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HOW TO RAISE CONFIDENT MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN

ELISAVET ARKOLAKI

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Inventing identities for our multicultural children

by Elisavet Arkolaki

Intercultural and interracial marriages are on the rise according to studies, whilst more parents, particularly in USA and Europe, are adopting children from other countries. As a result, our communities are growing increasingly diverse and it is no longer surprising to see families composed of different ethnicities and cultures.

My family is an example of this. My kids were born in different countries and have different nationalities. The eldest, Erik, who is 4 1/2 years old, has lived in four countries, speaks three languages and understands four. He can't identify 100% with any one country he has lived in. According to the the United Nations Population Fund in 2015, Erik is just one of the 244 million people recorded to be living outside their country of origin.

I on the other hand have lived in six countries and speak three languages. My husband, who is from a different country of origin than mine, speaks two languages, understands four, and has travelled all over the world. The biggest advantages that I see in a mixed cultural background and global mobility, besides the benefit of language comprehension which I address in the article I wrote for Bilingual Kidspot

Raising A Trilingual Child When The Community Language Changes, is the opportunity this allows for learning to see the world from different perspectives. Being immersed in different cultures encourages the development of character traits such as adaptability, compassion and tolerance.

Rita Rosenback, author and blogger on multilingualparenting.com states that "All my languages are an intrinsic part of my identity. Every single one of them has helped me understand other people and cultures and thus contributed to the person I am today. They do however not split my identity, they consolidate it."

I so love this quote and appreciate how an adult is able to take this optimist perspective. But for a child, the reality of being multicultural may be interpreted in a less favourable way. Identity is very closely knitted with culture. When the cultures are so blended and the background so fluid, our children need our help to invent a positive identity of their own; an identity which is is not defined by one sole culture. In order to build a strong identity and a confident sense of self, our children need to feel proud about their cultural background. They also need to learn how to be open and accepting towards whatever culture they now find themselves in which through integration will inevitably come to shape their identity too.

This is why I wrote the story for preschoolers and early readers, titled Where am I from? - the first picture book ever to feature illustrations painted entirely on walls. The story conveys a message of peace, diversity, and unity while also helping the kids associate different imagery with different cultures from the six inhabited continents of the world.

And this is also why I am complementing the story book with this guide for the multicultural parent, as a way to pay it forward, and give something to the global parenting community on which I rely for the future of my children, and of all the children of the world. This guide is available for anyone to download for free no matter if you decide to support us on Kickstarter and purchase the book Where am I from?.

The following people, who are all successful professionals in their respective fields of expertise, are here to help us on our parenting journey by embracing the challenge that is raising multicultural children.

Contributors

Dr. Ute Limacher-Riebold has lived in several European countries and has managed to thrive in all the places she has lived so far. She is a multilingual and multicultural who helps internationals as a Language Consultant and Intercultural Communication Trainer. She helps them understand the local culture and language, while maintaining their home languages. She wrote the first chapter.

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Vivian Chiona is a specialised psychologist and the founder and director of Expat Nest. She is a bi-cultural, multilingual expat with family all over the world, and she is well familiar with the blessings of a mobile life but she is also well aware of its challenges. Vivian has successfully consulted with more than 1000 clients and has delivered training on a variety of topics, such as transition; Third Culture Kids (TCKs); coping with change; dealing with stress, bereavement and expat loss; violence prevention; special educational needs and inclusion, and understanding diversity - to name but a few. She supervised the second chapter which was partly based on her writings.

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Dr. Brigitte Vittrup is professor of child development at Texas Woman's University. She holds a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from The University of Texas at Austin, and her research focuses on parent socialisation practices, children's racial attitudes, and media influences on children. Brigitte was born and raised in Denmark and is currently living and raising her children in the U.S. She wrote the fourth section of the second chapter, and the fourth chapter.

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Brian Vassallo is the Assistant Head of School at Mariam Albatool School and visiting lecturer at the University of Malta. He is a graduate in Psychology and in Inclusive Education from the University of Malta and a Masters graduate in Educational Leadership from the University of Leicester UK. He is the author of numerous research papers and his research interests include Multicultural Educational Leadership, and Cultural and Disability Inclusion.

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Elisavet Arkolaki is an author, translator, blogger, entrepreneur, online marketer and certified teacher of two foreign languages. She is the founder of Maltamum.com, Malta's top parenting blog, she acts as the exclusive retailer in Malta for two top international babywearing brands, and is the co-founder of the international

award-winning company All-in Translations. She has a degree in French language and literature from the University of Athens, a certificate of proficiency in English awarded by Cambridge University, and a Master of Science in Global Marketing from the University of Liverpool where she achieved A+ in 5 out of 8 courses.

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Quotes and advice from the following professionals have been used in the second chapter.

