

Dan's outline notes for "The Benefits of Television" session

Introduction

Who I am- Dan Vilter

A homeschooling parent
Entertainment Professional
Techno geek

What this session is about

Embracing and exploiting television.

A quick definition of Television for the purposes of my discussion today.

The box in your home and the programming that you and your family utilize to explore life and the world around you. It is a tool.

TV reflects changing world around us

You can live nicely without it. The same can be said about books, electricity, plumbing, But why? Life may well be simpler, but not richer.

What this session is not about

It is not a debate

Kill the TV = Book burners (it's just a cop out)

Benefits of incorporating TV in your family

Social experience

It is a common sociological experience shared with the vast majority of the population, experienced at a personal level with **great control**.

Family activity

"Special times" watching a favorite movie or sporting event. Or discussing how will this story resolve?

Family bonding-Watching together, being engrossed together is also a connection with each other. In your nest together.

Child and parent are on an equal footing, without power struggle.

It is a time to share generational experiences. [Rox's bigotry and Cosby Show questions.]

Entertainment

Comes from a very long history of story-showing

The birth of Drama and Theatre. Our ancestors sitting around the ancient campfire where it is safe, out there it is dark and lions and the like, it is safe here at home by the fire with the others. We talk because it is comforting. The hunters are talking about today's hunt because it is exciting, they killed a lion today.

Someone gets the idea to SHOW the others how it was. Standing and motioning for us to get on one side of the fire, he stands and takes the first stage on the other side. He is SHOWING how the hunt transpired. One of the other hunters places the lions' skin over themselves and becomes the first actor. They reenact the exciting events of the days hunt, stalking, crouching, leaping, roaring, stabbing, rejoicing.

The most important event of the day has come to life for people who were not there.

Great performances are available to you.

"Live" performances are broadcast far beyond the immediate audience

All My Sons and *You Can't Take It With You* are live stage plays performed in a theatre, for an attending audience that have been taped and broadcast to a Television Audience.

Watching truly great performances that wouldn't otherwise have been available

Film and other constructed programming reaches beyond movie theatres and studios

Studio masterpieces in your home without the costs of attending a movie theater. Older movies that are not available any other way.

Physical closeness

You're in the same room together. Hard to beat being on a comfortable sofa, child in your lap, or snuggled next to you enjoying a program together, laughing, crying, questioning.

A physical activity

Ever see a child role play while watching? Pretending with Mr. Rogers who is pretending to be in the opera etc. A time to encourage rather than shush. Your not in a theatre watching the ballet, don't shush.

A rest from Physical activity

Often motionless-take a look at why. Much like reading a book or attending the ballet or theatre.

Often a rest from other physically demanding activities- Gilmore Girls after soccer.

Catalyst for questions and discussions

I don't think there is a person who didn't ask questions about TV. Be there and enjoy them. Regardless what the subject or viewpoint, everything on it is open to discussion. Wide varieties of beliefs and values can be brought up for review and discussion.

Television provides a nearly limitless supply of subjects to discuss. For child and parent. An excuse or reason for the discussion. How women were treated in I love Lucy vs Mary Tyler Moore vs Gilmore Girls.

A time and reason to talk about apartheid.

Lyle's Recent TV discussions

While watching a show on dinosaurs, we got into a discussion about how crude oil is formed, and the different methods that have been developed for bringing it up out of the earth (or "sucking" it out, as my youngest put it), and also the refining process and all the things that the oil is used for.

While watching Spongebob Squarepants we talked about why people cuss, (there's an episode where Spongebob and Patrick think cussing is cool) and we all decided that people that cuss constantly must not be very "smart" if they can't think of any better words to use. :)

While watching a movie, a Kotex commercial came on and spawned a lengthy discussion on menstruation, and how all the different methods of protection work, or don't work, the reasons why women pick one method over another, and what did women do back before companies like Kotex existed. Then the discussion moved to the different methods of birth control, then to birth itself, and C-sections, natural childbirth, etc. All from one little Kotex commercial.

While watching The Mummy (cartoon), we talked about Egypt and the pharaohs, and then slavery, which eventually led to the civil war and Abe Lincoln, and then on to other presidents that had done "great" things.

That's just a few off the top of my head, but the main thing to remember is that none of these discussions were planned, and it's always the kids that initiate the talks, and when they stop asking "why, when, how, who and where" the talk is over. They may come back at a later date and want more information to add to what they know, or they may be satisfied and leave it at that.

TV is not a "bad" thing. TV can be very, very cool.

Sandra's Childhood watching Gilligan's Island.

