of the television.

Statement of the Problem

Society is concerned with how a child learns about the world if the major means of learning is through passive observance rather than active participation. Children watch television to gain insight about the world around them. They often look to the television set for answers.

Parents and teachers have worried about the impact that television viewing has on children's learning and school achievement due to the nature of television programming, which is largely geared toward entertainment rather than toward enhancing learning and creative thinking.

Time spent watching television is ultimately time spent away from reading and other intellectually

stimulating activities. Thus, reading skills are poorly developed and the value of learning goes unappreciated.

Purpose of the Study

This project is designed to study the television viewing habits of middle grade children. Viewing habits and television standards have been drastically transformed since the '50s, '60s, and '70s (Lasley, 1989). There have always been saloon brawls, shootouts, fist fights, and gun duels on television. But with today's advanced technology and the use of special effects, programs have taken on a realistic edge. Today's programs can carry the impact of an emotional knockout punch. Children learn a simple but important message about conflict resolution: You "hit" and your problems are over. Children are more likely to get this type of message with the combination of graphically portrayed programs produced and presented for their casual viewing.

By studying the viewing habits of children, educators can learn what types of programs students are

watching. Further, they can determine if excessive viewing seems to have any effect on students' learning and classroom performance.

Related variables taken into account in this study include:

- *Number of hours spent viewing television programs
- *Types of programs viewed on television
- *Study habits
- *Differences in home viewing environment
- *School grades
- *Classroom participation

Children imitate what they see and hear around them. Television viewing is a one-way process which does not permit a child to act upon, stop and think about, or comply with the ideas of people on the screen (Honig, 1983). Parents and educators need to be aware of this important fact if they are to expect children to act more civilized and to be in tune with what is going on in the world around them.

Limitations

This study involves a limited sample of twenty-eight middle grade children in a midwestern setting. Because the data are gathered from a specific group in a specific setting, these findings cannot be generalized into other student groups or settings. The results are based on what these twenty-eight middle grade children are watching and how it compares to the national average.

The attrition rate of about one-third of the participants represents a potential bias to the survey. Several students either declined to participate or failed to complete the required forms. Although the "drop-outs" are regrettable, the researcher does not believe that they represent a significantly different set of perceptions.

Assumptions

It is this writer's assumption that television viewing is negatively linked to children's learning and school achievement. Some evidence exists in the

literature to support this assumption (Morgan & Gross, 1981). Studies suggest that children who view an excessive amount of television tend to obtain lower grades than children who watch a more moderate amount of television (Neuman, 1984).

By aggregating the results of twenty-three different studies, Williams et al. (1982) found that viewing up to ten hours per week had a positive effect on student achievement, but anything over ten hours per week was associated with lower achievement in school.

One study suggests there is a difference in the capacities of the audio, print, and television media to stimulate (or hinder) student creative thinking. Meline (1989) notes: "Children who were exposed to concrete, video presentations which showed objects, people, actions, and events - gave consistently, and sometimes significantly, fewer solutions. Children who were exposed to audiotape and print presentations - which could not show but only name or describe objects, people, actions, and events gave consistently, and sometimes significantly, more stimulus-free and transformational ideas" (p. 89).

Basically, the more time a child spends in front of the television, the greater television's influence becomes in the child's life.

Overview

Children can learn and benefit from television. It just depends on the types of programs they are watching, the amount of time they spend watching, and if their parents play a part in their program choices. This study focuses on the types of viewing choices middle grade students make.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To say "we live in a media environment" is a statement very few would dispute. Everyday, we are flooded by commercial or entertainment messages from radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and billboards. Basically, there is no escape from the influences of media.

While we certainly acknowledge the many advantages to society that occur due to today's instant worldwide communications, we are also aware of the challenges it has brought to parental authority, to family relationships, and especially to the established value structures that have been present for centuries by the home working along with the school. The challenge facing parents and schools today is to prepare young children for living in a world of wondrous images, sights, and sounds. Without parents and educators to guide student interpretations of the vast amount of information surging out of television sets, what students watch on television becomes the primary source of the child's developing world view.

Television is the not-silent friend and teacher of today's child (Honig, 1983). Television is a baby sitting service guaranteed to keep children occupied for hours. Games such as hide-and-seeK, hop scotch, checkers and a score of other physical and intellectual activities which were once present and dominant in pre-television days are all but forgotten by America's young people.

Condry (1993) observes that "if there are 24 hours in a day, and if many children are awake for 16, the total of their 112 conscious hours each week is a proper object of study" (pp. 259-260). How many of those hours are spent by today's children in front of the television set? In most American homes, the television is on up to six hours daily and is viewed by preschool children for as much as three to four hours daily (Pearl, Bouthilet, & Lazar, 1982). How do those hours of television watching effect children? An examination of studies connecting television use to schooling and education found a modest negative relationship between television viewing and school achievement (Morgan & Gross, 1981).

To study more effectively the role television viewing has on children, we need to look at the research evidence.

Life Before Television

Back in the 18th and 19th centuries, children obviously did not have a television set available to teach them about life. Most children spent their time in the communities and villages in which they were born, watching and learning from adults in their everyday roles of work and home (Condry, 1993). Children learned what was needed for them to fit into the society in which they would eventually belong. Customs and traditions were basically kept and handed down from one generation to the next.

Some of this environment changed as the industrial revolution evolved (Hobsbawm, 1968). People began moving in large numbers from the only communities that they had ever known to cities both old and new. With this new urban industrial world, children began observing life in very innovative ways. Traditional schools were established to supplement the learning opportunities of daily observation (Bruner, 1972).