Chontelle Bonfiglio is a certified ESL teacher, writer and mother of two bilingual kids. She offers practical advice for parents seeking to raise bilingual or multilingual children; with inspiration, support and strategies based on her experience as a parent, and as a teacher of a foreign language to children.

Marianna Pogosyan, Ph.D., is an intercultural consultant specialising in the psychology of cross-cultural transitions. Intercultural consultant and author of Psychology Today's Between Cultures Marianna Pogosyan

Erin N. Winkler is associate professor of Africology and Urban Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she has also served on the advisory boards of Childhood and Adolescent Studies; Ethnic Studies; and Latin American, Caribbean, and US Latin@ Studies; and is affiliated faculty in Women's Studies.

Reid Lyon, Ph.D., former Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institute of Health (NIH) in USA

TED talk titled Where is Home by writer **Pico Iyer**, who himself has three or four “origins”. He meditates on the meaning of home, the joy of travelling and the serenity of standing still. He contemplates on the idea that home has more to do with a piece of your soul rather than soil.

Another inspiration TED talk that poses lots of questions, and challenges our perception of how and why things are in certain ways, is Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local by writer **Taiye Selasi**.

Why urging our children to embrace different cultures and learn different languages matters

by Ute Limacher-Riebold

Like many others who were born in one country, brought up in another (or more) and then moved to other places, I used to struggle when people asked me where I am from or where my home is. As a child I wondered why people would ask me which country I like most, Germany or Italy, or which language I prefer, German or Italian. I learned to give the answer that was expected from me and that made others happy: my parents, my family, my friends. What I only discovered much later in life was that I wasn't the only person having a hard time to deal with these questions. Children who grow up outside of their countries of origin, or out of their parents' passport countries, actually have a name; Third Culture Kids (or Cross Cultural Kids etc.).

All of these children face more or less the same challenges. According to the latest definition of TCKs from Michael Pollock (3rd edition of “Third Culture Kids: Growing up among worlds", 2017), “A traditional third culture kid (TCK) is a person

who spends a significant part of his or her first eighteen developmental years of life accompanying parent(s) into a country (or countries) different from at least one parent‘s passport country(ies) due to a parent‘s choice of work or advanced training”.

I was born in Switzerland while my German parents were living just across the Italian border. I grew up in Lombardy (Italy) and moved to Switzerland for studies when I was 18. My parents left Germany in 1957 and after living in Belgium, moved to Italy for my father's work for a European organisation. My sister and I didn't have a highly mobile childhood, but a childhood spent in different cultures: our parents’(German), the local (Italian), and the highly international one that we had the chance to immerse into at school, and in the community we grew up in: our “third” culture.

I grew up knowing that as “guests in the country” (how our mother would explain our status as foreigners) we'd better adjust to the host culture in order to fully embrace our life there. My mother was a perfect example on how to do this: she taught herself Italian and was one of the few foreign spouses who preferred the connection with locals to the expat bubble. She would always see the positive side of everything. There were only a few situations that made me realise that the way we were living was not that common.

I never understood why others would call us “Germans” or foreigners in Italy and “Italians” or, again, foreigners in Germany. This being “neither... nor...” wasn't a problem for me. I understood very early that only people who were not in our situation would ask these questions out of curiosity and because they wanted to know how a child perceived this kind of life.

For me, speaking German at home and Italian with my friends was normal, and although many of my local friends spoke the local language only, I never really thought that speaking three languages at age 6 was “strange”. Even though I saw that they would meet with their extended family regularly in the weekends and for special

occasions, I never missed my extended family. I guess that if you don't know something you don't miss it.

It was only later, when I was a teenager, that I started comparing my life to the ones of my peers in Germany and Italy. I wondered how life would have been if my grandmother would have cooked for me like she did for my cousins, what my birthdays would have been if my extended family would have been present. But again, it wasn't a sad thought, it was one of curiosity. I didn't long for a life more like theirs, I was simply curious to know what my life would have been should my parents have stayed in Germany.

It was at age 14, when I spent a few weeks with my aunts and grandparents alone in Germany, that I discovered my “Germanness”. I got a feeling for what life in Germany could be. I spent a lot of time with my cousins who happened to be my peers. I did my best to fit in, to belong to the groups I was hanging out with. I listened to their music, used the same language and slang, and started understanding their jokes. For the first time in my life I felt what it would be like living in a place where everyone speaks my home language. But I also felt sad because I had to hide my Italian-self as nobody spoke Italian or knew about Italian culture.

Growing up as a German in Italy in the 70s/80s was not always a pleasure. When I was 8 a young child was forbidden to play with me because I was German – his grandfather died in WWII and the family resented all Germans for this loss. When Italy played against Germany at the FIFA world cup, my father hid our car with the German number plate in the garage, out of fear that someone would damage it. As a teenager I avoided telling new friends that I'm German in order to fit in. I didn't want to attract attention or being compared to the German tourists that would come to our town.

