

Art Interrupting Advertising: A Critique of the Educational Paradigms of Linny the Guinea Pig and Dora the Explorer

ALYSON HUNTLY
Queen's University

It is six a.m. My two-year-old granddaughter is sitting in the dog basket clutching one of the cats. She is "watching Dora," which is to say viewing the "Egg Hunt" episode on a DVD featuring the animated cartoon character, Dora the Explorer. I am slumped on the couch clutching a cup of coffee too tired to face the storm of protest that will ensue when Dora is turned off and deeply regretting the day I brought this noisy creature into the house. (Dora, that is, not my granddaughter.) At least Dora is educational, I rationalize, or if not exactly educational, at least not harmful. Besides, my granddaughter loves her. There are three Dora episodes on this particular DVD. When the egg hunt finally ends, I persuade my granddaughter to consider a different episode. I am not good with the remote control at the best of times. This is not the best of times, and we somehow end up at a menu selection I have not seen before. That is how we discover "Linny the Guinea Pig Under the Ocean," a two-and-a-half-minute episode that interrupts¹ Dora the way a tree interrupts a billboard; the way art interrupts advertising.

This paper is a reflection on my encounter with Linny and the questions and exploration that followed. It is about wondering how Linny the Guinea Pig artfully interrupts the ideology of Dora the Explorer. It is about Dora too, of course, and the giant corporation that spawned her. But mostly it is about the way a creative little film challenges the core assumptions of consumer-based education; it is about the way imagination interrupts mass-market educational television.

Linny the Guinea Pig Under the Ocean

This computer-generated animation, *Linny the Guinea Pig Under the Ocean*, opens with a still shot of Linny, an ordinary-looking guinea pig in a cage in a kindergarten classroom. In a four-second voice-over, various young children say goodbye to one another (and perhaps to Linny). There is a pause. Then the music picks up and Linny the Guinea Pig begins to move. Linny whips on a cap, flips over the food dish to reveal a hidden exit, and slips out of the cage.

Linny, wearing flippers and scuba mask, is next seen standing beside the small classroom fish tank. Linny kicks a ball, which touches a fire truck, which lowers a ladder, which lifts Linny to the top of the fish tank. An elegant dive and Linny is in the tank swimming with its inhabitants amidst aquarium plants, toy shipwrecks, and plastic mermaids.

But Linny does not stay in the fish tank. Like C. S. Lewis's wardrobe,² the smaller space contains the larger country; the fish tank contains the sea. Linny swims out into an ocean of surprising encounters—a swirl of neon fish, a wild ride on the back of a sea horse, a fishy kiss, a whale that spouts Linny into the sky to soar with seagulls before plummeting back into the ocean. In a few minutes it is all over and Linny is back in the fish tank. Linny takes a flying leap out of the tank and back into the cage, sheds the diving gear, and resumes a guinea pig position as though nothing has happened. But for Linny's conspiratorial wink, we might almost believe it was a nothing but a dream.

Dora the Explorer

Linny is tucked away in a small corner of a DVD entitled *Dora the Explorer: Egg Hunt*. Linny is not promoted on the DVD cover and is not listed on the main menu. Dora the Explorer, the cartoon star, has the main billing. Dora is a toddler-sized Hispanic-American character. She is not particularly adventurous as explorers go, since she follows a map through every episode, both literally and figuratively. However she does have something of the *conquistador* about her.

Dora and her sidekick, Boots the Monkey, never stray from the path or from a pre-planned sequence of events that has the same pattern in every episode. This is the script:

- Something needs to be found and Dora is instructed to find it.
- Dora repeats three times what must be found.
- Dora consults an animated singing map.
- The map lays out the "path" that Dora has to follow.
- Dora follows the path, meets various friends along the way, and

collects what she has set out to find.

- Swiper the Fox tries to steal whatever Dora and her friends want/need/have.
- Swiper sometimes succeeds in stealing the goods, but always Dora and her friends always get back what they want/need in the end.
- Dora declares the mission a success and recalls key incidents.

