**"Better Multiculturalism" Through Technology: *Dora the Explorer* and the
Training of the Preschool Viewer(s)**
by Drew Chappell

"By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized
and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. This cyborg is
our ontology; it gives us our politics."

—Donna Haraway

Arizona, April 23, 2010. Governor Jan Brewer, promoted from Secretary of State when
Governor Janet Napolitano left office to serve as the Secretary of Homeland Security
under Barack Obama, signs Senate Bill 1070, giving state police broad power to detain
and question those people they suspect of being undocumented immigrants to the United
States ("Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration," "Senate Bill 1070"). This
legislation touched off a firestorm of controversy, inspiring protest on both sides of the
immigration issue. Emboldened by perceived support for such draconian policies,
conservative lawmakers and education officials in Arizona followed up SB 1070 with a
ban on ethnic studies ("Arizona bill targeting ethnic studies signed into law") and a
crackdown on teachers who speak English with an accent ("Arizona Grades Teachers on
Fluency"). At this writing, a bill denying birth certificates to children born in the US to
undocumented individuals is expected to be introduced in the fall, even though such a
law violates the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution ("Arizona's Next Immigration
Target: Children of Illegals").

Four years earlier, in the 2006 midterm election, citizens in Arizona, Colorado, and New
Mexico voted on measures aimed at discouraging "illegal immigration" from Mexico and
South America. Among these measures were Arizona's Propositions 103, which would
establish English as the official language of the state, and 300, which would deny public
program eligibility to any person who was not a lawful resident of the US (Arizona
Secretary of State's Office). Both propositions passed into law. These were not the only
attempts to respond to perceived abuses of immigration policy. Bilingual education had
previously been targeted; in 2000, Arizona banned bilingual programs in schools and
established English as the only instructional language.

In this politically charged climate, the Nickelodeon Jr. show *Dora the Explorer*,
featuring a bilingual English/Spanish speaking girl and her friends, remained a television
hit, with 21.9 million viewers in November 2005 in the United States (Wingett).
Preschool children (who are approximately ages 2.5-5 in the United States) watched on
television what they were discouraged from encountering in their daily lives: a Spanish
speaking girl who, together with her diverse group of friends, leaves her home and family
and crosses multiple borders with impunity in order to pursue various objectives

Dora the Explorer ("Dora") constitutes a cultural phenomenon; the television
show's popularity has spawned a host of commercial products including toys, games,

clothing, books, music albums, and home furnishings. In fact, in the 2006 holiday season, Dora was the number one toy license (Frenck 2). The show has won numerous awards, including a Peabody (for Broadcast Media) in 2003 and two Imagens (for positive portrayal of Latino characters/culture) in 2003 and 2004 ("Awards for Dora" 1-4). It also spun off a second show featuring Dora's cousin Diego, called *Go, Diego, Go*. The show's reach and its cultural currency led me to choose *Dora* as a research site. Even before I had a preschool age child, I could not escape the show's marketing and media coverage. I wondered what was behind its popularity. What specific narratives and performances did the show employ, and how did it construct dominant and subaltern identities that contribute to what I have elsewhere called "colonizing the imaginary": "an ideological process in which adults write their own culturally bound values, beliefs, and ideas onto narrative structures and performances intended for children's consumption (Chappell 18)"?

To interrogate this topic, I chose twelve episodes of the show that represented a cross section of the show's storytelling strategies. I watched special double length episodes ("Dora's Pirate Adventure," "Dora Saves the Mermaids," "Dora's World Adventure"), and standard episodes that reflected a number of tropes, ideas, and curricular goals. In watching these episodes, I paid close attention to the narratives created and the ways they called for children's embodiment—physically (speaking back to the show, moving with Dora), relationally (identifying with Dora and Boots' problems), and ideologically (grappling with the issues and values presented in the show, such as friendship). As I watched the program, with its deceptively simple formula and insistence on communicating directly to its audience, I became aware of subtle ways that the characters engage in an implicit dialog around multiculturalism (more on this term later). There is certainly more to *Dora* than there appears; the show cleverly uses surface level representations to engage complex social and political concepts (perhaps without the viewer's awareness).