The desire to fit in and feel a sense of belonging in a group of friends is very natural and healthy. It means that we want to fully embrace the otherness. The same

way I switched from one language to another, I switched my behavior and the way I presented myself from German to Italian, to my original Italo-German. It was my way to adapt with an innate flexibility to different situations and settings. This kind of switching is very common among adaptable people, and it seems to be one of the many advantages of children who grow up between different cultures.

When I was 18 years old, I moved to Switzerland to study at the University of Zurich and learned to find my way in a new culture without my parents. I learned the importance of punctuality and that one can have dinner at 6pm, among other things.

Although I enrolled in Romanistics, I studied several semesters of Germanistics, Psychology, English and Journalism, just because I was fascinated by these topics. I obtained my University degree in Italian and French Literature and Linguistics, and did my PhD in French Philology, worked 7 years as a lecturer, assistant, researcher and editor at the University of Zurich. I then moved to Italy and worked on several projects in Italy. I had obtained a 3 year's research grant for advanced researchers and my husband and I moved to Italy, Florence. While I was doing research, my husband was taking care of our son who was born a year after our arrival in Italy.

When we moved to the Netherlands in 2005, my life shifted 180 degrees: I turned from sole breadwinner to accompanying partner (expat spouse) within 48 hours. – In the following years (!) I had a hard time accepting that I couldn't pursue my former career if I wanted to take care of my son. At that time we didn't have a network of trusted friends that would support us, so we could only rely on ourselves and an occasional babysitter to take care of our by then three children. In the following years I decided to learn new skills and assess those I already had, and I managed to find a new purpose: helping international families thrive during their life in another country. My volunteer work with expats helped me understanding what they needed to lead a gratifying life. I became a Language Consultant and Intercultural

Communication Trainer who helps internationals to understand their new culture and language, while maintaining their home language.

I have experienced life in Switzerland, France, Italy and the Netherlands, first as child of expatriates, then as a student, as a researcher and sole breadwinner, and as an accompanying partner; as a single, with partner, with child.

With every move and change of “home” was the opportunity to experience life in a new place, but one which came with the challenge of learning to assert myself in a new culture. People we meet in new cultural settings don't know who we are or what we are capable of, and it takes time to gain their trust and prove that we are trustworthy.

We can accelerate this process by being proactive, connect with locals, build our new village that not only will be there for us if we need, but also for our children so that they can grow up in a community that will be their Ersatz-family. Learning the local language and the rules, values and beliefs of the host culture needs to come naturally. My mother used to tell us that as we are guests in the country, we need to adapt and integrate. It starts with learning the language, learning the rules of the society we live in, and by respecting the “otherness”. If we can adopt what we like and what feels aligned with our convictions and beliefs, and understand and respect what is different, we can thrive in every place.

I managed to adapt and thrive in all the places I lived so far, by being proactive, learning the language, being curious and open minded.

So far I have never lived in my parent's passport country and as a real expat (as of living out of the parent's passport country)-since-birth, I embrace this kind of life to the fullest and help others to do the same.

If you would like to have further information about how to lead a balanced and healthy life abroad, you can join the Families In Global Transition (FIGT = www.figt.org) on Facebook or follow me on my website.

The 5 most common challenges a parent faces while raising a multicultural kid and how to address them

Main contributor Vivian Chiona

A dialogue between a third culture child (TCK) and his classmate. When the latter asked, “Where do you come from?”, the TCK replied, “My father is from Brazil, my mother is from the States, my brother lives in Canada.”

“And you are..?” the classmate asked.

“Blessed,” he replied.

And blessed are our kids are indeed! Recent studies now debunk old myths that predict isolation and confusion for children of mixed cultural heritage. On the contrary, they suggest that these children demonstrate a stronger appreciation for diversity. They develop an ability to understand multiple sides of controversial issues, thanks to their own multicultural heritage. They also appear to have enhanced creativity when it comes to problem solving.

Before getting there though, as is the case for every child, the road that leads to a strong sense of self-identity can be bumpy. Identity is a complex thing, and for people of mixed cultural backgrounds it can be even more difficult to define themselves and figure out where they belong. It can take a while before they are able to see themselves as whole persons, rather than a pie-chart, split up into percentages. It takes proper guidance and support from their family and community in order to grow up with pride, confidence and a strong sense of self.

When parents and professionals, who are here to give us pointers and assistance throughout our parenting journey, work together, we can expect our children to thrive.

1) Maintaining the minority language(s)

by Chontelle Bonfiglio

One of the most common struggles comes in the form of maintaining the minority language(s) at the same level as the community language. There are still no world statistics but it is generally believed that more than half of the world's population is bilingual. Even though multilingualism is as normal as monolingualism, yet, there is a genuine struggle to keep all spoken languages at the same level.

