

WinkWorld November 2002

Draft of a segment for Learning to Teach/Teaching to Learn: Passionate Pedagogy, in progress for Allyn & Bacon, by Joan and Dawn Wink – In what follows, Dawn is reflecting on a personal experience.

I De-TV'ed My Home: A Story of One Family's Transformation

Dawn@dawnwink.com

"Enough", I said to myself, "that TV is out of our house." I did show considerable restraint, I thought, by not just throwing it out the two-story window. Instead, I lugged the TV to the garage, packed up all the videos in a box, and put the entire kit-and-kaboodle downstairs in the garage under a blanket.

This happened a few weeks ago when I was reading, yet another article, about the detrimental effects of TV on children's creative and intellectual development and family dynamics. Ironically, I read this while my three children were, of course, watching TV.

I will admit to a history of needing and hating the TV, since I became a parent. My children were only allowed to watch PBS and the Animal Planet channels. Nothing else. The truth is that during the several years that my husband was away from home for weeks at a time, this selective TV-watching helped me maintain the shreds of sanity of those long days with three pre-schoolers. Before our third child was born, I have wonderful memories of Wyatt, Luke, and me curled up in front of "The Crocodile Hunter" on weekday afternoons: All of us being at peace, laughing and enjoying. In addition, I didn't have to do anything!

But, I, like many parents, have used TV as an electronic babysitter. The TV always seemed to loom and seduce us. It was an addictive voice, even when turned off. It beckoned the kids and me. It was the basis for too many of our decisions about what to do. This was particularly true for my youngest, Wynn. When she was three, I noticed that it seemed like she constantly asked to watch TV and cried when I said, "No." Everything, for her, was measured against this.

So, how has our life changed since I tossed the TV? We are amazed at how much more peaceful our home is now without the constant lure of the TV. I was prepared to grit my teeth and endure the rebellion for a couple of weeks, but it just has not happened. For example, today when Wyatt, 6-years-old, came home from school, a time he usually got to watch a half-hour show on PBS, he came running in, grabbed his make-shift bow and arrow and headed out the door seeking rabbits in the juniper and piñon trees that surround our house. Let me qualify—there is no way he could actually hit one.

Watching him outdoors, intent on his physical surroundings, independent and at peace with himself, was a sharp contrast to the glazed over expression in front of the TV. Wynn asked only three times, and after an initial crying spat, seems to have accepted the disappearance of the TV in much, much easier than I'd anticipated. In addition, I am not tempted to plop the kids down in front of it, while I get something done. The lesson for me: My kids know how to entertain themselves better than I knew.

Below I am listing what the kids have done this weekend during the times they might have

been watching TV:

- jumped on the trampoline,
- played with play dough,
- played with blow pens,
- played on the swing set,
- read books in the BookNook,
- asked me to read to them,
- played with the dog,
- played dress-up, and
- listened to kids' audio tapes.

Sure, they did all these things before, but now they do them more often. I have read that in a home without television, children come to entertain themselves creatively much more readily. This has been my experience.

A main component of the newly-found peace in our home is the absence of my guilt when the kids used to watch TV, even if they were watching something good. I felt this particularly when I would hear something that made me cringe. I no longer feel that guilt, and it is, as if, a weight has been taken off my shoulders.