When I used to watch Gilligan's Island in 4:00 re-runs after school every day, I would wonder whose idea it was for the plot, how many writers there were, how they decided who could come and visit, what device they would use to prevent the visitor from rescuing them, how they must plan in advance not to have too-similar plots near each other, and the re-runs must be kept in that same order too. I wondered about them changing the theme song--at first it had said, "the movie star, and the rest," but in later seasons it said, "the movie star, the professor and Mary Ann," and I wondered whether they had re-sung the whole thing or just spliced in that line, because it sounded the same as it had before. And had they done it because the actors complained? Their agents complained? I wondered whether the pedal-powered washing machine (or whatever it was) really worked by the pedals, or whether it was just secretly plugged in, and if so, where did the wires run? I wondered if much of it was on indoor sets. How deep was that water? (As an adult, I saw what's left of the set at Universal Studios. Cool! Outside! Actual little lake.) When I would see a show the second time, I'd look around for things I had missed the first time. I would re-write lines in my mind, things that could have been funnier, or sounded more in character for that person. I'd wonder who knew more about hammock making, the captain or the professor? Maybe Ginger or Mary Ann knew macramé. When there was a show which didn't have one of the actors in, I'd wonder whether he was sick or on vacation or what? And if an actor misses the filming of a sitcom, does he still get paid? I wondered about them having to keep their hair the same for years, and which of them were might be wearing wigs. Where were they supposed to be getting nail polish and lipstick? Hair spray? I wondered if the professor was a physics professor or engineering, or what, and whether he would lose his job at the university. I wondered about that Mr. Magoo voice on Thurston Howell. I wondered about Amelia Earhart. I wondered about the soundtrack music. Did they just have little themes they pushed a button on during final edit, or was each show done separately? I wondered if the fruit was real or props. I wondered about cameras--where were they? Did they have to sweep the dirt between takes? I wondered if the guy who played the lost WWII pilot was really Japanese. I could think more during an episode of Gilligan's Island than most other people I knew could think in a whole week. I didn't bother to ask my parents any of the questions. They would have thought it was stupid to be thinking them. So to all outside appearances (except to my cousin, Nada, who was my age) I was just zoning out, involved in the plot of another 25 minutes of Gilligan's Island. That wasn't true at all.

A place to make choices safely in the home

Easy choices about what to view provide experience and empowerment in their lives and ample opportunity for questioning and self review.

This is where the child becomes the adult. Making choices about their time.

Being able to see and decide for themselves what is worthwhile and what isn't. Is Bewitched worth spending 5 hours of your time?

Time limits can undercut a person's ability to make useful choices for themselves. Some parents turn off the TV thinking that they are offering freedom

to their children. In reality, children that have limitless access have the freedom to turn it off, and often do.

Links specifically with visual learners (and aural ones too)

It is a vision based medium with motion and sound. Even incidental music, theme songs of shows, without the high-level opportunity for seeing people perform, and movies with award winning soundtracks, etc...
[Sandra's one radio station story and TV having all kinds of music]

Puts you in distant or remote locations

"TV and the internet allow all of us a view of the world that previous generations could not access. I can get a photo of virtually any place on the planet. I don't have to wonder what the favorite food of Aussies is or how to raise a tadpole or what the weather is like in Beijing today. Just go look it up. I think it's Exciting to live in this world we find ourselves in. The Possibilities are Limitless."

Develops visual intelligence which is necessary for much of mathematics

Illustrates concepts visually often with motion

Complex problems or situations that would be nearly impossible to comprehend in only words can be illustrated in spatial relation. Ex. Search for the missing quarks and elements. El Nino causing ocean temperature changing patterns. Satellite weather photo loops.

Opens vast information to non-readers

TV is a huge information resource available to anyone without the prerequisite of the ability to read.

I strongly disagree with people like John Rosemond that say you should allow viewing until they are firm readers. Why would a reasonable person hold it out?

Mr. Rogers Vs Sesame Street

Becomes a model for writing

A study for the presentation of structure and story. Understanding dramatic structure is fostered in the experience. You can understand good story telling by watching good story telling. Meta Cognition, the means of getting the message. Thinking about the thinking of the viewing.

Develops complex ways of thinking

A favorite show is Ebert and Roper because they talk critically about films we have seen and they intelligently explain their points of view. Saying good things about bad movies and visa versa. Ultimately ending with either thumbs up or down from all that gray of good and bad points. Illustrating how incomplete

such black and white answers can be. And how differently we all see the world. Often a negative point as explained is a positive reason for us to see the film.

Rebuttals to stereotypical anti-television arguments

TV is not good for your vision

It, like reading, and computer usage, is a visually demanding task that can cause discomfort. Concentrating during any of these tasks often causes one to blink less often. Making viewing an activity with discussion and interaction will automatically give the eyes a rest from the picture.

The flicker is distracting or bothersome

Some people are effected by it. There is now a sharpness adjustment on television sets that I hear helps to alleviate that sensitivity. But ultimately we all balance benefits with costs.

The electronic babysitter has no soul. The plug in drug will turn my children into zombies

That doesn't seem like the model for a parent active in their children's lives as most homeschoolers are. But take a good look at your parenting.

It will turn my family into couch potatoes

TV has become the poster child for laziness and obesity. It is an erroneous correlation. There is just as much good information and worthy topics of interest on TV as there are in books. It is in a different form. It does require discretion of the viewer. But so do books. Many books are not worthy of the trees that died for them.

Yet books have no music and sound recordings have no visuals.