Along the way, Dora teaches. Certain skills are introduced—such as how to locate something in the picture on the screen. Missing objects are marked with a pinging noise and a cursor, much the way they would be in a computer game. Other skills-building activities include matching colours and patterns. Key Spanish and English vocabulary is introduced in clear, artificially slow speech. New vocabulary is repeated throughout a given episode, along with objects that precisely match the words that are to be learned. Sequencing is another key “must do” in Dora’s repertoire of toddler skills; three-item sequences are learned and repeated throughout each episode.

The Dora programs are replete with stock phrases used by Dora to address her audience:

- “You have to say, ‘Swiper, no swiping!’”
- “Say, ‘map.’”
- “Say it with me!”
- “Can you find the (*insert whatever Dora is looking for*)?”
- “Thanks for helping. We couldn’t have done it without you.” (Though certainly after the first episode, most toddler viewers would be quite well aware that these cartoon characters do not really need their help.)

A Study in Contrasts

The Lunny and Dora episodes are perhaps best understood in their contrasts. They are so different from one another it’s hard to fathom how they ended up on the same DVD.

One contrast is in the direction of movement. Dora moves inward, becoming more and more confined whereas Lunny moves outward, into a wider and wider world. At the beginning of every Dora episode, the camera lens moves the viewer from a bright and colourful playroom into a green computer, where we find Dora and her animated friends following a track that goes round and round like a game of PacMan. Lunny, however, spirals outward, from cage to classroom to ocean to sky.

A second contrast is in the quality of speech. Dora shouts everything. Even turning down the volume is no help. She still shouts. She says very little, however. Most of her speech is repetitious and didactic; none of it is

funny or surprising or quirky or sad. Most of her words involve instruction and explanation. Linny, who says nothing at all in words, communicates a world of feeling—surprise, curiosity, delight, respect, awareness, contemplation, ecstasy, playfulness, affection, awe, humour. Linny is utterly silent and powerfully communicative.

A third contrast is in the style of movement. Dora strides purposefully forward along her set route. She stops only to accumulate or pronounce, then marches on to the next destination. Linny waddles, glides, slides, dives, twirls. He swims and dances his way through his adventures in a series of gestures stunning in their variety.

A fourth contrast is in the play, or lack thereof. Dora does not play; she is a workaholic-toddler-on-a-mission. True, she does laugh and shout and jump about whenever she acquires whatever she has been looking for, but her energy seems frenetic and driven. Linny, by comparison, seems to act purely for the love of play. He ventures out into the ocean, not to find or do anything in particular, but to play the game of being Being, being Being-in-ocean.

A fifth contrast, closely related to the fourth, is in the relationships. Dora's relational posture is adversarial and oppositional. She commands viewer participation: "Find this," or "You have to say this." Linny's playfulness simply invites the viewer into the game, the play, the play of being. Dora defeats her on-screen adversaries, most notably Swiper the Fox, with gestures and loud words. Even her environment is met as adversary—obstacles to cross, things to acquire, challenges to overcome. Linny, on the other hand, relates gently, invitingly, playfully. Linny greets the swirl of fish with head-over-heels delight, the sea horse with a bow (the sea horse bows back), the whale with a calmness that waits for invitation (to which the whale responds with a smile). Linny's every encounter invites response and invokes reciprocation. Dora marches through, picking up things and touching no one; Linny is fully immersed, touching and touched by everything.

The Education of Dora

Dora the Explorer is widely considered to be educational television. In the United States, the Children's Television Act requires each broadcast television station to serve the educational and informational needs of children. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) wrote rules to carry out this mandate. Under the FCC's rules, television stations must air at least three hours per week of core children's educational programming. Core programming is defined as programming designed for children ages 16 years and under, with an educational purpose, of at least 30 minutes in

length, aired between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., and regularly scheduled as a weekly program. The FCC website provides broadcast schedules for core educational programs in every city in the United States. Dora the Explorer shows up on virtually all the lists. Mind you, the definition is somewhat circular. It is the broadcast station, not the FCC that determines whether or not a program satisfies the definition of core programming. In other words, it is educational if the broadcaster says it is.