Research of Television Viewing

The overall idea of learning has changed more drastically in the 20th century. In 1946, televisions were nonexistent in most homes, but by 1973, 99 percent of all home owners had a television set (Liebert & Spravkin, 1977). As a result of the increased availability of the television, children began spending more and more time in front of the television set. In 1955, the average child watched five hours of television per day. In 1965, the average time in front of the television soared to six hours and twenty-nine minutes per day. By 1975, it was still six hours. Today, it has been estimated that American children spend almost seven hours watching television daily (Hepburn, 1990). Table 1 illustrates television viewing time based on the data from the Neilson Demographic Report.

Before the age of eighteen, children will spend approximately 22,000 hours watching television (Honig, 1983). That means most children will have spent more time in front of the television set than in any other activity, except sleeping (Kalba, 1975).

TABLE I
Who Are the Viewers?
Average Hours of TV Viewing per Week by Age Groups

	Age	Hours		Age	Hours
Children	2-5	25.4	Men	12-17	22.4
	6-11	23.2		18-34	25.4
		35-54		27.1	
		55 +		37.3	
Women	12-17	21.2			
	18-34	28.5			
	35-54	32.3			
	55 +	41.0			

(Based on Nielsen Audience Demographics Report, Nov. 1988)

In another study, Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found that one-fourth of all fifth graders were up watching television at 11:30 p.m. on school nights.

Although it seems logical to think that once the school year starts children would have fewer hours to watch television at home. In fact, that is not the case. Just the opposite occurs. School-age youngsters watch more television than do preschoolers. A study with over 1000 first graders, sixth graders, and tenth graders dealing with television watching habits over a one week period showed weekly averages of: 23 hours, 31 hours, and 28 hours, respectively.

Trends for watching television and doing homework are either stable or moving in the wrong direction. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1991), students' homework habits did not change much across the 1980s. In 1990, most students at age 9 reported doing less than one hour of homework each night. Only about one-third of the students at ages 13 and 17 spent as much as one hour or more per night engaged in doing homework. Conversely, students at all three ages reported watching television more often (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

Table 2 illustrates trends in television watching at ages 9, 13, and 17 based on the data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1991).

In a study done in 1975 at Horace Mann School for Nursery Years in New York City, which dealt with parents limiting television viewing and monitoring programs their children watched, teachers noted some remarkable transformations (Safran, 1976). Eleanor Brussels, principal at the time of this study, decided to send a letter to parents explaining her concerns about television and urging them to monitor the programs their children watched and to limit one hour of television each day. Most of the parents cooperated, and within three weeks there were remarkable changes in their children. The children seemed calmer and more relaxed at school. Instead of acting out Superman or The Flintstones, they began to play out their own productions and to reinvent the active games that children have played for generations, games that grow out of a child's own imagination. The children were less easily distracted and worked more creatively either alone or as a group.

Table II
Trends in television watching at ages 9, 13, and 17

	Numbers of hours watched per day					
	0-2 Hours		3-5 Hours		6 or more hours	
	Percent of students	Average proficiency	Percent of students	Average proficiency	Percent of students	Average proficiency
Age 9						
1990	37 (0.9)	231 (1.2)	39 (0.7)	234 (0.9)	23 (0.8)	221 (1.4)
1982	44 (1.1)*	218 (1.4)*	29 (0.6)*	227 (1.1)*	26 (1.0)	215 (1.2)*
Age 13						
1990	31 (0.9)	277 (1.2)	53 (0.7)	271 (0.9)	17 (0.7)	258 (1.4)
1982	45 (0.8)*	273 (1.2)	39 (0.4)*	269 (1.1)	16 (0.8)	256 (1.8)
Age 17						
1990	51 (1.2)	312 (1.1)	41 (1.1)	300 (1.2)	9 (0.5)	287 (1.8)
1982	69 (0.7)*	305 (1.0)*	26 (0.6)*	296 (1.1)	5 (0.2)*	279 (2.1)*
<p>*Statistically significant difference from 1990, as determined by an application of the Bonferroni procedure, where alpha equals .05 per set of comparisons between previous mathematics assessments and 1990.</p> <p>NOTE: The standard errors of the estimated percentages and proficiencies appear in parentheses. It can be said with 95 percent certainty that for each population of interest, the value for the whole population is within plus or minus two standard errors of the estimated for the sample. Percentages of students may not total 100 percent due to rounding. Data from 1978 are not available at ages 9 and 13.</p> <p>SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, <i>Trends in Academic Progress</i>. Prepared by the Educational Testing Service. Washington, DC: 1991, p. 100.</p>						

This was something only a few of the children had been able to do before (Safran, 1976). Safran repeated the experiment with a follow-up group. The follow-up was conducted so that information could be obtained on what was happening at home in addition to what was happening in the classroom. In New Milford, Connecticut, Safran worked with the Family Resource Center, which includes nursery school, kindergarten and day-care facilities and with the First Congregational Church Co-op Nursery (230). About 15 mothers agreed to join the television study to monitor the shows their children were watching and keep diaries on what happened as they limited the viewing. Some teachers also contributed their observations, and when the test period was over, parents, teachers, and editors met to exchange their ideas and impressions. Children clearly watched more television than their parents realized. Many of the parents in the study were aware that the television habit is as much a parent problem as it is the children's. Out of those who kept diaries, one was a father who admitted that while he and his wife were trying to get everybody off to work or school in the morning, or when he heard the kids

squabbling in the evening, he found himself wanting to yell, "Okay, go watch some television." He said he had to remind himself that if the children were watching television, they'd still be arguing over what they were going to watch.