Traditionally, the "one person, one language" (OPOL) approach has been regarded as the best method for bilingual language acquisition. Though, as Chontelle Bonfiglio says, "Just because you speak to your child in your native language, it

doesn't mean that they will automatically start to speak it back especially when everyone else around them is speaking another language. Sure they might understand everything you have said, but speaking back takes a lot more effort and sometimes children tend to go with the easier option."

You will find all her practical tips on how to improve the minority language(s) here.

2) Cultural Transition and Adaptation

by Vivian Chiona

Moving to a new culture can be a very stressful experience. The good news is that what appears challenging right now, will pay off in the long run. The majority of the kids who have been through such a transition eventually arrive to the conclusion that this experience helped them learn more about themselves and develop greater confidence in their ability to navigate new situations.

a) Healthy Goodbyes for Healthy Starts

According to Vivian Chiona, we often find ourselves avoiding proper closure or not knowing how to handle it. We need to accept, and pass it on to our children, that going through the sadness of an ending is normal and healthy. "Goodbye" represents that closure and helps with a smoother transition. Closing the cycle gives you a strong

foundation as you begin again. A healthy goodbye also helps you to savour the good parts of your experience; it holds these as treasures from your previous chapter and into your new one. This can give you strength; it can give you love. It can give you the power to continue when the transition is difficult.

A good idea is to turn the focus of the kids on the positive, while anchoring and re-assuring them about maintaining established relationships (ie communication via Skype till you meet again). In the meantime, help them recognise and accept all the emotions, good or bad, and process them. Give them space to express themselves. Vivian suggests that assertiveness is one of the greatest skills; being able to express what we think and feel without blaming others but focusing on ourselves, and with the good intention of making our relationships better and “more real”.

b) Raising our children’s cultural intelligence prior to the move

Cultural intelligence can be broadly broken into 3 sub-dimensions:

Cultural knowledge refers to our ability to understand what culture means and how it can affect our behaviour;

Cultural skills describes the ability to learn from interactions with others, to expand our understanding of diversity and its consequences, and to modify our behaviour to fit a specific situation;

Cultural metacognition is what helps us to better understand and be understood. It occurs when we reflect on the role that culture plays in explaining our

own behaviour and consciously think about using different ways of communicating when interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Cultural intelligence is the competence each and every one of us needs to improve our interpersonal skills within a multicultural set-up.

The journey towards raising our children's' cultural intelligence begins with the parents being positive and well prepared about the transition. It can be very helpful to talk to the children about the new culture and its communication style before expatriating thus minimizing the chances of a complete cultural shock. Much of the learning will happen when the family arrives to the new destination, but learning about it in advance helps the family members be more open-minded and less critical to the perceived differences.

When people from different countries interact, they project perceptions and feelings formed by their native culture. Without a basic knowledge of what culture is and how it affects our personality, people tend to get offended or feel like an outcast, or even unintentionally insult those who don't share their values.

Only when the perception filters are put aside, our understanding of other people and cultures broadens and expands. As a result, our relationships will deepen and our acceptance of diversity will bring us together. Acceptance towards ourselves and towards the others is the key to happiness.

3) Where is Home?

by Elisavet Arkolaki

A well known proverb says “Home is where the heart is” which can be interpreted as wherever our loved ones are, that is our home. Secondly, it can mean that a person's heart, their love, will always be tied to the place they live, the family home. For the multicultural children, and in particular the children that move from one place to another, the aim is to help them find home within them, and carry it in their hearts wherever they ago.

“The ache for home lives in all of us,” writes Maya Angelou, “the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.” Marianna Pogosyan, in her article Finding Home Between Worlds, is well aware of the fact that for some, whose childhoods were scattered around the world, home is a tapestry of foreign memories. For some, whose answer to “Where are you from?” is all but straightforward, home has more than one address. For some who call themselves Third Culture Kids (TCKs), the ache for home is constant and insatiable.

So how do we help our children who live in between worlds find out where home is for them?

As a starting point, I would recommend you watch an insightful TED talk titled Where is Home by writer Pico Iyer, who himself has three or four “origins”. He meditates on the meaning of home, the joy of travelling and the serenity of standing still. He contemplates on the idea that home has more to do with a piece of your soul rather than soil.

Another inspiration TED talk that poses lots of questions, and challenges our perception of how and why things are in certain ways, is Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local by writer Taiye Selasi.

Vivian Chiona, in her article How I Became My Home talks about her own experience, how she found and redefined her very personal concept of 'home' and the process she went through.

Regardless of how you and your children will eventually define “home”, what matters the most is to help the children find peace with where they are right now and where they are heading to in the future, and to be able to enjoy their life without feeling like there is “something always missing”.