In Canada, although there are no explicit guidelines concerning educational television, the rules of the game are much the same. The Canadian Radio-television and Communications Commission (CRTC) relies on voluntary codes and the co-operation of broadcast stations. Again, decision-making about the content of children's programming is left to the corporation. Chair of the CRTC, Keith Spicer, said in a 1995 CRTC press release on children's television:

Our approach aims to keep program decision-making away from regulators. It tries to throw it back where it belongs—to thoughtful producers, script-writers, advertisers and distributors listening to more informed, better-equipped parents. We are trying to leave power, in a word, to the "market." (p. 2)

Dora the Explorer is self-defined, self-proclaimed, as children's educational television. "Play and learn with Dora," declares the Nick Jr. web page. There, one finds "age appropriate games," "learning activities for teachers (and parents), tips for parents, and colouring pages. And advertisements: ads for Dora video games, movies, clothing, toys, and a host of other accessories, complete with shop-on-line links.

Education for what, one wonders? How to play a video game? How to shop online? Aside from, or perhaps connected to, its overt learn-to-shop theme, the educational model proposed by Dora is solidly rooted in metaphysical attitudes to knowledge and knowing. This, as Brent Davis (2004) elucidates, is a mode of thinking and being in the world that has to do with "the identification of unchanging laws and principles that governed forms and phenomena that exist in the realm of the physical" (p. 16). One of the attributes of early metaphysical science was a preoccupation with classification of forms, which entails drawing lines and making distinctions between categories. Truth is a category that can be separated from falsehood; knowledge from ignorance. The metaphysical lens shapes knowledge as something fixed and unchanging. Truth exists in a kind of incorporeal form outside of any knowing agent. Thus, the metaphysical attitude to knowledge objectifies it into something that can be acquired and possessed.

In Dora, knowledge is a possession. Each new skill, word, or fact is presented as a discrete entity, something that can be collected the way Dora collects eggs in the "Egg Hunt" episode. New words are not portals,

opening up vistas of possibility. Words have precise and definite meanings; they are fixed links between sound and object. For example, the Spanish word *cascaron* points to a decorated egg with a prize in it, nothing more, nothing less—even though it has several other meanings in Spanish, such as eggshell, crack (n.), and cracked.

The Dora episodes suggest a mode of education based on the philosophical rationalism inherited from 17th century French philosopher Rene Descartes, which has its roots in metaphysical assumptions. Brent Davis (2004) refers to rationalist modes of education as “teaching as instructing.” According to Davis, the rationalist mode of teaching is associated with words like *telling* (laying flat), *informing*, *edifying*, and *directing*. Implicit in all these terms, says Davis, “is a conception of teaching that is most concerned with logical, carefully planned movements through topics” (p. 78). Dora and her cohorts are almost always in this telling mode—telling the viewer what to do or say, explaining where things are, giving instructions, and reminding other characters what they are doing and what will happen next.

In Dora’s teaching model, learning is sequential. Just as Dora’s map offers an invariant route to the big, yellow *cascaron*, Dora’s educational map suggests a step-by-step progression of knowledge and skills. Skills are taught deliberately and sequentially. The video guides the young viewer to find objects, say words, do movements, match patterns. Skills build on each other but each is discrete. The route, in each episode of Dora, is clearly spelled out at the outset.

Davis (2004) points out that in rationalism one of the principle contemporary metaphors for the mind is a computer. It is no accident, I think, that the character, Dora, inhabits a world within a computer.