The Santa Barbara County School District noted in 1989 that most of the students in Santa Barbara County, California had their bedrooms filled with television sets, telephones, stereos, radios, and VCRs (Cirone, 1991). At least the results and demographics of a study of media used by students in the school district showed that their bedrooms were packed with these types of media devices. The students distributed the survey throughout Santa Barbara County's 23 school districts. Cirone received 21,364 useable responses from students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. A surprising forty-four percent of the K-12 population reported having television sets in their bedrooms. The most telling comparison developed when the school district correlated the incidence of media devices in bedrooms with student academic performance. The school district found that the "A" students were significantly less likely to have bedroom entertainment technology. Further, the "A"

students owned the fewest television sets.

These studies and surveys were not conducted to simply proclaim that television viewing is a counterproductive activity, but a one-way communication system is not the best way for children to learn and grow. Children will learn through involvement (active participation) with parents, teachers, and other children.

In order to understand what children do know about the world and themselves, it is important to look at their environment and the way family, peers, school, and television affect the lives of children.

Reasons Children Watch Television

Children watch television for significantly different reasons from what those identified as common among adults. Most adults admit they watch television to be entertained (Condry, 1993). Television enables adults to escape from their everyday "real life" responsibilities to watch someone else deal with their everyday tasks. In essence, adults accept the detachment

from reality and watch programs with the ability to separate fact from fiction.

Children have difficulty separating fact from fiction. Often children may expect that "real life" should accommodate the upbeat nature of television. For children, television will always be there as a constant companion, available to entertain and to keep them company. Rubin (1983) observed that there are six motivational aspects related to the viewing habits of children and adolescents: learning, passing time/habit, companionship, escape, arousal, and relaxation. Based on data comprised in the secondary analysis of television motivations and patterns, Rubin concluded there were two television-viewer types. The first viewer type uses television out of habit. Habit viewers watch television to pass the time when there is nothing better to do. Television provides a sense of enjoyment and entertainment. Some "habit" viewers watch television for companionship; they lack the necessary social interactions with family or peers. Other habit viewers are escapists. The escapist uses television to become isolated from his or her problems. Still others are arousal viewers, who gain an internal thrill from

programs viewed. The relaxation (habit) viewer uses the media as a means of unwinding. The second viewer type uses the media as a means to gain information and to learn, not to escape. Table 3 summarized the data gathered by Rubin on a sample of 626 subjects. The participants were asked to respond to thirty statements which dealt with reasons for watching television (Rubin, 1983).

Since the earliest observations of children's play by the Dutch naturalist Groos (1901), play theorists made note of the importance of gaining a sense of control over a complex world for the developing child (Singer, 1973). In the course of such efforts, children also practice skills that will be valuable to them later in life. These skills include story imagery and vocabulary.

Besides being primary influences on children's lives, family, peers, school, and television all function together. Information obtained through one group is ultimately carried over into the other groups. That is why parents and educators need to be available for children to make sure they know the differences between fact and fiction, especially when it comes to television programs. Even if no one actually shuts off the

TABLE III

Initial Viewing Motivation Set
Data gathered by Rubin

Initial Viewing Motivation Categories and Statements ("I Watch TV ...")	\bar{x}	s.d.
RELAXATION		
1. Because it relaxes me	3.25	1.07
2. Because it allows me to unwind	2.89	1.17
3. Because it's a pleasant rest	2.90	1.04
COMPANIONSHIP		
1. So I won't have to be alone	1.97	1.17
2. When there's no one else to talk to or be with	2.45	1.25
3. Because it makes me feel less lonely	1.88	1.06
HABIT		
1. Just because it's there	2.38	1.25
2. Because I just like to watch	2.68	1.16
3. Because it's a habit, just something I do	2.33	1.27
PASS TIME		
1. When I have nothing better to do	2.89	1.30
2. Because it passes the time away, particularly when I'm bored	2.72	1.30
3. Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time	2.38	1.21
ENTERTAINMENT		
1. Because it entertains me	3.71	0.96
2. Because it's enjoyable	3.26	0.91
3. Because it amuses me	3.02	0.99
SOCIAL INTERACTION		
1. Because it's something to do when friends come over	1.59	0.87
2. So I can talk with other people about what's on	2.06	1.07
3. So I can be with other members of the family or friends who are watching	2.39	1.14
INFORMATION		
1. Because it helps me learn things about myself and others	2.71	1.16
2. So I can learn how to do things which I haven't done before	2.09	1.08
3. So I could learn about what could happen to me	2.10	1.06
AROUSAL		
1. Because it's thrilling	2.09	0.94
2. Because it's exciting	2.29	1.00
3. Because it peps me up	1.89	0.96
ESCAPE		
1. So I can forget about school or other things	2.41	1.27
2. So I can get away from the rest of the family or others	1.64	0.92
3. So I can get away from what I'm doing	2.22	1.20

Note: Response options from "exactly" (5) to "not at all" (1) like their own reasons for watching television. Category statements were alternately presented to the respondents. In other words, an escape statement followed an arousal statement, which followed an informative statement, and so on.

television set, communicating about why and what they are watching can still take place.

In addition to looking at the reasons why children are watching television, it is also important to look at the research on television violence in children's lives and the indirect effects that may surface due to constant viewing.