It's important to introduce them early on to the concept that “Home” can be wherever they currently find themselves, but that it can also be who and how they are. Home is mostly a place within. Marianna Pogosyan on In Search of Home reflects on what it takes to build a feeling of “home” in a new country and how we can begin to know that we’ve found it.

4) Dealing with Prejudice

by Brigitte Vittrup

Multicultural families are more likely to face prejudice from society, which entails preconceived, negatively-biased thoughts or beliefs. As a result, the most vulnerable members of the family unit, the children, can be severely affected. The family, the teachers, and the community need to stand up for them. We need to open a dialogue with the kids affected by prejudice but also with the kids who are prejudiced

towards the ones that look or behave differently. But most important of all, we all need to be positive role models. Children absorb and understand much more about the world through our behaviour rather than our words. When the two don't match, the children are left confused.

Ip wrote the article How silence can breed prejudice: A child development professor explains how and why to talk to kids about race. In there, I explain why it is of paramount importance to not shy away but talk to our children about races, skin colours, differences and diversity. I clarify that 'silence from the parents' side sends a very loud message to the children that this topic is taboo. While the intended message may be “Shhh… race is a sensitive topic in this country, so be careful what you say out loud, because we don’t want to offend anybody,” what the child is more likely to hear is “Shhh… there’s something wrong with these people, so let’s not talk about them.”

Silence about race related topics is common among adults. Often this silence is inspired by discomfort (because race is often treated as a topic “we don’t talk about”), lack of practice (many of today’s adults did not grow up in homes where race related issues were frequently discussed), and the desire for children to be color blind. Unfortunately, our society is not colourblind, and neither are the children. Research shows that children as young as age 3-4 have begun to develop ideas and attitudes about race and ethnicity, which later leads to biased perceptions. These biases are perpetuated by stereotyped portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities in the media. Therefore, if we as adults do not have intentional conversations with children about these issues, the children are left to figure it out on their own, and often that leads to inaccurate and often biased ideas. In addition, silence about race related issues can send the unintended message that the status quo (prejudice, inequality, and discrimination) is normal and okay. In addition, children whose parents do not discuss these topics are more likely to perceive their parents as being biased, and this in turn can influence their own development of racial biases.

In my research, I have asked many parents and teachers about the types of race related conversations they have with children. Often, the responses include statements such as “It doesn’t matter what people look like,” “We’re all the same on the inside,” and “God loves everyone.” These are well intended statements, but unfortunately they don’t convey any practical messages to children about race or culture. To be effective, conversations have to be direct, explicit, and continuous across time.

When talking to children about race related issues:

-Be honest and factual. You may not always have the answer to children’s questions, but that is okay. If you have to look up information or even say “I don’t know – let’s find out”, it leads children to believe that their questions are valid, and this is a topic that is okay to discuss.

- Present the information in an age appropriate manner. Young children understand concepts of fairness and being nice to others. Older children understand more complex concepts about stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

- Ask children what they know and what they think. State the facts and engage children in conversation. For example, “Some people don’t like….”, “Some people think that [minority group] are…”, “Have you seen/heard [news, events, experiences]?” and then ask “What do you think about that?” or “What would you say/do if you saw/heard…?”

- Use books, videos, websites, or news stories as springboards for conversations. Discuss the topics presented and then branch off to discuss how this relates to your own life and experiences, about what is right and wrong, and what we can do to make things better.

We need to deal with our own personal discomfort and engage our children in a conversation on these issues. Subjects that we might consider as 'sensitive' are in fact the most important ones to be addressed. The objective here is not to come up with the perfect answers; there aren't any.

Erin Winkler in her article Here's How To Raise Race-Conscious Children also gives us actionable advice on what should we do.

5) When a child expresses negative emotions

by Vivian Chiona

It is important to pass on the message of embracing and celebrating the blessings of expat life. It is also essential to convey an optimistic message: that these uncomfortable feelings will lessen over time. This too shall pass… Every thought, form, feeling and situation in life is temporary. Isn't it comforting to know that one's sadness will have an end?

Here's a story to tell your child that contains this pearl of wisdom:

According to an old Sufi fable, there was once a king in the Middle East who was constantly torn between happiness and despair. The slightest thing would

provoke a strong reaction in him. When he felt happiness, it would swiftly turn into disappointment or hopelessness.

The king eventually became so tired of this that he decided to call for help. He was notified of a man in his kingdom who was said to be enlightened. The king pleaded for the wise man's help. When the wise man arrived to see the king, the latter said: "I want to be as you are. I want balance and clarity in my life – and I will pay you any price you demand for that insight."

The wise man responded: "I might be able to help you, but this insight is so valuable that the entirety of your kingdom would not be enough to pay for it. That's why I will give it to you as a gift, if you will honour it."