Dora’s ideology has a solid footing in rationalism, but it also has links to metaphysics’ other offshoot—empiricism. Dora casts a world where learning is tangible and measurable—words, skills, and understandings can all be quantified. Davis (2004) calls education rooted in empiricism “teaching as training.” This kind of education is associated with behaviourism. There are elements of behaviourism in Dora. The viewer’s behaviour is to some degree conditioned and rewarded. Dora gives an instruction such as “Say, map,” followed by a pause during which the toddler is expected to respond. A reward follows—the song-and-dance entry of the map, for example, or a phrase such as “Thanks for helping.”

This educational paradigm is broader than Dora of course. According to Davis, this metaphysical model undergirds most contemporary educational practice, which sees personal learning as linear and progressive, distinguishes objective knowledge from subjective sense-making, and forms a dichotomy between learning and “real life.” Viewed in this way, Dora the Explorer is closely aligned with most North American public education.

Dora and Global Market Capitalism

Dora's educational paradigm is connected to the video's underlying ideological commitment, a perspective shared by most other popular television programming. Dora the Explorer is, I believe, very much connected to global market capitalism.

To understand Dora, one needs to know her genealogy:

- Dora the Explorer is a product of a company called Nick Jr. ...
- which is a company under the umbrella of a company called Nickelodeon (famous for the character Sponge Bob Square Pants) ...
- which is wholly owned by an international mass media conglomerate called Viacom (which also owns CBS television, Paramount Pictures, Blockbuster Video, CBS news, Famous Players, Simon and Schuster, McMillan Publishing, hundreds of radio and television stations and cable networks, etc.).
- Viacom is owned (70% of the voting shares) by another company called National Amusements ...
- which is a "closely held" (which is to say, wholly owned) by a man named Sumner Redstone (who, according to *Forbes* magazine, had a net worth of \$8.9 billion US in 2004³).

To understand Dora is to come face to face with Viacom, which is, by its own admission, one of the largest media corporations in the world. To understand Dora's acquisitive march through life, one must understand her origins in mass media, which is the medium of advertising, which is the fuel of mass consumption, which is the lifeblood of global market capitalism.

At a very basic level, Dora is about advertising, about selling a product called capitalism. It's not just that the Dora episodes indirectly advertise a host of video games and other products sold on the Dora website (and increasingly in shopping malls). It's not just that Dora, as a commodity on children's television, is a package for advertising directed at young consumers. It is more basic: the video itself is a lifestyle advertisement for consumerism. Dora acquires and defends private property. (In the "Egg Hunt" episode, she collects 12 Easter eggs, each containing a child's toy. In other episodes she collects musical instruments, toys, living creatures, stars, and food items.)

No wonder Swiper the Fox, petty thief and threat to private property, is the arch villain of Dora's world. No wonder Dora's educational model is a consumption-driven one, in which knowledge is objectified and acquired. No wonder Dora sounds more like she is selling a product than nurturing a toddler's imagination. No wonder. Which is to say—no room for wonder, for imagination.

And this package is neatly wrapped up and sold as children's educational programming.

"Every television show is educational," says Neil Postman (1986) in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, "just as reading a book—any kind of book—promotes a particular orientation toward learning" (p. 143). Dora the Explorer promotes an orientation—a set of values and beliefs and behaviours—that is closely aligned with the needs of large corporations. The program would do so whether or not it was billed as educational. The "education" label gives added market value, however. The way "made with real fruit" stands out on the label of a highly processed sugar-coated snack.

Linny as an Interstitial

The word *interstitial* is an adjective in standard English usage. It comes from two Latin words, *inter* (meaning *between*) and *sistum* (meaning *set*). Hence its meaning, *set between*. Interstitial refers to things that are set between, that occupy small spaces, between the cracks, between the lines.

Episodes like Linny the Guinea Pig are called *interstitials* in the media world. Interstitials are short productions that are used to fill up short periods of time between main productions. An interstitial also has the sense of interruption, however. The word also refers to ads that interrupt, disrupt, or arrive uninvited. A classic computer example is the pop-up ad or splash page.