Once I collected data, I used typologies and assertion development to analyze my findings. I created the typologies based on a semiotic reading of the *Dora* episodes in relation to contextual information found in the sites and spaces surrounding the show. This context included intended social use, promotional material, contemporary political discourse, and *Dora* merchandising outside the show itself. The typologies allowed for interpretation and analysis of the data (Bogdan and Biklen, Wolcott), and pointed toward a common theme put forth by the image of Dora as cultural traveler who bears the markings of a number of different subaltern identities, from a white middle class US perspective (non-white, female, child, Spanish speaker), and uses networks of friends and various technologies to solve each issue she faces. I then used assertion development (Erikson) to construct a theoretical understanding of the nature of embodiment and power in the show, as follows: *Dora the Explorer suggests that technology is the road to a multicultural society, and this society will focus on similarities rather than differences.*

Television as Performance

Children's television enters the child's own space; it "invades" the private sphere of the home via a broadcast signal, cable, or other device. To watch a program, young people must gather around a television screen, often located in a common area where parents can monitor their children's viewing. Watching television is a bit like a small-scale film screening; a screen becomes the center of focus, and images tell the story. Unlike in a movie theatre, however, a child can feel free to move around as much as desired, take breaks, or "multitask," playing with toys, books, etc. while watching. Also, the characters on a television screen are (typically) miniaturized, easily controlled by the viewer (wielding a remote). This use of space may lead to a familiarity, an intimacy between viewer and television character(s). There is a sense that the program is "only for me;" although I know there are many others watching the same program, not being able to see them "erases" their presence. Television uses time in specific, regimented ways; programs appear according to a schedule, thus allowing the practice of viewing to become routinized. On non-public broadcasting channels (such as Nick Jr.—Dora's network) programs are "interrupted" for commercial content—product and service advertising. There is a "rhythm" to watching television shows and waiting out commercials—an embodied sense of when the program will institute a twist or when a commercial is coming up. Like other media, TV trains users (starting in childhood) in its effective use.

Like film, television controls the viewer's gaze through its use of camera shots. These are typically more "claustrophobic" than in film, as many shows are filmed in studios using sets that are re-used from week to week. Animated programs like *Dora* add another layer of mediation; they offer two-dimensional representations of people, places, and objects that the audience recognizes from outside experience. These referents, however, are recombined, exaggerated, and otherwise distorted through the animation process until they become more simulacra than simulations (Baudrillard). As in comic books, the tendency is for animated settings and events to transcend reality. In these worlds, extraordinary things may happen quite easily, as the animator's only limitation is what he or she can draw. Animation sets up a fantastic realm in which rules are malleable, conflict is explicitly handled, and objectives are clearly defined. Animated characters, again like their comic book counterparts, tend to be less psychologically complex and more emblematic. They bear only a passing resemblance to actual people, typically having one characteristic that defines and limits them.

As with film, television audiences are expected to sit relatively quietly and pay attention to what is happening on screen. (However, as mentioned above, television offers more opportunity for freedom of movement and "outside" actions.) Typically, the viewing experience is framed as "passive;" an engagement with the screen images connotes a detachment with the world at large. Much is made in the media of television's detrimental effects on children's health, as television replaces more "active" entertainment (I use quotes with active and passive to suggest that the dichotomous

framing of these terms is troubling in light of the [potential] critical and semiotic activity performed while watching television). *Dora's* creators specifically sought to get children's bodies moving when they view the program. They built in multiple opportunities for children to speak back to the characters and engage in other physical activities. The desired outcome of such a strategy is to make the viewer feel even closer to the characters, as if he or she is inhabiting and exploring Dora's world alongside her.

