

My childhood was an adventure in itself. From riding shotgun in the *Hot Wheels Jeep* to the edge of the pond, to swinging from trees, and even attempting to take the *Step 2* wagon onto the pond as a make-shift boat; there was always something worthwhile to do alongside my siblings before our mother called us in for dinner. But where did our adventure seeking selves come up with these imaginative ideas? Who's to blame for all these creative mishaps? At such a young age, such ideas were implemented into my imagination through my consumed mass mediated content, my travel loving family, my equally as imaginative friends, and my social institutions, such as pre-school. Specifically narrowing it down the time period of preschool, I can recall watching many shows on television.

One specific show that I was drawn to was *Dora the Explorer*. This mass mediated American television program was created by Chris Gifford, a writer and executive producer, who also was responsible for the successful spin-off, *Go, Diego, Go!* *Dora the Explorer* first officially aired on August 14, 2000 and still continues to air as a regular series today. The show won the Peabody Award in 2003 for outstanding efforts in making learning a pleasurable experience for preschoolers.ⁱ Broadcasting networks included *Nick Jr.*, *Nickelodeon*, and *CBS*; all highly rated US networks. *Dora the Explorer* stars a young girl, Dora, her friend Boots, her animated Backpack and Map, and her villainous foe Swiper, the cunning antagonist. Also consisting in the show are various other animated objects and lively characters. In each episode, the audience joins Dora in an animated world set inside of a computer. The show provides puzzle solving mysteries that aid in the progress of early education. *Dora the Explorer* has impacted its young viewers by introducing them to cultural relativism, advancing their intellect in linguistic and spatial skills, and helping aid them in the development of good morality.

Why was *Dora the Explorer* created? It was created as yet another pre-school preparation show. It's partially intended message was to initiate the early onset use of Spanish and English literacy amongst the pre-school population accompanied with problem solving and spatial skills. Again intended was the message of defining what is wrong and right in society, based upon morality. The well-known repetitive phrase from Dora, "Swiper no swiping!" helped teach children stealing is not acceptable in society. Also the use of Dora as the heroine in every episode follows along the Proppian Theory of having one character save the day. The use of villains such as Swiper, the cunning antagonist, and other magical witches and creatures that stood in Dora's way, also follow along with Propp's theory. Perhaps the biggest intention of developing *Dora the Explorer* was to make a profitable show that could prosper off a market of children, through the use of: accompanying brand toys, interactive websites, productions of short movies, and high network ratings. As earlier noted, the producers that supported this show were *Nickelodeon*, including the associated *Nick Jr. Channel*, and *CBS*. These three networks are nationally recognized in the U.S. and stand by their high ratings. By creating an early-education show starring a Latino girl, these networks reeled in new profits from an up and coming market; the Latino population. The Latino population in America has been rapidly increasing since even before the early 2000's. In 2005, it was documented 45% of children under 5 are minorities, and 22% of this percent are Hispanic.ⁱⁱ According to the FCC (Federal Communication Commission) educational TV was not reaching out to this large population and providing the same equal education as compared to that of the English speaking population. By not representing a large portion of children in the US, this new economic market remained hidden. The FCC expressed the legitimacy of their concern when they fined Univision (the leading Spanish language network in US), \$24 million dollars for not serving the Spanish-speaking child audience.ⁱⁱⁱ This brought

incentive to make more popular shows, such as *Dora* and an increase in economic power in this new market.^{iv}

