



Comparative Cultures

Screen Saver

By Kinjal Dagli-Shah

I once worked with a mother of two who decided not to own a television. I recently met another mom who chooses to not get a cable connection. Today I spoke with a friend and a new mom who has decided to keep her baby away from television for as long as she can.

I understand the concerns - when I became a new mother (an event that feels like it happened yesterday), I too read reams about the not-so-positive effects of television on young children. One that stuck in my mind was that one hour of television every day can reduce your toddler's vocabulary by six words. I neither support nor refute the claim but I do think a normal amount of television can prove entertaining if not useful for your child.

In a home like ours where we focus on making a conscious effort at speaking our native language so that our child can learn it, television played the role of English tutor. There were times when a neighbour would talk to our then 18-month-old in English and she would draw a blank. All she had heard until then was a different language.

We weren't worried because we knew that English would eventually take over once she went to school and made friends. Until then, however, *Treehouse* was there to teach her all she needed to know about neighbourhood interaction. At two, she speaks a delightful mix of both languages that is sometimes hard to understand.

Exposing her to English wasn't the only reason we resorted to TV time. Growing up in an extended family with one television, I remember missing out on children's shows

and popular culture. It didn't affect my quality of life, but when you're 14 and all your friends talk endlessly about that one episode of *Friends*, it does feel like a big deal.

Of course, I learnt far more valuable life lessons in sharing and letting go. I just didn't know it at the time. I can't recreate the same situation for my toddler but as long as she learns to share TV time with her dad without a scuffle, I'm okay.

Another reason we allow TV time, I confess, is because you sometimes just have to get on with a task and let your child be on her own. And despite our best efforts to involve her in activities that apparently stimulate one or the other parts of her brain, sometimes nothing works as well as an episode of *Caillou*. So there, I said it - let the judging begin.

Ultimately, a balanced approach works best for our home. It may be different for every parent but I don't believe some amount of television is harmful, especially if combined with a fair bit of other activities. I'm not sure what happened to the six-word theory but my toddler speaks in full sentences, most grammatically incorrect, and recites nursery rhymes mostly when she thinks we aren't looking.

Now that I'm done writing this column, I can switch off the TV.

Kinjal Dagli-Shah is a full-time mom and a part-time teacher. She organizes Montessori Mornings once a week for ages 2-5, aimed at involving young children in developmental activities and structured play. For more information, email her at kinjal.dagli@gmail.com

March Heat Wave Forecast For Stouffville

On March 23 from 6 to 7:30 p.m. the 5th Annual Chili Cook-Off will take place at EastRidge Church on Tenth Line.

If you have a chili recipe that will make the world a warmer place, you can submit your entry by March 19. Just send an email to office@eastridge.ca with 'Stouffville Chili Cook-Off' in the subject line. You can also fax your entry to 905-640-3925 or call 905-640-3911.

Prizes will be awarded in the following

categories: Most unique ingredients, hottest, vegetarian, traditional and people's choice. Whitechurch-Stouffville Emergency Care Fund committee members Marty Bartley, Mayor Wayne Emmerson, Jim Mason, Kym Pyke and Tim Soukup will be on hand to undertake the deliciously difficult task of selecting the winners.

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