Television Violence in Children's Lives

In 1993, a pre-schooler set fire to his home, an idea he said he got from watching Beavis and Butt-head, MTV's rebellious teen headbangers who love to play with fire, torment animals, and sniff paint thinner. A few months ago, another youngster made headlines when he swung an infant around by its feet, cracking the child's head on the floor. It was a stunt he was trying to copy from a movie.

On a daily basis, America's children are victims of violence or abuse, commit violent or abusive acts toward others, or witness violent acts in their homes or communities (NAEYC Position Statement, 1990). With

violence spreading like a virus through America, no one knows if brutality depicted on television is just a symptom or a source of a larger problem. And there is more violence on television than ever before because in addition to regular network television stations, there's cable (e.g. Showtime, Home Box Office, and MTV), pay-per-view, and movie rentals.

Over the past 30 years more than 3,000 studies offer evidence that violent television programming has a calculable effect on the minds of children (Connell, 1993). The American Psychological Association reviewed more than 1,000 studies, surveys, and commentaries and found that there is a correlation between viewing violent material and aggressive behavior (Paschal, 1993). The end result is that those who regularly view programs filled with violence tend to behave more aggressively than those who occasionally tune-in to violent programs.

Violent types of programs tend to affect children in two ways: (a) Children mimic what they see and subsequently (b) they become immuned to it (Connell, 1993). (That means exposure to media violence can only lead children to see violence as a normal reaction to pressured situations and an acceptable way for resolving problems.)

University of Michigan psychologist Leonard Eron followed more than 800 children as they matured from age 8 to adulthood (as cited in Connell, 1993). In a landmark twenty-two year study, children who consistently viewed violence on television were more likely as adults to be aggressive when drunk, to use violence against family members and, in some cases to be convicted of violent crimes. The study showed a considerable risk for disadvantaged children. Inner city children are surrounded by violence - in their neighborhoods, on the streets, and most recently in the schools. Because America's streets are becoming increasingly dangerous, children spend more time indoors, and what do they see? More violence! How can children escape from exposure when we hear all these alarming statistics? One would assume that since the broadcast airwaves belong to the American public, the industry would tone down the violence on television because it is not in the public's interest. However, this does not seem to be the case.

According to the Washington-based Center for Media and Public Affairs, in 1992 eighteen hours worth of cable and network programming in one day contained 1,846 violent acts ranging from serious assaults and gunfire to

punches and slaps.

Violence in the media is not a new problem. It has become worse though since Federal Communication Commission decided to deregulate children's commercial television in 1982 (NAEYC, 1990). Since that time air time for war cartoons rose from 1 1/4 hours per week in 1982 to 43 hours per week in 1986 (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1987; Tuscherer, 1988). Children's programs that featured 18.6 violent acts per hour a decade ago now have around 26.4 violent acts each hour (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1990). The violent behavior toward opponents, especially when playing with toy copies of television program characters, makes it difficult for children to tell the difference between pretend violence and real violence.

Peggy Charren (1985), founder and former president of Action for Children's Television, asserts that the major problem facing children's television today is that the industry has given over children's television to the toy companies. The industries do not produce creative programs, but instead produce long commercials that are merchandising haven (The Programmer, 1985). Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future cartoon show

contains spaceships which the child uses to shoot light beams at the characters on the screen. In turn, the characters appear to shoot back at the spaceships during a five-minute segment of the "Captain Power Show." The violence on television is disturbing enough without a child engaging actively in violence with these characters.

No one claims that viewing violence on television is the only factor involved with aggressive behavior in children. Nevertheless, studies over the past 30 years have indicated children who are heavy viewers of violent programs increase their chances of becoming more aggressive with others, less willing to share and cooperate, and more afraid of the world outside their own homes (Paige, 1990). Adults need to be aware that the content of television programming has changed over the years, which brings about the potential for negative effects on children's lives.

Indirect Effects of Constant Viewing

Viewing an excessive amount of television

programming not only directly affects children's behavior, but it also indirectly affects children's lives. Some of the negative effects include: obesity, poor reading performance, and less play time.

Obesity is a problem facing young people in the United States. Can sitting in front of the television set for hours at a time be a contributing factor to student weight problems? There are good reasons to suspect that it could have something to do with obesity when watching television is often accompanied by eating. Studies show that there is a decrease in metabolic rate when watching television, especially for those children who are already obese (Brody, 1992). New research from Boston University School of Medicine shows that the more television pre-schoolers watch, the fatter they are, with the risk greatest for kids who watch 2 1/2 hours or more per day (Points, 1993). This means that children need to get off the couch and engage in some physically active activities, instead of watching an excessive amount of television which is a physically passive activity.

The reading performance of today's children has become an issue of concern among educators and television may be contributing to the lower reading performance of

students. Controversies are being raised regarding new media technologies and videogames. Concerns arise over the belief that these types of technologies and videogames take time away from other children's activities which are thought to be more important, such as reading and homework. Researchers conclude that children who view an excessive amount of television seem to earn lower grades than children who view a more moderate amount (Neuman, 1984). An analysis by Prowda and Neuman (1982) found a slight negative trend in television's relationship to student reading performance. Fourth grade reading scores seemed relatively unrelated to television, but for eighth and eleventh graders, there was a weak negative correlation. Some might see this as evidence of an effect of television viewing over time. The American Federation of Teachers and Chrysler Corporation survey found that eighty-six percent of nine-year olds read a book a few times a week. That figure dropped to 42 percent by the age of 17 (Springfield News-Sun, 1993). Television plays a big part in determining children's reading habits: "Fifty-four percent of those who watched five hours of television or more each day read only occasionally; 63 percent of those who watched

one hour or less characterized themselves as active or moderate readers" (p. 1). It stands to reason the more television children watch, the less likely they will be apt to read and engage in other activities. Even though there may not be a simple relationship between reading scores and the number of television hours logged per week, teachers and parents need to be alert to the possibility that television viewing may be an easier and preferred activity compared to the struggle and challenge of reading for children.