I can personally relate *Dora the Explorer* to my identity through my interests in: travel, Spanish, appreciation for other cultures, educational endeavors, and my use of good moral judgement. Growing up with *Dora* as a role model I learned self-dependence, and how to problem solve on my own. Her ambitious character helped shape me into partially what I am today. *Dora's* ability to go out on her own and solve problems by herself inspires young females to break social norms and do the same. Her multi-cultural background also appealed to me in what may have furthered my academic studies. I have gravitated to studies that concentrate on exploring different cultures; such as anthropology and sociology. I also have gained a love for travel. I have always appreciated the exotic vacations my family brought me on outside of the U.S.'s borders, and who would have thought it would be all thanks to *Dora*. I plan on continuing my interests in enjoying the indulgence of other cultures, and problem solving through my major in International Business and Marketing. Further dissecting my studies, I have taken four years of Spanish; coincidence to *Dora* and her Spanish ties? I think not. The use and introduction of Spanish vocabulary with *Dora* at such a young age makes foreign language an approachable and interesting topic to the audience. Aside from my educational endeavors, I have gained valuable lessons on friendship. *Dora's* and *Boots'* close relationship taught me at an early age what it means to be a good friend, and always be there for those you love. Yet another lesson I took away from *Dora* was the differentiation between what is morally right and wrong. The infamous line, "Swiper no swiping!" taught the audience it is not right to steal or commit felonies. Lastly, the technological use of computers in *Dora* also brought me up to the speed with our 21st century technological constructed culture we have today. This show made using a computer easy and

approachable to its audience through the use of a computer like setting, and its advertising to go online and play the accompanying interactive games. These educational advancements through technological use are supported through one experiment that reported “significant gains in the effectiveness of educational software when children were allowed to use the software at home as well as in school.”^v

My personal connection through the expansion of my education through the use of *Dora the Explorer* may be convincing; however, if one was hesitant to believe so, there are plenty of studies that have been conducted to prove this exact claim. Similar television shows at the time that used this same introduction of vocabulary for preschool viewers, like *Sesame Street*, have found:

There was an apparent causal connection between 3-year-old children’s viewing of an educational program and their improved scores on vocabulary tests. In addition, The Recontact Project also found that the viewing of educational programs at younger ages (2 to 3 years) had a greater impact than viewing from 4 years of age onwards, suggesting that there is a window of opportunity for very young children in which watching educational television can have its longest and most powerful effects. In a recent review of the past 50 years of research based upon U.S. television and the link between cognitive development and educational achievement, it was finalized that educational television has a substantial positive influence on children’s educational achievement.^{vi}

Through specifically goal-aimed television programs, like *Dora the Explorer*, it is apparent that children do in fact learn from educational media. *Dora the Explorer* includes characters that speak one-on-one with its audience. The program is formatted around audience

participation. This show, as well as others such as *Blue's Clues*, was positively correlated to improvements in an expansion of vocabulary. In fact studies show that:

A combined viewing of *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* resulted in 13.30 more vocabulary words at 30 months as well as an increase in the rate of growth in vocabulary words of 1.35 words per month compared with non-viewers. Combined viewing of *Arthur and Clifford* and of *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* resulted in more single and multiple word utterances at 30 months when compared with non-viewers (2005: 637).^{vii}

Aside from improvements in solely vocabulary, children were also proven to take away pro-social behaviors as well as both cognitive and logical reasoning skills from shows like *Dora the Explorer*. Studies concluded that when US children in Grades 2 to 6, were asked to note down the lessons they learned from watching pro-social and educational television on the public network PBS and Nickelodeon, they learned “social-emotional (pro-social) lessons, followed by informational lessons, physical/well-being lessons and cognitive skills lessons from their viewing.”^{viii} Even furthering the validity of children’s capability in decoding the social meaning of characters, a study was demonstrated on 48 of two year old children. In this study the toddlers were assigned to one of three groups designed with a socially meaningful character, lack of socially meaningful character, or a non-exposure group. The findings concluded that “toddlers learned the seriation sequencing task better from a video when a socially meaningful character, rather than a less socially meaningful character, demonstrated the task.”^{ix} This again supports the claim that young children are capable of learning early educational skills through an onscreen character, such as *Dora* herself.

Through clinical studies over the years it is evident that educational television for children does in fact work. The unintended messages through *Dora the Explorer* also are evident

through its viewers as well; take myself for example. I became open to other cultures, an avid traveler, a respectable student with developed linguistic and spatial skills, and an adult with good moralities; all thanks to Dora and her friends.

