



From the Editor

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An Old-Fashioned Alternative To Screen Time

This morning, I read an inspiring article about a program in Denmark called Kulturvitaminer (culture vitamins). The program offers unemployed people with stress, anxiety, or depression the opportunity to go on a crash culture course. Partly funded by the Danish health authority, Kulturvitaminer encourages cultural participation for those unemployed or on state sick leave (Russell, 2019).

The article describes the Kulturvitaminer program in the city of Aalborg. The 10-week program includes singing, visiting the city archives to learn about local history and genealogy, and music appreciation. Participants also visit the theater to watch new productions and coaching sessions, where actors teach participants about body language to help promote confidence in job interviews. They attend the symphony, visit art museums, and participate in creative workshops.

However, the program piece that most captured my attention is the library visit. In a dimly lit room at the local library, participants are encouraged to snuggle up under blankets while a librarian reads to them for 2 hours. If you were read to as a child, I imagine this thought might bring back warm memories. Most participants in the program had not had books read to them since childhood, so the event was quite emotional for some of them. They expressed feeling cared for; it was a powerful experience.

Berns, Blaine, Prietula, and Pye (2013) reported that brain scans show when individuals are immersed in a book, they mentally rehearse the activities, sights, and sounds of a story. This stimulates neural pathways, which can increase empathy and improve wellbeing (Kidd & Castano, 2013). Mendelsohn and colleagues (2018) found that an intervention based in pediatric primary care to promote parents reading aloud and playing with their young children could have a sustained impact on children, such as curbing problem behaviors (e.g., aggression, hyperactivity, difficulty with attention).

Reach Out & Read is a nonprofit organization that gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. The program is delivered by doctors and nurse practitioners at routine pediatric checkups. In addition to being a wonderful way of engaging with young children, reading aloud:

- Builds motivation, curiosity, and memory.
- Helps children cope during times of stress or anxiety.
- Takes children to places and times they have never been – enlarging and enhancing their worlds.

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- Creates a positive association with books and reading (Reach Out & Read, 2014, para. 5).

Children who are hospitalized often have much time on their hands. Frequently, that time is filled with screen time – television, laptops, video games, and other devices. The detrimental effects of screen media use is well documented, including aggressive behaviors (Wilson et al., 2002), obesity (Koplan, Liverman, & Kraak, 2005), disordered sleep (Dworak, Schierl, Bruns, & Strüder, 2007; Hysing et al., 2015), attention deficit disorder (Acevedo-Polakovich, Lorch, Milich, & Ashby, 2006), impaired cognitive development (Zimmerman & Christakis, 2005), lower academic performance (Hancox, Milne, & Poulton, 2005), mood disorder (Erdogan et al., 2006), and psychological distress (Erdogan et al., 2006; Hamer Stamatakis, & Mishra, 2009; Primack, Swanier, Georgiopoulos, Land, & Fine, 2009). Although the American Academy of Pediatrics offers guidelines for media use in the home, to date, there are no similar guidelines for hospitals.

Arora, Soares, Li, and Zimmerman (2016) conducted a study to explore caregiver (parent or other guardian) perceptions about screen use, to compare at-home with in-hospital screen media use, and to measure media screen use among hospitalized children. Their nearly 1,500 observations revealed screen media on over 80% of the time the hospitalized child was in the room and awake, and about 48% of the observations with direct attention to a screen. Caregivers reported that their child engaged in significantly more screen media use in the hospital setting as compared to at home. Many caregivers (42%) added the amount of screen time their child used in the hospital was more than they would have liked.

None of us like to have something we enjoy taken away. Perhaps rather than directing efforts to reduce children's media screen time when hospitalized, something new could be offered in its place. Maybe that something could be a person reading aloud to a child. Hospital volunteers are logical stand-ins as readers when parents are not present. Yes, volunteers currently read aloud to children, but what if this activity could become a regular part of the child's day? Many hospitals have enforced quiet hours each afternoon;

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perhaps this is an ideal time for a child to hear a story. Bedtime is also a traditional and good choice. And wouldn't it be lovely, if along with the story, each child had a personal story blanket to wrap up in during this special time to bring on the mood of coziness and comfort that the Danes call *hygge*.

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