Playtime is an important activity in a child's life and the quality of that playtime is influenced by television. When heavy viewing occurs, playtime is reduced (Singer & Singer, 1986). Although television may provide rich content for stories, it also pushes aside time needed for reading and play. Singer and Singer (1986) believe children develop important ways of self entertainment through reflection and play during their early years. Such activity, while natural in most children, still requires enforcement through parent-child play and parent discussion. Where such parental interventions are weak, the child may show a weak play potential and may turn toward the television set as an

alternative to play. Adults need to make sure there is equal time between children's television needs and other needs - for play, reading, exploring, socializing, and studying (Honig, 1983).

Television and Education

There is no question that some television viewing can be an asset to a child's growth. However, a small child needs more time to process an idea or to understand a concept than the few seconds that a television image may provide.

In the past, teachers have complained that children who view an excessive amount of television are unable to listen attentively to teacher lectures dealing with explanations of school subjects, or they are restless and expect to be entertained by the teacher (Singer & Singer, 1986). This statement by teachers brings about the question of whether television boosts school achievement by increasing knowledge, or interferes with school learning and encourages a shorter attention span.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the nation's largest organization of early childhood professionals, believes educators have a responsibility to assist children in acquiring and developing skills in nonviolent conflict resolutions, to assist them to become critical viewers of what is broadcast on the airwaves, and to encourage the constructive use of the media (NAEYC, 1990).

Formal television education is vital because research shows that children can learn to take television seriously and analyze what they experience. Children can be taught to recognize the value messages found in the media they receive and evaluate them in an appropriate way (Cirone, 1990).

The roles of the parents, guardians, and educators must come together to help children comprehend what they see and hear on television. If children are going to spend time watching television - and still more hours with movies, video games, and computers - they must be educated on how to better understand and appreciate what they are experiencing now and in the future.

CHAPTER III
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The role television plays in the lives of children has been widely studied and documented in the past (Singer & Singer, 1986). Television is a technique for communicating with children. It enters their homes and speaks their language. With visual and auditory images, no reading or writing ability on the part of the child are required. Because children learn by observation and imitation, television presents them with behavior to observe and imitate in a way they can understand.

Television viewing does have the ability to be an effective educational tool for children - but not the sole tool in a child's learning process. Concern lies with the fact that an activity such as watching television, which occupies so many hours in a child's life, must have lasting significance for him/her. Basically, the more time a child spends watching television, the greater television's influence becomes on that child.

Problem

Society is concerned with how a child learns about the world if the major means of learning is through passive observance rather than active participation. Children often look to the television set to gain insight about the world around them. They also look hoping to find answers amid the vast amount of information relayed to them via the television set.

Subjects

The subjects used for this study were twenty-eight seventh grade students enrolled in Northwestern Local School District in Springfield, Ohio. Participants were given permission slips to take home for parental approval to complete the demographic data and television log.

Demographic data were collected on each participant. The data included questions regarding age, sex, parental status, parental education, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and number of television sets in

their homes and the location of those sets. For the subjects in this study, thirteen (or 46.4%) were males and sixteen (or 53.6%) were females. The ten twelve-year olds (or 35.7%, of the sample) and eighteen thirteen-year olds (or 64.3%) participated in the study. Of the students who participated: twenty-two (or 78.6%) came from two parent homes; three (or 10.7%) came from homes with divorce; and three (or 10.7%) came from single parent homes. Seventeen (or 60.7%) of the participants' mothers and eighteen (or 64.3%) of the fathers graduated from high school. Those graduating from college included nine (or 32.1%) of the mothers and nine (or 32.1%) of the fathers. There were two (or 7.1%) of the mothers who did not graduate from high school. Those involved in extra-curricular activities included nineteen (or 67.9%) of the participants, while nine (or 32.1%) were not involved in any activities. An estimate of the number of hours spent on homework showed the majority of the twenty-eight participants working at least one hour per night. Of the twenty-eight participants, sixteen (or 57.1%) said they worked at least one hour per night, eight (or 28.6%) worked two hours, and four (or 14.3%) responded they worked three or more hours per night on homework. When

asked if participants had television sets in their homes, twenty-seven (or 96.4%) said yes; one (or 3.6%) did not have a television set at home. The participant who did not have a television set was also ranked the number one student (of those participating in this study) based on academic performance and classroom participation (see Table V). Of those who had television sets in their homes, eighteen (or 66.7%) had three or more of them and nine (or 33.3%) had two. Also, thirteen (or 48.1%) of the participants who had television sets in their homes had one in their bedroom, while fourteen (or 51.9%) did not have bedroom sets.

Procedures

A television log was given to each participant to take home prior to the data collecting process. Students completed a log of programs viewed from 5:00 p.m. until bedtime (in 1/2 hour intervals) for a full week. They completed the log during February 1994 (See Appendices B, C, & D for samples). Students were instructed to write down what they did during most of the 1/2 hour time

segment. If they did watch television, they were instructed to write in the names of the programs they watched. If they did not watch television for the 1/2 hour time segment, they were instructed to indicate what they did during the allotted time.