The king agreed, and the wise man went on his way.

Weeks later, the wise man returned to the king, bringing with him a golden ring with these words inscribed on it: "This too shall pass."

"What is the meaning of this?" the king asked, baffled. The wise man told him to always carry this ring on him and to look at it before he judged any situation again. "Do this and peace will be with you always," the wise man said.

So, this too shall pass… Every thought, form, feeling and situation in life is temporary. Isn't it comforting to know that your sadness will have an end? Yes, this too shall pass, just as other sad moments in the past have done. And isn't it a treasure to learn to appreciate that every single moment of happiness is precious? This awareness of knowing that all things have an end – that no matter the situation, it will pass – gives us both the strength to carry on and the wisdom to enjoy what we have.

Media influences on children

by Brigitte Vittrup

Children these days spend a lot of time with various forms of screen media, including television, computers, websites, video games, and cell phones. Research shows that children in industrialised nations spend upwards of 6-8 hours per day engaged with screen media. This is despite the fact that various medical and scientific communities advise against excessive media use. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics has for a long time recommended that children ages 2-17 spend no more than 2 hours per day in front of screens, and that children under 2 have no screen time exposure. In addition, a recent consensus statement by the European Academy of Paediatrics and the European Childhood Obesity Group recommended a limit of 90 minutes per day due to the link between increased screen time and childhood obesity.

Decades of research have shown us that media exposure influences children's behaviour, attitudes, and general development. Electronic media can sometimes be seen as a "window on the world." With the amount of time children spend in front of screens, they gain a lot of information – some of it true and realistic, and some of it not so much – about the world and the society they live in. Children who spend a lot of time with television, video games, and internet content are likely to think that at least a

good amount of that content is a true representation of reality. Therefore, what they see is likely to influence them, because this content provides examples of behaviours, and the media characters can be seen as role models (both positive and negative). Over time, they may begin to imitate behaviours and pick up on various social attitudes about others (parents, authority figures, minority groups, etc.).

a) Positive influences of media

Electronic media offers a wealth of educational resources that can teach children from preschool through the teenage years important knowledge and skills. This includes educational websites that teach children language, reading, maths, art, problem solving, and social studies; video tutorials teaching children how to create things, build things, solve maths and statistical problems, and speak a foreign language; educational video games that can teach children problem solving and spatial skills; and a variety of educational and informational television programs that can teach children all of the above. In addition, some programs can inspire pro-social learning, such as cooperation, helping behaviours, empathy, and moral values.

While there are a lot of positive educational resources available, they are not always the ones that are advertised most prominently, and therefore parents may need to help their children seek out these sites and programs. In addition, even positive media should be limited to a few hours per day.

b) Negative influences of media

Unfortunately, there is also a lot of negative content in electronic media. Over the past 50 years, the violence in television, film, and video games has increased exponentially. In addition, live fight videos are being distributed on social media and video sharing websites, making them easily accessible to children. Research shows that frequent exposure to media violence can make children more aggressive because they learn that violence is a means to solve a problem. It can also make children more anxious and afraid, because they learn that the world around them may be dangerous.

The amount of sexual content has also increased, and there is evidence that repeated exposure may lead to teenagers engaging in risky sexual behaviours at earlier ages.

Television and video games often portray minority populations in stereotyped and negative manners. For example, people of colour are frequently portrayed as villains or criminals whereas white people are portrayed as being powerful and in leadership roles. Women are often objectified or portrayed as passive and less intelligent. Muslims are often portrayed as terrorists.

For children and youth belonging to marginalised groups, these portrayals can affect their self-esteem, aspirations for the future, and general vulnerability.

Finally, the increasing popularity of social media sites and the ability to connect with people worldwide through social media, internet groups, and video games, can leave children vulnerable to negative exposures, risky propositions, and bullying.

c) What parents can do

When children are young, parents have a lot of control over their children's access to media, and it is important to establish good rules and habits early on. However, research from both Europe and the United States shows that many parents are unaware of their children's media habit and do not enforce many media rules at home. There are various rules parents can put in place to selectively restrict the amount of time children spend with electronic media (for example, no more than 2 hours per day), the content they are allowed to access (based on their age), and the context of the media exposure (for example, watching TV with the children, having a computer or video game console in a family room instead of the child's bedroom, and not allowing them to interact with unknown individuals online).

Even with established media rules, children may at times – either deliberately or accidentally – be exposed to inappropriate content. Therefore, it is important that parents discuss the content, help children understand what is appropriate/inappropriate and why, and help them develop media literacy skills. Young children, due to cognitive limitations, do not yet have the ability to critically evaluate the content they are exposed to, such as intent, purpose, persuasion, and depictions of so-called reality. By discussing these, parents can help children develop these skills. Being able to critically evaluate media content can help buffer any negative effects of media exposure. Critically evaluating content includes identifying what is appropriate and inappropriate, as well as understanding that information may be biased or slanted, and that not everything you read on websites or see on television is the unbiased truth. In addition, parents should help their children seek out positive content that can help educate them and inspire positive self-esteem.