Most television programs have a two-pronged narrative strategy. They try to create stand-alone episodes, so that viewers will have a complete experience during the half-hour or hour they spend watching. But producers also want to reward faithful viewing, and so they create larger narratives that build slowly over time. In the case of *Dora*, this larger story is not as explicitly handled; episodes are self-contained and similar, and the "rewards" for repeat viewing are a knowledge of minor characters and following Dora through multiple settings and genres and watching her persona flourish in each. The strategy of giving viewers a little at a time is part of the training process; like giving an animal a treat when it performs a desired action, a show that comes on at a specific time offers an anticipated and constant return. But children's knowledge of this predictable structure within an episode is also a form of power.

Dora, Her World, and Borders

Dora revolves around a young Latina girl and her friends traveling through various landscapes in search of missing articles or characters, or collaborating on a group objective. Each show follows a similar format, based around the narrative style and strategies of a computer game. Dora and Boots, her monkey best friend, introduce themselves, and a complication emerges. To achieve their objective, they call upon Map, a talking, rolled up map who identifies a series of locations to which they must travel. Often during their journey, they encounter Swiper the Fox, who attempts to steal an item that Dora needs. Sometimes Swiper succeeds, and sometimes Dora and Boots foil him by chanting "Swiper, no swiping!" three times. Also on the journey, Dora utilizes her backpack (herself a character) to retrieve some necessary item from the myriad of objects she contains. Eventually, Dora and her friends achieve their objective, and sing a victory song: "We Did It." They then ask the viewer to recall his/her "favorite part" of the journey, before sharing their own. Every show follows this formula; elements such as locations, objects needed, and characters encountered may change, but the journey structure never alters.

Dora takes place in a borderland; its main character speaks two languages and Dora seems caught between Mexican and US culture. Author/theorist Gloria Anzaldúa defines borders as more than physical boundaries: "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined space created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (3). I find this definition a useful space to begin talking about the discourse around Dora's explorations. Although Dora

lives in a borderland, the only "borders" she encounters are spaces between locations, which are easily traversed. In her travels, she might be seen as a *border crosser*—someone who belongs to multiple cultures simultaneously and is able to move freely between and among them. Anzaldúa suggests that those who exist in this state are often feared, mocked, or seen as illegitimate, but Dora encounters no such prejudice. Although she holds several real-world markers of the historically subaltern or marginalized—female, nonwhite, child, Spanish speaker—she is centered in her own constructed society, and so represents the dominant identity (yet the audience has intertextual knowledge of her as a marginalized identity—at least in the US).

By dominant identity, I mean that Dora represents a normative middle class US childhood. She lives in a home, attends school, plays safely with her friends, and does not worry about money for meals (in fact, she sometimes gives Boots money when he doesn't have it available, as in "Ice Cream"). Her mother is an archaeologist, we learn in "Job Day;" her father's employment (if any) is not addressed. He is mostly seen cooking and caring for Dora's younger siblings. As she is represented as a normative US child, Dora also demonstrates the strategy of "selective incorporation of cultural elements from the various cultural worldviews and practices to which [she] has been exposed during […] her life" (Chen, Benet-Martínez, and Bond 806). This reflects her positioning as bicultural within a globalized/mediatized environment.

Could Dora's border identity point to a growing knowledge and expectation of multicultural identity? Educational theorists Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriades describe the current social condition: "Indeed, if this is an era of the 'post,' it is also an era of difference—and the challenge of this era of difference is the challenge of living in a world of incompleteness, discontinuity, and multiplicity" (202). This paradigm organizes Dora's world, with its border crossing protagonist and easy acceptance of various cultural backgrounds against an external lived backdrop of controversy over immigration policy and border politics. The show may aspire to Homi Bhabha's discursive "Third Space," with narratives and environments focused not around cultural distinction, but hybridity. In *Dora*, speaking more than one language is taken for granted and imparted as useful. In her world, various cultures (and even species) collaborate and celebrate their common goals and values. In fact, the show represents a liberal humanist societal outlook in which differences are minimized and unity centered.