While the students were spending the week working on television logs, the students' teacher ranked each student in terms of academic performance and classroom participation, with a 1 given for the top performer, 2 to the second, 3... and so forth.

Of the forty-seven students ranked by the teacher and given permission slips to partake in the study, only twenty-eight were usable participants. The number of participants diminished as students moved from one procedure to another. Out of the forty-seven students, forty-two (or 89.4%) filled out the demographic data and were given television logs. Three students were absent the day the data and logs were distributed, while two were not allowed to be involved in this study at their parents request. One week later, the television logs were returned by thirty-three (or 70.2%) of the students. Only twenty-eight (or 59.6%) actually completed the television log according to the directions given to them.

There were three incomplete logs. Two participants did not sign their names.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was performed to determine if excessive television viewing has any effect on students' learning and school achievement. Further, by studying the viewing habits of children, the writer also identified the types of programs students were watching.

The researcher computed the means as the measure of central tendency for the data collected from this study. The results are entered into Tables IV, V, VI, and VII. Table IV illustrates the activity categories derived from the television logs and their group means.

The assumption (see Chapter 1) that television viewing is negatively linked to children's learning and school achievement is supported by the data collected in this study. The writer found there was a notable difference between the means of the top and weakest five

TABLE IV
Categories developed from television logs and their group means

Activity categories developed from logs	Group means (minutes)
Television	943.2
Recreation	638.6
Homework	307.5
Miscellaneous	451.1

*Miscellaneous category includes eating, work, and church.

students in television viewing time. Table V shows the total minutes spent by the top and weakest five students in each activity category. The top academic student out of the forty-seven students ranked by the teacher and participating in the study did not have a television set in her home. Table V shows that zero total minutes were spent by the top student in the television category and that 570 minutes were used during that time period doing homework. That is the highest number of minutes spent on homework out of the other top students or weakest five students.

The comparison of the top and weakest five students' means in each of the activity categories derived from the television logs to the group means is shown in Table VI. This table illustrates the differences in time spent by the top and weakest five students and how it compares to what time the group spent as a whole engaged in each activity category. In the television category, the means of the weakest five students was higher than either the top five students or group means. In the homework category, their means were lower. It appears that the majority of the participants who spent more time watching television spent less time doing homework.

TABLE V

Total minutes spent by the top five students in each activity category

Student	Rank	Television	Recreation	Homework	Miscellaneous
S.J.	1	0	630	570	1080
B.D.	2	420	1470	240	300
C.L.	3	810	600	150	690
C.J.	4	1320	390	240	90
H.M.	5	570	600	240	750
		Totals: 3120	3690	1440	2910

Total minutes spent by the five weakest students in each activity category

Student	Rank	Television	Recreation	Homework	Miscellaneous
B.G.	24	1410	630	0	180
H.I.	25	1200	510	240	330
J.B.	26	2140	150	0	420
V.W.	27	360	1020	540	180
S.C.	28	510	720	510	660
		Totals: 5620	3030	1290	1770

TABLE VI
Comparing means of the top and weakest five students to the group means

Categories	Means of top five students (minutes)	Means of weakest five students (minutes)	Group means (minutes)
Television	624	1124	943.2
Recreation	738	606	638.6
Homework	288	258	307.5
*Miscellaneous	582	354	451.1

*Miscellaneous category includes eating, work, and church.

By studying the television logs submitted by the participants, the writer was able to study the types of programs most watched during the week's time period. Table VII shows that the top five students watched more action/drama type programs, while sitcoms were watched more by the weakest five students. Another notable difference was that the weakest five students watched more television in the Game Show/MTV/Nintendo category than did the top five students. Overall, the most watched programs by both groups were the sitcoms "Saved by the Bell" and "Family Matters".

In general, the results of the present study indicate the weakest students watched more television each day than the group and did less homework. That is their mean daily television viewing time of the weakest students was 1124 minutes; the mean for the group was 943.2 minutes.

Results

The question investigated in this study supported the ideas shared by Neuman (1984). Neuman suggests that

TABLE VII
Types of programs most watched by top and weakest five students

Types of programs	Top five students	Weakest five students
Sitcoms	1230	2580
Sports/News	510	150
Action/Drama	1260	780
Game shows/MTV/Nintendo	120	2100

children who view an excessive amount of television tend to score lower grades than children who watch a more moderate amount of television. In this study, the weakest five students watched more television than the top five students.

The findings of this study also support Morgan and Gross's (1981) examination of studies connecting television use to schooling and education, which found a modest negative relationship between television viewing and school achievement. The weakest students in this study watched more television than the top five students; the weakest students also did less homework. Time spent watching television for the weak students was ultimately time away from homework.

It is doubtful that differences in viewer preferences could account for differences in achievement, since even educational programming does not necessarily generate what children are expected to learn in school.

The use of the demographic data and television logs collected for this study places certain limitations on the interpretations of the results. The results are based on what a limited sample of twenty-eight middle

grade children in a midwestern setting are watching. These findings are gathered from a specific group in a specific setting and cannot be generalized into other student groups or settings.

CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Television can be used to entertain, to aid and instruct, and to enrich our lives. It is one of the most powerful communication tools we have in the world.

One of the concerns about television viewing lies with the findings of researchers who concluded that excessive television viewing can hinder a child's learning and school achievement (Singer & Singer, 1986). The television industry defends itself by telling people who do not like what they see to turn the television off. But often, there is no parent at home to turn the television set off. With an increasing number of two-career and single-parent families, television's role as an electronic babysitter has amplified (Page, 1990/1991).