Observations	Intended Message	Non Intended Message
Use of Spanish	to advance linguistic skills amongst children at a young age	appeal to the Latino population and increase education amongst low-income families
Color Purple	power, ambition, creativity, independence	feminist pitch; increase the status of women and teach young girls independence
Use of Animals	friendly, cute	increase respect for nature and wild habitats, as well as increase market for domestic animals
Use of Computer Setting	applicable to modern day, relatable/preparation	advance and advocate the use of technology
Lack of Parental Figures	to be independent and successful on your own	parents do not matter in the sense of this show
Use of Animals/Inanimate Objects	cartoon style; interesting to the viewers	marketable; also increases imagination and creativity development

Column1	Column2
Proprietary Initial Situation	How It Is Applied
Trickery	Swiper and other antagonists try to deceive Dora from completing her tasks at hand
Departure	Dora leaves home at the beginning of each episode
Spatial Change	Dora is led by her friend the Map to her object of search in each episode
Branding	Sometimes the heroine (Dora) is stuck and captured
Struggle	Dora often faces villains in direct confrontation
Punishment	Swiper is always punished for "swiping" or stealing
Victory	The villain is always defeated, but yet offered forgiveness by the heroine (Dora)
Pursuit/Chase	Sometimes Dora is pursued
Difficult Task	A difficult task is purposed to Dora every episode
Solution	The task is always solved due to help from the Map, Boots, and Backpack

Notes

ⁱ "Dora the Explorer." *The Peabody Awards* -. Web. 1 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.peabodyawards.com/award-profile/dora-the-explorer>>.

ⁱⁱ Moran, Kristin C. "The Growth of Spanish-Language and Latino-Themed Television Programs For Children in the US." *Journal of Children and Media* 1.3 (2007): 294-300

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Kirkorian, Heather L., Ellen A. Wartella, and Daniel R. Anderson. "Media and Young Children's Learning." Princeton Edu., 2008. Web. 1 Oct. 2015. <https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/18_01_03.pdf>.

^{vi} Schmidt, M and Anderson, D (2007). 'The Impact of Television on Cognitive Development and Educational Achievement.' in N Pecora, J Murray and E Wartella (eds). *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, New Jersey: pp. 65–84. Web. 1. Oct. 2015. http://www.aracy.org.au/publicationsresources/command/download_file/id/169/filename/Young_Children_and_the_Media.pdf

^{vii} Lali, Tasawar Abbas, et al. "An Empirical Review of Television as Potentially Beneficial Medium for Children; Exploring Some Realities." *Journal for Studies in Management and Planning* 1.3 (2015): 98-124.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Lauricella, Alexis R., Alice Ann Howard Gola, and Sandra L. Calvert. "Toddlers' learning from socially meaningful video characters." *Media Psychology* 14.2 (2011): 216-232

Bibliography

"Dora the Explorer." *The Peabody Awards* -. Web. 1 Oct. 2015.
<<http://www.peabodyawards.com/award-profile/dora-the-explorer>>.

Kirkorian, Heather L., Ellen A. Wartella, and Daniel R. Anderson. "Media and Young Children's Learning." Princeton Edu., 2008. Web. 1 Oct. 2015.
<https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/18_01_03.pdf>.

Lali, Tasawar Abbas, et al. "An Empirical Review of Television as Potentially Beneficial Medium for Children; Exploring Some Realities." *Journal for Studies in Management and Planning* 1.3 (2015): 98-124.

Lauricella, Alexis R., Alice Ann Howard Gola, and Sandra L. Calvert. "Toddlers' learning from socially meaningful video characters." *Media Psychology* 14.2 (2011): 216-232

Moran, Kristin C. "The Growth of Spanish-Language and Latino-Themed Television Programs For Children in the US." *Journal of Children and Media* 1.3 (2007): 294-300

Schmidt, M and Anderson, D (2007). 'The Impact of Television on Cognitive Development and Educational Achievement.' in N Pecora, J Murray and E Wartella (eds). *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, New Jersey: pp. 65–84. Web. 1. Oct. 2015.
http://www.aracy.org.au/publicationsresources/command/download_file/id/169/filename/Young_Children_and_the_Media.pdf