It is still important to remember that even positive content and educational media cannot replace direct interaction with positive role models. Children can often learn more from conversations and engaging activities with family members and peers. One of the reasons for the advised restrictions on screen time for very young children is that children need direct face-to-face interactions with others for proper brain development in the early years. Children's cognitive development is aided by the bidirectional interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as adults, and their developing social skills benefit from direct interactions and feedback from peers and adults.

The more time children spend with media, the less time they spend in social interactions with others, and therefore it is important to limit their exposure to the extent possible. However, given the easy access and wealth of media technologies available to children, the reality is that they will continue to spend a lot of time with electronic media. In addition, media content is not likely to become more child friendly. But the influence of media on children's behaviour, attitudes, and development can be mediated by the context in which the exposure occurs. Thus, the onus is on parents to be involved in their children's media use by monitoring, selectively restricting, and discussing the media content with their children.

The impact of culture on the education of the young

by Brian Vassallo

The political history, life outlook and cultural milieu of particular groups of children impact heavily upon the values and expectations placed on the children themselves. It is vital for educators, along the course of their experience in working with children, to garner knowledge of the cultural patterns in the community of the students with whom they interact.

These differences may cause educators to inaccurately judge students from some cultures as poorly behaved or disrespectful. In addition, because cultural differences are hard to perceive, students may find themselves reprimanded by educators but fail to understand what they did that caused concern. Take for example the students who collaborate with peers on a task. At first glance it might seem that nothing is inappropriate, but when helping is extended to writing of assignments or the involvement of families in composing the assignment then helping might be perceived as cheating rather than guiding. Also, if a teacher expects his/her class to be arguing around a presented topic, then those students who are quiet might be thought of as being disrespectful or lazy. Also, conflicts might arise in cases where students are brought up in environments where property is communal but then are taught in

environments where a high degree of individuality and self-achievement is encouraged.

The influence of culture, on anything that surrounds education, has a direct influence on students' participation style. Both in Europe and in the USA, students are thought to be proactive in the learning experiences, value classroom discussions and look at teachers in the eye as a sign of respect. On the other hand, Asian students, especially females, are encouraged to exhibit low profiles and eye-contact with teachers is considered to be rather offensive.

Also, some parents from Latin America tend to view teachers as experts and highly regard their opinion when it comes to important decisions on the future of their children's academic careers. In contrast, however, most European and American parents adopt a more continuous involvement in their children's career paths, consult teachers on an ad hoc basis but finally decide on their own accord together with their children.

These cultural underpinnings have a direct bearing on the perceptions which educators have on American, European and Asian parents. Keeping in mind that different cultural groups adopt different interaction patterns, language prosodics and demeanour is of paramount importance. When educators become cognizant of the panacea of cultural differences within and across cultural groups they start realising that successful schooling is the result of a multitude of constructs which need to take into account students' cultural makeup.

Educators need to be careful not to push personal cultural patterns upon students which counter the values and traditions engrained in the culture makeup of the students under their care. Being respectful as to what is positive and ethical in various cultural systems should be the hallmark in all educational systems. Negative or disrespectful mechanisms which undermine or in any diminish the human respect

of the “other” should be addressed in a way which increases the cultural richness of all those concerned.

a) Children’s behaviours and Cultural Factors

It must be stated from the outset that neither families nor schools can provide an answer for children’s behaviours. Parents, teachers and children are themselves a product of an encompassing culture, which transforms itself with the changing times, promises new value sets, behavioural standards and expectations. Children’s behaviours are the reflection of what adults present to them as the ‘appropriate’ culture to live in. When these expected behaviours, the ones proposed by the school and the ones brought about by the home environment, are in conflict with one another then problems are bound to occur. Different cultural forces play their part into pushing and pulling our children in one direction and not in another with the undesirable effect of labelling a child as ‘culturally deviant’ depending as to whether s/he is at home or at school.