Yet, the ethos of the *Dora* show also reflects some of the troubling discourse around the term "multiculturalism." Rusom Bharucha writes: ". . . there is almost an in-built expectation written into the 'multi' which assumes that 'we *have* to get along and live together'. In short, it would seem to deny the 'right to exit' a particular society or to subvert the premises of 'living together'" (10). When presented to young people, is the ideology associated with use of this term a forward looking worldview? Or, does it seek to establish a basic and official knowledge to which all cultures should be exposed in order to mold their cultural understandings while keeping their folkloric character (Torres 198)? In other words, is Dora's border crossing transgressive, challenging accepted

notions of identity as "this" or "that," or is it monolithic, attempting to homogenize multiple blended identities into a singular "human" experience? Do the characters in *Dora* have the "right to exit" their common journeys and objectives, or to question the ways in which these objectives are pursued?

Bilingualism and Border Identities

At the beginning of most *Dora* episodes, she greets the audience: "Hola! Soy Dora!" Boots joins in: "And I'm Boots." This bilingual greeting sets the tone for the show, which includes dialogue in both Spanish and English. One of the stated goals of *Dora's* creators was to teach Spanish vocabulary ("More About Dora" 1), and so episodes introduce Spanish words for numbers, greetings, and simple phrases. Some of these are translated into English, and some are not; the viewer must make meaning of the non-translated words through context. Yet, although the program includes bilingual elements, in its US form, the "default language" is English. A child who spoke no Spanish at all would have no trouble following the narrative of Dora's journey.

Media and communications scholar Richard Popp suggests that the bilingual nature of *Dora* distinguishes the show within the field of educational programming. The focus on language learning becomes a motivation for parents to encourage their children to watch the show: "Language becomes a means of advancing into the upper echelons of education, work, and even taste groups. Bilingualism can open doors and act as a symbol of one's tolerance and refinement" (17). He points out, however, that parents of children watching the show must value the cultural capital associated with being bilingual. They must also have the means to "take the next step" and provide assistance to their children in order for them to progress beyond the simple words and phrases the show teaches (12). This attention to the *kind* of bilingualism being taught by *Dora* is important; the show's educative merit is in teaching English speaking children beginning Spanish, not in assisting Spanish speakers to maintain their language. (This is also true of dual language schools in Arizona, which can only be attended by English proficient students—there is no provision for using Spanish to develop English speaking skills.) Essentially, Dora is a "helpful native," a guide whose purpose is to introduce her own language to outsiders, and to translate for them when they encounter unfamiliar contexts. But where does Dora "live?" What is the terrain the show guides the audience through?

Dora's home is not specifically located in a single country, but more of a borderland, a "no-place/everyplace." This home space is a verdant landscape with tropical trees and green hills. Dora's family's house has a Spanish tile roof, and the walls around its door and windows are painted with turquoise designs. The landscape and animal clues—Dora's friends include an iguana, monkey, and bull—seem to locate the show in Mexico or South America, but even this is a computer game-style simulation, a politically charged sedimentation of US fantasies of travel/exploration/colonization. Because she lives in this borderland, Dora seems to be a cultural hybrid, a combination of multiple traditions and folkloric elements. She is drawn as a Latina girl, but plays out

(for example) European fairy tale and trans-Atlantic pirate narratives. In an interview, one of the show's writers stated: "We often combine a Latino character with a fable character. But really, it's all a legacy of imagery" (Sigler 43). The "legacy of imagery" the writer speaks of suggests a view of Dora as symbolically formed from multiple imaginary strains. She is a multicultural cipher, a hybrid in the most surface level sense of Bhabha's meaning. Without a specific racial or ethnic identity, each viewer can "download" his or her own cultural background onto Dora, molding her into whatever that child or adult needs or wants her to be. (Thus adding to her great cross-cultural appeal.)

