

# Concerns grow over children using tablet computers

March 29 2012, by Mariano Andrade

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A Brazilian boy looks at an iPad at an Apple store in Sao Paulo in 2011. Electronic tablets like the iPad are a revolutionary educational tool and are becoming part of childhood, but should be watched carefully so that overuse doesn't lead to learning or behavioral problems, experts say.

Electronic tablets like the iPad are a revolutionary educational tool and are becoming part of childhood, but should be watched carefully so that overuse doesn't lead to learning or behavioral problems, experts say.

"It's a topic that really emerged in the last two years. You can't pull it from their hands," Warren Buckleitner, editor of Children's Technology Review, said this week at a New York panel titled "Baby Brains and Video Games."

According to a late 2011 survey of 2,200 parents and children in Britain

and the United States, 15 percent of kids between three and eight had used their parents' iPad. Nine percent had their own iPad, while 20 percent had their own iPod.

The same study, by the marketing agency Kids Industries, found 77 percent of parents believed that using tablets was beneficial for their children and the same number thought the gadgets helped develop creativity.

Amid warnings from some researchers that tablets can cause [developmental difficulties](#) and problems including autism or [attention deficit disorder](#), experts at the forum recommended not rushing to judgment.

"Technology maybe fosters some things and dampens others," Rosemarie Truglio, from the children's TV producers Sesame Workshop, said. "It's definitely about balance."

Lisa Guernsey, director of the Early Education Initiative at the New American Foundation, said that critics blaming devices like the iPad for child developmental problems should differentiate "between a cause and an association."

Still, Guernsey, author of "[Screen Time: How \[Electronic Media\]\(#\) -- From Baby Videos to \[Educational Software\]\(#\) -- Affects Your Young Child," urged parents to establish limits on use of \[electronic devices\]\(#\).](#)

"Can they focus on a conversation, not look a screen for 30 minutes?" she asked.

Truglio noted that "researchers have proven they need adult-child interaction," in addition to the electronic helper. "Interactive doesn't mean educational," she said.

Annie Murphy Paul, author of "How the Nine Months Before Birth Shape the Rest of Our Lives," said there's no need to panic.

"Your brain is changing all the time, each time you learn something new," she said.

But Paul said she strictly controls her own offspring's access to such devices and remains concerned "about the value" for small children.

For Buckleitner, it's all a question of balance. Don't let the [iPad](#) become an electronic babysitter. But it can be "a shelf of toys. It could be a lot things," she said. "Trust your gut."

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