Linny acts as an interstitial to interrupt Dora. Yet, in ironic reversal of the interstitial ads that interrupt programming, this is art interrupting advertising. Linny as creative expression interrupts Dora, the lifestyle ad. "Linny the Guinea Pig Under the Ocean," functions as a critique of Dora, positing a creative alternative to consumerism and consumer-based education, a gentle interplay of relationships in a world that is nuanced, subtle, fragile, and intimately webbed.

This raises the question of how Linny comes to interrupt Dora. After all, they are both housed in the same media empire, lodged in the same DVD. Dora, however, is produced directly by Nick Jr., while Linny is produced by an independent writer and filmmaker by the name of Josh Selig.

Selig was a child actor on the Sesame Street TV show, a street performer (unicyclist, fire eater, juggler), and a circus arts instructor. He is poet and actor who grew up in New York City and Cuernavaca, Mexico. Selig won 10 Grammy awards as a writer for Sesame Street and now has his own production company. His stated goal, in an interview with *Parents Know.com*, is to produce "the most innovative pre-school television programming in the world."

In this is the difference, I think. Linny was produced as an act of creative intent, without any goal or agenda except creativity itself. There was no formal educational goal, no marketing plan, as with Dora. There are no Linny peripherals for sale. It is the creativity that causes interruption, because creativity is inherently interruptive, disruptive, and even subversive. Sumara (1996) makes this point in *Private Readings in Public* when he speaks of the importance and the power of imagination to interrupt the powers that be.

The power of the imagination invoked by the poetic—the literary fiction—is well-known by political dictators who understand the subversiveness and danger of the poetically conditioned imagination. (Sumara, 1996, p. 40)

Although Sumara is speaking here of the imaginative space opened up by the indeterminacy of literary fiction, it can be argued that Linny is also indeterminate, opening up spaces in the imagination, and that Linny also powerfully interrupts the status quo.

To imagine, says Sumara (1996), is not merely to fill up the spaces created by a piece of literary fiction (or, I will add, a creative work of art such as Linny), it is also to re-imagine oneself. He says: “To imagine is to ‘bethink oneself,’ to meditate, to picture oneself in imagination. It is this human ability that leads to interpretation, to self-interpretation” (p. 40). And this, says Sumara, is hermeneutic.

The Hermeneutics of Linny

School is closed and the children have gone home; formal educational activity has ceased. It is only *after* the lessons that Linny begins to play. To understand Linny, one has to move outside formal models of education and modes of learning into a playful engagement with Linny as a being in the world, which is to say, to take a hermeneutic turn.

I suggest that Linny moves its audience into a hermeneutic mode of understanding and being—a way of being in the world that is about interpretation and understanding, as opposed to Dora’s mode, in which learning is a goal-driven activity separate from life. Linny does not offer age-appropriate vocabulary, learning strategies, or learning objectives. Rather, Linny is a hermeneutic engagement that is creative, that generates new meaning.

Hermeneutics is the philosophy or study or art of interpretation. Hermeneutics, since Heidegger, has come to be understood as an essential characteristic of what it means to be human. As Shaun Gallagher (1992) explains it, “For Heidegger, understanding is essentially a way of being, the way of being which belongs to human existence”(p. 42). Hermeneutics is what we are in the world: To be human is to interpret; to be human is to be

in the world as an interpreter. Heidegger's student Hans-Georg Gadamer agrees that "understanding is not an isolated activity of human beings but a basic structure of our experience of life" (as cited in Gallagher, p. 43).

Heidegger and his adherents assert priority to the notion of Being—our humanness as being-in-the-world—as opposed to the subject-object dichotomies of metaphysical philosophy (e.g., Crusius, 1991; Gadamer, 1989). We are not isolated individual packages of consciousness observing the world as though it is separate from us. We are dwellers in the world and our understanding is intimately and inextricably linked to this beingness. "The very fiction of the detached subject is a cultural norm," says Crusius (p. 15).