Dora's family celebrates Christmas, with a tree in their living room and luminaria on the path outside ("A Present for Santa"). Yet the focus of the Christmas episode is on presents and their suitability for those who receive them, not on the religious or family-centered aspects of the holiday. When Swiper attempts to make off with their present for Santa, Boots hopes Christmas will bring out the fox's better nature: "Swiper wouldn't swipe on Christmas, would he, Dora?" In fact, Swiper takes the present, but returns it once he realizes it's for Santa. The present is "una guitarra" (a guitar), on which Santa serenades Boots and Dora with "Feliz Navidad." So Santa serves as a kind of universal bringer of good cheer rather than a Christian icon (this draws from his status in the culture at large, in which he has been largely stripped of religious context). Santa hails a liberal humanist/morality tale view of "Christmas" as unifying and peaceful—and yet, despite his secularization, he still represents Christian ideology; fully decontextualizing such a religious figure is not possible.

One of Dora's most expansive adventures takes place in conjunction with (International) Friendship Day ("Dora's World Adventure"). On this day, Dora tells the audience that her friends dress up and have parties, and wear special friendship bracelets. The bracelets are particularly meaningful to her: "When we all wear our friendship bracelets, it means that we'll always be friends forever." Of course, Swiper steals the bracelets, and so Dora must go around the world to return them. She stops in Paris, Mount Kilimanjaro, the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, and the Great Wall of China. In each country, she teaches the audience the local word or phrase for "hello," and provides some superficial information about the culture in each setting. She says that the French enjoy cheese in cafes, for example, and that in China, people ride bicycles and fly kites. As her friends thank her for returning the bracelets, she tells them: "Friends help friends," again privileging a liberal humanist erasure of difference and an easy characterization of the complex notion of intercultural "friendship."

When Dora travels, she does so almost instantaneously by stepping into a method of conveyance (that helpfully appears when she needs it) and then stepping off in a new location, usually after singing a brief song. These vehicles can take her across lakes, around the world, or even to another planet ("Journey to the Purple Planet"). She can also enter fairy tales by climbing into books ("Dora Saves the Prince") and breathe underwater using a magic crown to transform into a mermaid ("Dora Saves the

Mermaids"). In her travels, Dora never buys a ticket or rides with other children. She has complete freedom to cross borders without documentation, and she never passes through any kind of immigration post. When she arrives at her destination, the local people and animals happily accept her. (One exception to this is when she enters Swiper's home space in "Berry Hunt" and picks berries—in this episode she is chased by a bear.) All this traveling suggests the space-bending possibilities of the internet, a technology that allows communication and virtual travel across great distances. Because of its simulated nature, travel via the internet does not require documentation or funds. Like Dora's transportation, it occurs instantaneously and whenever needed by the user. But, again like Dora, those who travel in this fashion are limited by the environments, people, and information available through the technology used. And these travelers must always return "home" to their physical bodies. Although Dora may cross geographic borders, she cannot escape those of the television frame; she is at the mercy of her journey narrative and when her show ends, she disappears—or transitions into a Dora controlled by the child fan, assisted by branded dolls, clothing, etc.

Children and Technology

Dora's narrative takes the form of a computer game, and Dora herself utilizes various technologies during her adventures. Thus, the show engages questions about the relationship of young people to technology such as: How is Dora's life structured as a computerized series of binary decisions? How does Dora's use of technology engage specific forms of embodiment and identities? And how does it reflect children's experience with technology in the "outside world?"

Theorists such as Neil Postman argue that children's use of media decreases their capacity for imaginative play and exposes them to harmful stimuli. On the other side of the continuum, David Buckingham argues that new media, such as computer software, the internet, and text messaging, provide additional venues for communication and enhance young people's ability to extend their knowledge and influence. This utopic vision positions technology as generating new forms of learning, democratic literacy, liberation from bodily identity, and creative expression (Buckingham 44). Facility with multiple media also produces the ability to adapt to change, experiment creatively with different modalities, and learn to solve problems by "doing"—without rule books or manuals (McDonnell 115-16).

Through watching *Dora*, children learn the ritualized semiotic and performative aspects of machine use (Oravec 253). As they become accustomed to technology—through representations in entertainment or use of computers at home or school—children prepare to use machines in their daily lives. But cultural theorist Jo Ann Oravec cautions that: "Technology rituals can thus displace efforts to establish or participate in more human-centered rituals, rituals that involve higher levels of human response and permit more spontaneity, playfulness, and even magic" (Oravec 254). Notice the parallel here with Postman's view. As shows like Dora engage the binary structure of computer

functions (calling for one right answer), might they curb children's creative use of the technology or ability to imagine alternative solutions and narratives?