The more time children spend in front of the television set is ultimately time away from reading and other intellectually stimulating activities. As a result, reading skills are poorly developed and the value of learning goes unappreciated.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the television viewing habits of middle grade children. By looking at their viewing habits, the researcher can

determine if excessive viewing seems to have an effect on students' learning and classroom performance. Further, information can be obtained as to what types of programs students are watching.

The question investigated, which used demographic data and television logs to record student viewing information, was conducted with twenty-eight middle grade children in a midwestern setting.

Before the week long television logging assignment, students were given demographic data sheets to complete for use in this study (see Appendix A). The data included questions regarding age, sex, parental status, parental education, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and number of television sets and the location of those sets.

Results of the demographic data brought about some interesting discoveries. When questioned whether or not participants had television sets in their homes, twenty-seven (or 96.4%) said yes; one (or 3.6%) did not have a television set at home. Interestingly enough, the participant without a television set at home was ranked the number one student (of those participating in this

study) based on academic performance and classroom participation. Of those who had television sets in their homes, eighteen (or 66.7%) had three or more, and nine (or 33.3%) had two. Also, thirteen (or 48.1%) of the participants who had television sets in their homes had one in their bedroom, while fourteen (or 51.9%) did not.

Information was also obtained from the students' teacher as to the ranking of each student in terms of academic performance and classroom participation. A 1 was given to the top performer, 2 to the second, 3...and so forth.

When it was time to collect the television logs, only twenty-eight of the forty-seven students ranked by the teacher and given permission slips to partake in the study were usable participants. The unusable logs represent a potential limitation in the study. Students did not return the logs for a variety of reasons (e.g., forgot them at home, or did not complete the log properly).

The assumption (see Chapter 1) that television viewing is negatively linked to children's learning and school achievement is supported by the data collected in this study. The researcher computed the means as the

measure of central tendency for the data collected. The writer found a notable difference between the means of the top and weakest five students in television viewing time (see Tables V & VI). Out of the activity categories derived from the television logs, the means of the weakest five students were higher in the television category than either the top five students or group means. In the homework category, their means were lower.

The writer also studied the television logs submitted by the participants to discover what types of programs they were watching during the week's time period. The data indicated the top five students watched more action/drama type programs, while sitcoms were watched more by the weakest five students. Another notable difference was that the weakest five students watched more television in the Game Show/MTV/Nintendo category than did the top five students.

Not only does research show that television viewing is negatively linked to children's learning and school achievement, which gives cause for concern, but common sense tells us that any activity occupying so much time in a child's life must have a lasting impact in the long run. There is no question children can learn and benefit

from television. It just depends on what the programs are, the amount of time spent watching them, and if parents play a part in their viewing.

Conclusions

Today, children are living in a new type of television environment where they are influenced by the way television represents places and people rarely encountered in "real life". Television's influence on children has not only grown and changed over the years as television programs have changed, but so has the amount of time children spend in front of the television.

Society is worried about the impact that television viewing has on children's learning and school achievement due to the nature of television programming, which is largely geared toward entertainment rather than toward enhancing learning and creative thinking.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the television viewing habits of middle grade children. By looking at their viewing habits the researcher can

determine if excessive viewing seems to have any effect on students' learning and classroom performance. Further, information can be obtained as to what types of programs students are watching.

The following are a list of conclusions drawn from this study.

1. The assumption (see Chapter 1) that television viewing is negatively linked to children's learning and school achievement is supported by the data collected in this study.

2. There was a notable difference between the means of the top and weakest five students in television viewing time. Out of the categories derived from the television logs, the means of the weakest five students were higher in the television category than either the top five students or group means.

3. In the homework category, the means of the weakest five students were lower than either the top five students or group means.

4. The weakest five students who spent their time watching more television did so engaged in the Game Show/MTV/Nintendo category.

5. The more time that students spent watching television ultimately resulted in time spent away from homework and other intellectually stimulating activities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for parents. They are drawn from the extensive literature as well as the data generated from this study which investigated the television viewing habits of middle grade children and whether excessive viewing had any effect on students' learning and classroom performance.

1. Become more observant of time spent doing homework; to become aware that excessive time spent in front of the television can have a negative effect on academic performance.

2. Watch at least one episode of a program the child watches and decide if the program can be a good or bad influence in their life.

3. Discuss the contents of the programs viewed with the child.

4. Create a balance between the child's television needs against other needs - for play, reading, and studying.

APPENDICES

TELEVISION VIEWING SURVEY

Information About You

GENERAL DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following questions as accurately as you can by simply placing an x in the appropriate box. In several instances, there are two part questions. These cases only apply to certain "yes" answers.



I am:

 Male Female

I am:

 12 years old 13 years old 14 years oldMy parent (s)
is/are: Single Married Divorced WidowedMy mother
graduated from: High school College Other _____My father
graduate from: High school College Other _____I am
this student: A A-B B B-C C D

Are you involved in extra curricular activities this year?

 Yes No**If Yes:** How many are you involved in this year? One 2 3 or more

Estimate the amount of time you spend on homework each night:

 0 hours 1 hour 2 hours 3 hours or more

Do you have a television set in your home?