Other forces which are likely to bring about tension in children’s expected behaviours include adherence to community standards, influence by the media, mixed marriages, changing attitudes to sexuality and other factors. All these come into play when examining children’s behaviours.

b) Community standards

Community standards (especially those associated with minor communities) are frequently in dissonance with mainstream standards. Examples include attire, teen socialization, sexual encounters, dating and others. Children and teenagers are frequently ‘torn apart’ between having to conform to the norms transcended to them by their families and those of the society in which they reside. Children and teenagers who practice particular religious teachings may be excluded, stigmatized and

ostracised by their peers while on the other hand, those who do not conform to their religious obligations are haunted with feelings of extreme guilt and in danger of eventual community exclusion.

c) The Media

Media effects children's behaviour and debating their influence in this book can be a laborious task. It is clear, however, that behavioural expectancies depicted in the media are not consonant with some community expectancies. For example, newspapers and magazines advertise clothing which are dissonant to some cultures. They use peer pressure techniques, influencing children into purchasing an expensive mobile phone and not a cheaper brand. This puts undesirable pressure on families of low economic background. This provides fertile ground for conflicts and discord in families. Similar examples include clothing, entertainment and leisure activities.

d) Mixed Marriages

Children coming from mixed marriages may have a hard time develop a sense of identity, especially during adolescence. They experience difficulty in affirming their uniqueness while recognising the positive impact which both cultures had in their upbringing. Harnessing this positivity and using it in critical moments in their life is of vital importance.

e) Changing attitudes to Sexuality

Adolescents today have to contend between the freedom which society glorifies and the responsibility which educators promote at every opportunity. Children and adolescents are frequently at crossroads between the cultural values inculcated earlier and the emerging values of the digital age. Society presents adolescents with

freedoms they are not equipped to handle, falls short equipping them with skills when they face challenges, yet castigates them for behaving irresponsibly.

Besides these factors, the children's self-esteem and their perception of how others see them have an influence on how they function at school and outside school. The way children evaluate and the way they react towards what happens around them is not culture-free.

f) Some suggestions

Hence it is important for parents and teachers to help children express their emotions and to speak up for their rights, when the need arises. Show openness to your child's questions and teach them about anything in which they show interest. Allow your children to meet other children - both of a similar and of different ethnic background. This will boost their self-image and self-confidence. Also, encourage alternatives to clothing, food, music and overall atmosphere, both at home and at school. For the very young ones, you can invest in multicultural toys, books and internet resources. You may also want to participate in multicultural events such as festivals, weddings, talent shows etc. Help children understand that respect is common for all cultures.

Educating our younger society members is a rather complex, not to say an arduous task. The cultural makeup with which children are endowed since their very early years, and how it is developed as years progress, is a subject of intense study and deep reflection. Care needs to be exercised to utilize children's cultural baggage as a tool towards more successful school and societal engagement.

The stories you should tell your multicultural kid everyday

by Elisavet Arkolaki

"The most important thing that parents can do is talk and read to their children. During the toddler and preschool years, it is critical to provide children with different language and reading experiences." - G. Reid Lyon

There are so many studies and so much research all pointing to the direction that reading to our children from very early on, telling them stories, is paramount for their development. Literature and literacy is the direct product of a human need to understand the world by the simple act of telling stories. Humans have always been coming up with all sorts of stories, fables and myths in order to better understand the people around them and make sense of the world. This is how the human race survived, lived, and evolved.

A brilliant way to help your multicultural children interiorise a strong sense of identity is by sharing traditional stories; the ones that span generations. Folklore stories and myths from their countries of origin keep the culture alive and help them

connect with their roots, even when living outside the community. They can help them grow closer to their past and incorporate elements of tenderness and pride in their identity. Also, sharing stories from cultures that aren't their own can help them to better understand friends and classmates.

Then, there are these other stories, the ones you can recite yourself, and which can be told at the most diverse moments of the day and not just before bedtime. Use every opportunity you have to share with your child invented stories, heard stories, stories you've read together. I remember growing up listening to my father telling us three stories he had come up with himself, always the same, night and night again during our dinner time. This storytelling time was so special to us that we purposefully delayed finishing our food. We never got tired of them. These very same stories are now passed on to my children.

Books are also a powerful tool for our children, helping them to make sense of their homes, communities, the world at large. Literature provides their first window to a world beyond their five senses, a world that can be magically entered by the simple act of words and illustrations putting in motion the wheels of the internal mechanism called imagination. This is how they grow and this is how they develop into individuals who can think for themselves.

There are so many books out there to choose from and as parents it is our responsibility to present to our young ones fun stories with beautiful artwork that sparkle their curiosity and inspire them. For our multicultural children in particular, it can be very beneficial to pick up books with diverse characters with whom they can relate to. It is also advisable, when the children start showing specific interests, to let them choose books on their own. One of our favourite family outings are Saturday morning visits to the local library.

When it comes to which books are best, I can only tell you which are our favourite ones right now. The best books will grow with your child. Let's say you buy

now Where am I from? for your 5 year old to read to him. If it becomes a favourite, at 6 he will be reciting the words to you and by 8 he will enjoy reading it on his own, all curled up somewhere cosy at home.

A good multicultural book should:

- present the character's culture accurately and sensitively;

- empower children of different ethnic backgrounds;

- have strong literary merit.

Here I have compiled a list of my personal Best Picture Books for Multicultural Children .

Thank you for reading!