

New media company favors relaxed learning; 6-year-olds and cell phones

Detroit is a media town, so it's no surprise that a new, child-friendly media company called Braincandy has been launched by a former Oakland County kid who now has her own children – and some definite ideas about educating them.

Sam Reich-Dagnen and her husband, Johnny, who live in Seattle, have developed a series of DVDs that seek to teach children without drilling them. *Braincandy*, *My Five Senses*, *Fingercandy* and *Eyecandy* build critical thinking skills by teaching children about themselves as they learn about the world, says Reich-Dagnen, who graduated from West Bloomfield High School in 1983 and from the University of Michigan in 1987 (with a double major in film, theory and production and photography).

After having twins four years ago, Reich-Dagnen says the couple started getting lots of DVDs for gifts. "We started to find really quickly a lot of content was focused on rote type of learning." The flash-card-style instruction plays on parents' pressure to raise smart kids, she believes. The real aha moment occurred, Reich-Dagnen says, when her daughter was 2 years old trying to learn the alphabet with flashcards.

"She got stuck on the letter Q, and she finally knocked the cards over and said, 'Mommy, I hate the letter Q.'"

"There is so much pressure and so much competitiveness. We really wanted to offer a product to parents focused on worrying less and playing more."

My Five Senses, for instance, teaches children about their senses in three ways: through puppets (Mojo Mouth, Ivy Eyes), animation, and showing "real kids doing real, sensory things," Reich-Dagnen says. She says the DVDs encourage interaction from kids instead of the "passive, fill-me-with-knowledge" approach.

The couple also recently sponsored a national survey, the Kids Media Report Card. They say results indicated that 60 percent of U.S. and Canadian parents rely on television and videos to provide educational content for their children, and 90 percent of parents recognize the importance of critical thinking skills for adults. But only 25 percent believed children's entertainment helps kids develop those skills.

That is a major mission of Braincandy, which was established in April 2004. "We're a teeny, little company" so far,

Reich-Dagnen says. But response to *My Five Senses* has been encouraging. The company's website, www.braincandykids.com, offers more information.