The hermeneutical mode is about engagement and participation. In same way that Linny is immersed in the ocean of events and experiences, we are immersed in Being. Linny moves into the happening of events and is carried by them. This is our experience of life, says Heidegger. We are interpreters tossed into the middle of history and engaging with it. Gadamer develops this further into the idea of play—the play of difference, the play of conversation. Linny plays, interacts, and experiences. We, as viewers and interpreters, are drawn into the game, the play of imagination, as we interact with (which is to say, interpret) Linny.

As interpreters tossed into the middle of things, human beings enter into an interaction between the familiar and the strange, the known and not yet known. This continuous interplay between what is already known and what is new or challenging is called the "hermeneutic circle." We cannot know what we know nothing of, nor can we ever encounter anything without some prior knowing or history given to us by our culture and language. In Gallagher's (1992) view, this is how learning happens. The learner never enters with a blank slate. Thus the interpreter brings what is already known into an interpretation, moving from known to unknown, from familiar to surprising. Linny the Guinea Pig moves from the known, the contained world of the fish tank, into the surprising and familiar yet strange world of the ocean. This element of strangeness is so evident in Linny. Each new encounter is greeted with surprise, which in turn elicits a fresh response/interpretation from the guinea pig. The film greets the viewer with surprising twists and turns. Dora, in contrast, is mapped out in advance. There is no surprise ending.

The interpretation or meaning that is discerned through hermeneutical engagement with the world is partial, temporal, and contextual. For example, my interpretation of Linny—the meanings I derive from the play of meaning in this little film clip—are conditioned by past experiences, culture, history, language, and by my present context. David Smith (1999) suggests that interpretation is a reflection of creative spirit that overturns notions

of objective truth. Hermes, the youthful, trickster Greek god from whom the word *hermeneutics* comes, is not concerned with one way only of doing things, nor with words that mean only one thing, says Smith. Words like *fact* and *knowledge* are supplanted by words such as *understanding*, *truthfulness*, and *meaningfulness*, all of which are rooted in a sense of the conversational, intersubjective, and dialogical nature of human experience.

This brings us to another feature of hermeneutic understanding, one particularly developed in Gadamer's work: Hermeneutics is relational. As Smith (1999) elaborates:

The hermeneutic modus has more of the character of a conversation than, say, of analysis and the trumpeting of truth claims. When one is engaged in a good conversation, there is a certain quality of self-forgetfulness as one gives oneself over to the conversation, so that the truth that is realized in the conversation is never the possession of any one of the speakers or camps but rather is something that all concerned realize they share together. (p. 38)

The character Linny engages the world in a conversational mode: each encounter with an ocean creature has the quality of an intimate exchange—a bow, a kiss, a blink of an eye, a nod. The episode of “Linny the Guinea Pig Under the Ocean” also engages the viewer in a conversation with the imagination. Dora dominates the conversation, whereas Linny leaves room for the viewer's own imaginative engagement. This suggests what Smith (1999) calls “hermeneutic pedagogy”—the “giving oneself over to conversation” and “building a common shared reality in a spirit of self-forgetfulness, a forgetfulness that is also a form of finding oneself in relation to others” (p. 39).

Interrupting Dora

Linny and Dora may be polar opposites in terms of style, but it took me more than one viewing to discern the differences in their ideology. Fortunately or unfortunately, I had lots of opportunity to contemplate Dora and her world. First thought: Dora may be loud, obnoxious, and annoying but she is not really harmful. After all, what's wrong with a toddler picking up a few Spanish words and learning to think in three-step sequences? And at least Dora isn't violent. Second thought: Dora is no more harmful than globalized monopoly capitalism, mass consumption, and their offshoots in global warming, poverty, and militarism, are harmful. Third thought: No, it's not really Dora that's harmful; it's just everything she represents.