When we use technology, we participate in an exercise of control over ourselves as users. We must use the technology in the way it demands; otherwise, it will not fulfill its function. Oravec suggests that adults have explored the "strategic use of technological ritual" to reinforce structure and establish discipline over children (262-63). Teaching such processes as launching a program, starting a file, saving work, researching on the internet, etc. constitutes an imposition of structure, a discipline of children's minds and bodies focused toward particular uses of machines. This discipline imposes a technological layer on top of other daily structures such as mealtimes, class schedules, and bedtimes. The process assists in socializing children to become technological workers in a modernist paradigm (Callahan). As Donna Haraway suggests in the quote I led with, such a process moves society into an ever closer, cyborg-like relationship with its machines.

Another issue raised by Oravec is the purpose of introducing children to technology in a consumerist culture. She states: "Through these consumption rituals, children learn that technology is a consumer item, and that the purpose of human interaction with computers is to collect various devices and then follow the programmed instructions, experimenting within their affordances and constraints" (261). As children add more technological devices and media, they increase their cultural capital. Rather than calling on children to master a single program or tool, as a parent or teacher might, the consumer market suggests that diversifying one's technological portfolio provides a more direct key to success. This is reflected in the *Dora* program; Dora relies on a multitude of mechanical devices (transportation, tools, reference materials) to get where she needs to go and acquire necessary items. But she also consistently utilizes her map to access information and mark her progress. Indeed, having access to technology and exhibiting mastery in its use ensures Dora is able to complete her objectives successfully each episode. (Such consumerism/collection is also promoted through the proliferation of *Dora* merchandise, electronic and non-electronic.)

Technology in/as Dora's World

Dora makes extensive use of technology during her adventures. Some is "low tech" or magic, like the map that shows her the locations she needs to travel through to reach her objectives, or her backpack that magically holds whatever items she might need. And some is quite sophisticated—as mentioned, she has access to whatever mode of transportation she requires at any given time. In "Dora's World Adventure," she makes use of a collection of video screens that project images of her friends around the world and allow her to speak with them, as if on videophone. These screens, like Dora's instantaneous travel, suggest the possibilities of internet communication. Dora's cousin Diego has a computerized "field journal" that he uses to collect information on animals ("Meet Diego"). The field journal seems to be linked not only to an information network

about zoology, but also to a satellite feed—Diego can use it to locate any animal in seconds. The journal looks something like a blackberry or GPS device, and its key function in the narrative gives it a "cool factor" that makes such devices attractive to the viewer.

Boots and Dora also like to "catch stars," reaching up and grabbing smiling stars that fly by them on their journey. Once caught, Dora stores the stars in a special rainbow pocket on the side of her backpack. These "captive" stars, with diverse abilities and properties, prove useful as she applies them to various problems. Rocket Star, for example, can enable her to move more quickly. Glowy can light up dark places. In *Dora the Explorer: the Essential Guide*, a companion book to the television series aimed at emerging readers and their families, the author states that these small pieces of technology are "giggly star friends" (Bromberg 16), yet they seem unwilling to be caught and always fly away after being "helpful." The stars contribute to the framing of Dora's world as a video game, as they fly above the characters' heads and suggest the idea of "bonuses" when they are caught—they are objects, tools without any agency or function other than to aid Dora.