Again most studies work on given situation not outcomes. They find a lot of obese people watching a lot of TV and deduce that TV made them obese, that there were no other factors in the obesity. If there were no TV we would all be skinny very little of it looks the other way, that obese people look for occupation that can be sedentary. [joke about frog research]

Is TV making you (or your kids) a couch potato or are you (or your kids) a couch potato looking for something to do on that couch.

Watching alone makes you a solitary person

Solitary viewing may be an excuse for needing time alone or time to cogitate. Let those needs be satiated with TV or a book or music or whatever. Then continue to make TV an active endeavor.

Studies have shown that watching TV will cause _____.

I can't begin refuting every study

Blaming TV is a politically expedient scapegoat

Schools don't work as their proponents would like and they need scapegoats.

The first two are often parents and Television

The points against TV are pretty weak and remarkably similar to homeschooling:

No social interaction? No questions? No language?
Anti-TV studies often are school-based, and talk about how kids who don't watch TV do better in school, or whatever. If learning is the goal, not school, how could TV prevent LEARNING?
Before TV they blamed comic books, and before that paperback novels, and before that secular books... till we get to the devil.

Look behind the study-if it concerns you

How does the study relate to your situation, beyond the common denominator of the TV? Are they looking at active homeschoolers? [or at student nurses] What is the study group and how were the tested? Why was the study performed and what was trying to be proven. I haven't found a single study that concerns active homeschooling parents like you.

Jane Healy, keynote speaker last year (that I enjoyed very much) had lots of negative things to say about TV and affects on learning. Not a signal example involved homeschooled children. She hadn't even knowingly had a conversation with a homeschooled person until she came to the conference.

Kinds of Television

Public television

PBS, a mission of public interest. Starts from the viewers desires usually in education and the arts. Not strictly commercial free.

Commercial television

Exists to provide an audience to advertisers. Don't ever forget that.

The market will not protect you kids.

Media providers' primary responsibility is to its shareholders. Many take NO responsibility for children except as a group of potential customers to advertisers.

Illustrates advertising deception

What is so cool about the race car toy after you take away the lighting and sound effects and music?

It is an economic necessity for our current "free" distribution system. [including PBS etc]

Commercial avoidance – taking the bait off the hook

Built in times for discussion

Time shifting commercials into a blink with VCR and PVR (Tivo) [DEMO]
EVEN BETTER is that the VCR & Tivo allows discussion at anytime, safely encouraging dialogue without fear missing program. We can stop anytime we want and interact.

Video recordings and motion pictures

Presumably commercial free content tailored for personal one to one viewing. Re distributing films in the television format

Can be viewed with scrutiny unattainable in movie theatres

[Cats or Star Trek]

Resources

<http://television.vilter.us> My fledgling website where, for now, is a web page version of this document. I'll post more information here as I get it.

<http://sandraddodd.com/tv> The television section of Sandra's web site. The rest of the site is a rich resource for un schooling and homeschooling.

<http://www.screenit.com> very explicit review of what you will see broken-down by category, addressed to parents

Kids in Mind

<http://www.kids-in-mind.com/> objective, non-critical assessments of the potentially objectionable material contained in movies, also addressed to parents

<http://www.filmsite.org/> - very in depth reviews, although not specifically aimed at guiding parents picking movies for children.

Grading the Movies, Music and Games - not currently keeping up w/ game reviews, although there are a few in the archives.

<http://www.gradingthemovies.com/>

EduTaining Kids - Children's Video Reviews - they also review books, toys, music and software.

<http://www.edutainingkids.com/videos.html>

Parents Television Council

<http://www.parentstv.org/>

The History Channel - subscribe to their listings.

<http://www.historychannel.com/>

Mail Call

<http://www.historychannel.com/mailcall/mailcall.html> Answers questions about technology and tactics used throughout history by the armed forces (one of my sons favorite programs)

Children's Television Workshop

<http://www.ctw.org/sesamestreet/>

Public Television

<http://www.pbs.org/>

TV Land

<http://www.tvland.com/>

<http://www.tvland.com/nickatnite/>

<http://www.nickjr.com/>

<http://www.nickjr.com/grownups/teachers/>
<http://www.bobthebuilder.com>

Cable in the Classroom
<http://www.ciconline.com/default.htm>

National Geographic Channel US
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/tv/channel/cic.html>

Tech TV
<http://www.techtv.com/> Specializing in programming about computers and technology.

Noggin
<http://www.noggin.com/>
<http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/>

Home and Garden Television
<http://www.hgtv.com/>

Food Network
<http://www.foodtv.com/>

RFDTV
<http://www.rfd-tv.com/start3.html>

Discovery Channel
<http://www.discovery.com/>

BBC America
<http://www.bbcamerica.com/bbcamerica.jsp>

Animal Planet
<http://animal.discovery.com/>

NetFlix
<http://netflix.com> DVD rental through the mail very large collection of films and television show released on DVD (only)

Mentura
<http://www.mentura.com/> Similar to NetFlix specializing in educational programs. Study guide are available for many programs

Internet Movie Database
<http://www.imdb.com> extensive database of 260,000 movies and TV shows thoroughly hyperlinked "what's his name?" "What else has he been in?"