Dora epitomizes the persistence of metaphysics, the deeply ingrained tendency to carve up the world into subject-object relations—different/same, mine/yours, us/them, normal/abnormal, rich/poor, able/disabled, black/white, male/female, gay/straight.

Metaphysics is dead, according to the hermeneutical philosophers, but it seems to me that *dead* not quite the right term. Metaphysics persists in a *deadness* that sometimes gets characterized in terms like “Western alienation,” a deadness that spawns a myriad of destructive “isms.”

The implications of this metaphysical paradigm make themselves known in educational practices that replicate the structures of power, oppression, and privilege that exist in the larger society. For example, even before they start school, Dora’s young fans are already caught up in the systems that will sort them into categories, assign them labels, and foreclose their futures.

Smith (1999) describes this pedagogical problem, which is also a human and global problem, in terms of a Western philosophy that has stranded us in a position of distance, abstraction, and non-involvement with the rest of the world. This is the poverty of Western society:

We lack a deep understanding of how we are bound together on this planet. Maybe it could be said that what we lack is a simple love for life; perhaps this is *our* poverty. We are reluctant to understand how violence inheres in the deep substructures of our thinking and our everyday life practice, and here I speak of a violence that is subtle, often benign, but nonetheless real insofar as it breathes through most of our assumptions about what it means to live in the world. (p. 103)

Linny interrupts Dora by offering other possibilities through hermeneutic imagination:

- The possibility of relational engagement with the world rather than control and subjugation of others;
- The possibility of imaginative knowledge, in which experience is a door opening onto new understanding, rather than the predicted and controlled world of pre-existent truth;
- The possibility of immersion in the world of being, rather than detachment through the abstractions of acquisition and objectification;
- The possibility of transformation through participation, rather than through conquest and domination.

I believe that Linny offers a model for being in the world that mirrors what Davis (2004) is talking about when he says:

Teaching and learning seem to be more about expanding the space of the possible and creating conditions for the emergence of the as-yet unimagined, rather than perpetuating entrenched habits of interpretation. Teaching and learning are not about convergence onto a pre-existent truth, but about divergence—about broadening what is knowable, doable, and beable. (p. 184)

Postscript

It would be nice to be able to write that my granddaughter and I turned off Dora and everyone lived happily ever after. Not so. My granddaughter recently acquired much loved Dora pyjamas that she inhabits day and night.

It would be great to be able to write that Dora's ratings have plummeted and three-year-olds no longer sport their heroine's logo on everything they own. But Dora is not the only program out there clear-cutting a path for the corporate giants. If Dora disappeared a hundred others like it would step in to fill the breach.

But this is also true. Linny is there, and other creations like it, that interrupt business as usual. And there are educators and artists who nurture the same kind of creative imagination—creativity that works its way, like dandelion roots, into the interstitials, the cracks, in corporate North America. And my granddaughter is there too. She has not yet lost her creative connection—her capacity for wonder and right relation. She may go to bed in Dora pyjamas, but she dreams of oceans full of stars.

They are there, and all of them, in their own way, are expanding the space of the possible and creating conditions for the emergence of the as yet unimagined.

Notes

1. I have drawn the concept of "interruption" from Magda Lewis's article "Interrupting patriarchy: Politics, resistance, and transformation in the feminist classroom" and from the ideas of Dennis Sumara and Brent Davis in "Interrupting heteronormativity: Toward a queer curriculum theory." In these articles, "interruption" is more than a delay or a pause in the continuity of action. It is a disruption, interference, a dislocation. Interruption implies a radical break with the past; events do not and cannot simply pick up where they left off, because the landscape has inalterably changed. <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/gap>
2. In *The Lion, the witch, and the wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis, a magical wardrobe contains within it the world of Narnia.
3. Information on Sumner Redstone, including the term "closely held company" came primarily from Redstone's biography on the Viacom Web site; his net worth came from the Forbes website. Information about Viacom came from the Viacom Web site.

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