Other elements of the show suggest the mediated nature of Dora's world as well. In the original title sequence for the show, the camera zoomed in from outside a (non-animated) child's room and focused on a desktop computer. Dora and her friends appeared on that computer. In each episode, including those currently running, a mouse pointer clicks on Dora's name to transition from the title sequence to the main part of the program. This pointer then becomes the audience's avatar in Dora's world, allowing the assumed viewer to access ("click on") objects and elements in the landscape, as he or she would if playing a computer game. Once clicked, objects activate—they fly around the screen, or appear on Dora, or perform some other useful action. Of course, this "mouse pointer" access is not personalized to each viewer; there is one master narrative it portrays. This narrative is also centered around the "correct" answer; for example, if Dora asks for a flashlight, the pointer would choose the picture of a flashlight, not (for example) a maraca that, when shaken, could attract fireflies to light her way. In this way, Dora's technology maps onto Oravec's notion of technological rituals as discipline, as it prepares the viewer to interact with machines in a specific, linear, binary fashion. Rather than imagine multiple possibilities, preschoolers are taught to choose the most obvious, straightforward answer.

Behavioral Responses

As mentioned above, another stated objective of Dora's creators was that the show's audience "be active participants—not only by answering questions, but by getting off the couch and moving their bodies" ("More About Dora" 2). Several times each episode, the show calls for audience members to engage in various types of physical embodiment. In order to issue this call, Dora and the other characters speak directly to the audience, breaking the mediated fourth wall. Dora begins each episode by telling the viewers: "I

need your help," and then asking if they will help her. Regardless of the children's response, Dora assumes an affirmative, and begins her journey with the viewer compelled alongside. This participation is touted by Nickelodeon executive Brown Johnson as empowering to the preschool viewers: "It makes them feel smart, and it makes them feel strong, and it makes them feel powerful. . . . No one had ever asked for that degree of audience participation before" (Ralli C2). Yet, all of the participation is carefully choreographed to overlap with Dora's success along her journey.

After gaining the viewers' support, Dora, Boots, Map, and Backpack implicate them in their activities through various physical performances. Sometimes these are in the form of compelled speech—the characters tell the children watching that they "have to say" a key word, such as "backpack" or "map." Occasionally, Dora and Boots follow this demand with "louder!" Some of these speech acts engage learning through rote: viewers learn Spanish words by repeating them after Dora, for example. Often the characters employ closed ended questioning as a teaching strategy, asking children where a certain shape or animal is that Dora somehow is having trouble seeing. Sometimes the physical performance is focused on larger movements; children are asked to jump, or reach, or point to an object. Sometimes, viewers will "earn" some reward for engaging in these performances—a friendship bracelet, for example, at the end of the World Adventure story. When this happens, the reward is "given" to the viewers by passing it under (or around) the "camera" so that it appears to have been moved out of Dora's space and into the viewer's. The show thus establishes a token economy, based on following Dora's instructions, but the token is virtual and disappears as soon as the show is over. Yet, with all these compelled actions and rewards, the fourth wall is a blurry boundary—in many ways—in *Dora*.

In all these performances, as with the computer pointer avatar, there is one "right" answer, gesture, or other response, and it is assumed that the viewer embodies this correct performance. Thus, there is essentially only one way to engage with the program's narrative, except for interpretations of animal movements or other gestures called for in a general way. The major exception occurs at the end of each episode, when viewers are asked to tell Dora and Boots their favorite part of the day's journey. The characters leave a few seconds of time for children's open responses before validating them: "I liked that part, too." After this, Dora and Boots relate their favorite parts, which may be the same as the viewers'. Only here does the viewer get to express creativity, or break out of the binary right/wrong answer structure.

The interactivity in *Dora* functions as a metanarrative of the series as a whole, since it is structured as an interactive game—perform correct action, receive reward, progress along journey. But, because it is mediated, the interactivity is false, ultimately resulting in the audience's consumption of the "correct" performance. In the "bargain" of sitting down to watch *Dora*, viewers lose the ability to express themselves creatively, but gain the comfort of knowing they can never give the "wrong" answer. This is similar to technology use; a calculator cannot give a "wrong" answer, as long as the user inputs the

question correctly. Is the bargain beneficial to the viewer? What are the right answers being imparted, and what alternate solutions are left out? Ultimately, Dora leaves little room for resistant viewing or "play."