 Yes No**If Yes:**A. How many do you have in your home? One Two Three or moreB. Do you have a television set in your bedroom? Yes No

TELEVISION LOG

Logging at 5:00 P.M. Fill in your log every 1/2 hour noting the programs you watched. If you do not watch television specific 1/2 hour time period, make a note of what you did in place of watching television (e.g., eating, homework, sports)

Time	M	T	W	TH	F	S	SUN
5:00 A.M.	IN SCHOOL						
5:30 P.M.							
6:00 P.M.	made cookies	homework	homework	homework	homework	took a shower	read book
6:30 P.M.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	went out for supper	↓
7:00 P.M.	↓	ate supper	ate supper	↓	↓	↓	↓
7:30 P.M.	ate supper	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	went to church
8:00 P.M.	↓	homework	homework	ate supper	ate supper	↓	↓
8:30 P.M.	unloaded dishwasher	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
9:00 P.M.	↓	↓	took a shower	homework	read book	↓	↓
9:30 P.M.	played Scrabble	played Monopoly	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
10:00 P.M.	↓	↓	read book	read book	↓	↓	↓
10:30 P.M.	↓	↓	bedtime	↓	bedtime	↓	↓
11:00 P.M.	↓	bedtime	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
11:30 P.M.	bedtime	↓	↓	bedtime	↓	↓	ate Popcorn
12:00 P.M.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	read book	↓
12:30 P.M.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	bedtime

TELEVISION LOG

Logging at 5:00 P.M. Fill in your log every 1/2 hour noting the programs you watched. If you do not watch television specific 1/2 hour time period, make a note of what you did in place of watching television (e.g., eating, homework, sports)

Time	M	T	W	TH	F	S	SUN
10 A.M. ↓	IN SCHOOL						
10 P.M.	Did homework	Bonkers	Bonkers	4 wheel	Four wheel	Basket Ball	Raido
10 P.M.	↓	cosby	Radio	↓	↓	↓	↓
10 P.M.	↓	married with children Bundys	married with children	↓	↓	↓	homew
10 P.M.	eat	mash	Homework	↓	Run	dinner	↓
10 P.M.	↓	dinner	↓	eat	↓	Brith	↓
10 P.M.	ride four wheeler	Return movies	↓	↓	eat	video games	Help with dinner
10 P.M.	olympics	↓	olympics	olymp	Shower	movie Ness-Say Roughness	↓
10 P.M.	↓	olympics	↓	↓	Rent movies	↓	eat
10 P.M.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	more homework
10 P.M.	↓	↓	eat	home work	movie wind-walker	Phone	↓
10 P.M.	Bedting	homework	↓	↓	↓	↓	Sleep
10 P.M.	↓	↓	Sleep	Sleep	↓	Snack	
10 P.M.	↓	Sleep			↓	News	
10 P.M.					Sleep	↓	

TELEVISION LOG

Start Logging at 5:00 P.M. Fill in your log every 1/2 hour noting the programs you watched. If you do not watch television a specific 1/2 hour time period, make a note of what you did in place of watching television (e.g., eating, homework, sports).

Time	M	T	W	TH	F	S	SUN
5:00 A.M.	IN SCHOOL						
5:30 P.M.							
6:00 P.M.	Bonkers	Bonkers	Bonkers	Bonkers	Bonkers	Softball	Softball
6:30 P.M.	Homework	Homework	Homework	Homework	Copy	↓	↓
7:00 P.M.	Ate Dinner	Ate Dinner	Ate Dinner	Ate Dinner	Ate Dinner	↓	News
7:30 P.M.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
8:00 P.M.	Star Trek	Roseanne	Roseanne	Star Trek	Home work	Ate Dinner	Fun
8:30 P.M.	↓	Jopardy	Jopardy	↓	Jopardy	Computer	Fun
9:00 P.M.	Fresh Prince of Bel-air	Full House	The Nanny	Simpsons	Family Matters	↓	Read
9:30 P.M.	Blossum	Roc	The Critic	Wings	Boyz Meets World	↓	Living Single
10:00 P.M.	Mad About You	John Larroquette	Home Improvement	Seinfeld	Step By Step	↓	Read
10:30 P.M.	Bed Time	Cafe American	Grace Under Fire	Herman's Head	Hanging with Mr. Cooper	Winter Olympic games	George Carlin
11:00 P.M.	↓	Star Trek	Star Trek	Bed Time	Played board games	↓	Bed Time
11:30 P.M.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	Read	↓
12:00 P.M.	↓	Bed Time	Bed Time	↓	News	Tales From The Crypt	↓
12:30 P.M.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE OF A LOG AGGREGATING TOTAL MINUTES PER DAY IN EACH CATEGORY

	<u>STUDENT</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>TELEVISION</u>	<u>RECREATION</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>	<u>MICELLANEOUS</u>
M	S.J.	#1	-----	210	-----	120
T			-----	90	150	60
W			-----	30	120	120
TH			-----	90	180	60
F			-----	90	120	60
S			-----	30	-----	360
SUN			-----	90	-----	300
<hr/>						
TOTALS			0	630	570	1080

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE OF A LOG AGGREGATING TOTAL MINUTES PER DAY IN EACH CATEGORY

	<u>STUDENT</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>TELEVISION</u>	<u>RECREATION</u>	<u>HOMEWORK</u>	<u>MICELLANEOUS</u>
M	J.B.	#26	280	60	-----	60
T			270	30	-----	60
W			270	60	-----	60
TH			330	-----	-----	60
F			330	-----	-----	60
S			330	-----	-----	60
SUN			330	-----	-----	60
<hr/>						
TOTALS			2140	150	0	420

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