Implications: Completing the Training

As Dora explores, she transmits specific ideologies regarding childhood and society. The viewers' assumed complicity with her actions places them at the center of debates over border identity and multiculturalism, and the place of technology. Dora's journeys are carefully constructed to serve as conduits for certain values, often having to do with being a "good" person—saving a friend, finding some useful or sentimental item, working as a team. As she travels, Dora sees her world not for what it *is*, but rather as a series of locations to be passed through. Locations serve less as significant journey markers than as staging points for challenges—the no places/every places of computer games. The objective matters most—again, a linear and structural standpoint—and the show cannot end until Dora meets that objective.

The way space is used in *Dora* also serves as a marker for how the show treats other concepts. As mentioned earlier, Dora's world is a simulacrum, a decontextualized version of real landscapes, a place that never was. Sociologist Henri Lefebvre suggests that space can be *abstract*, existing in the realm of the conceptual (we will use this kitchen to cook food), or *lived*, suggesting practical, material usage (the kitchen can also be used for playing with toys, or brushing the cat, or bandaging a cut). Literary theorist Nicholas Spencer argues: "Lefebvre describes abstract space as a homogenizing and fragmenting social force that seeks to destroy the potential for oppositional cultural space that lived space represents" (142). The flattening of space creates a unilateral expectation of how it will be used, disregarding possibilities for play. As Dora moves through her own abstract space, her possibilities for use of space are limited; she cannot bring her space to the realm of the material. Like a character in a novel who is similarly confined, "she cannot integrate her various spatial experiences into a social map of her world" (144). Since Dora cannot and does not bring her experience into the material, it is up to the children viewing the show to do it for themselves. They define their own sense of Dora's space, of who she is as a pretend or aspirational peer, and how her world culturally maps onto their own. Through this relational and ideological embodiment, the show imparts its training.

Multiculturalism—that contested term—is presented in *Dora* as a sort of extended series of friendships, a liberal humanist outlook exemplified by her team's cheer: "When we work together as a team, there's nothing we can't do. 'Cause being on a team means you help me and I help you" ("We're a Team"). Dora and her friends never encounter any hardships based on difference; they don't have difficulties understanding languages, traditions, gestures, or geographies. Their challenges are skills based: they search for objects, pass through locations, outwit Swiper the Fox, and cheer up a grumpy troll by making him laugh. The characters' differences easily coalesce into a network of

abilities—accentuated by technological or magic objects that conveniently appear when needed, removing any struggle connected with building assemblages—that serve a common good. The *Dora* vision of community might thus be seen as an idealistic "happy multiculturalism." The characters share a common identity, even though they are of multiple species, cultural backgrounds, and genders. (Class is not specifically represented or addressed.) Dora and her friends are brought together by common, humanistic objectives that are supposed to transcend their perceived differences.

Educational theorist Carlos Alberto Torres proposes that under such a liberal humanist vision: "Unfortunately the tension between and among these differences is rarely interrogated, presuming a 'unity of difference'—that is, that all difference is both analogous and equivalent (201). This treatment of difference tends to reject radical notions and reproduce structure in its attempts to forge a unified "personhood" (Ladson-Billings and Tate 62). In its attempts to build a liberal humanistic third space—a hybridizing, democratic borderland—*Dora* defers conversation around issues of culture and power. Children do not learn about the relationships between injustice and common cause, or misunderstanding and friendship. Both contained and enabled by the technology that frames it, the show's multicultural discourse is ultimately imaginary and temporary. Everything in *Dora* comes too easily; it is decontextualized and abstracted from cultural and linguistic tensions. In the outside world, those who look like Dora may be stopped and detained by the police if they live in Arizona. Spanish speakers contend with a state system that enforces English as a sole mode of literacy, spoken and written. Yet, *Dora's* determination to exist in a highly simulated environment, with a mysterious avatar pointer and instantaneous travel, sets it apart from the outside world and ignores complex questions around the very issues it engages. The show colonizes the imaginary around the avoidance of cultural conflict and a false sense of unity, while outside, restrictive legislation is signed, protestors gather, and children respond in English when their parents speak to them in Spanish.

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