

It's, like, whatever

By Ruth Ostrow

"HEY dudes chill. We can like ... like go to her place."

"Yeah, like let's go now," say the girls standing in a group at the bus stop.

They are speaking Valley Talk, with accents that belong to United States West Coast surfer boys and Valley chicks - the shallow, the vacuous, the digitally enhanced but intellectually challenged - who use the word "like" as if it were a comma: "I feel like, I mean like, what I really wanna do is like ..."

Only they are not Valley girls. The bus-stop dudes are Australian-born tweenies so overdosed on shows like *The OC* and American video clips, they're actually beginning to speak the vernacular - and I read recently that the women of LA were appalled that their kids had started sounding like *The Wiggles!* Like Daaaaah?!

The scariest is the word "whatever" - said with hands on hips, in a long bored drawl - "whad...ever" - used in any part of the conversation for no apparent reason. Talk about Dumb and Dumber.

I'm a trier. I really am. I have dragged my family to Hippyville, downshifted, downsized. Our babysitter is a farmer and wildlife carer, my daughter knows how to rescue bats and can name the seven yogic chakras in Sanskrit - a prerequisite for living in Byron Bay.

But none of my best endeavours have helped because how can one woman single-handedly battle the advertising muscle of multinationals and fast-food chains that are turning us into Big Mac-eatin' Americans?

It doesn't help to turn off the tube because it permeates every medium. It's on billboards, in the music, in the water. The kids at school do it and it's so "coo-el" no-one can resist. Hell, I'm even doing it. When my close girlfriend said, "Like Daaaaah" the other day, we both glared at each other in shock. We don't even know what it means!

I'm not America-bashing. I loved living in the States in the '90s, and still drive around blasting my ears with African-American hip-hop music, which endlessly fascinates and excites me. I just want to see our own culture reflected in our children more. More Australian TV content, or at least a more even distribution of other cultures in mainstream media.

Let's be influenced by the whole world, let our kids explore Italian mannerisms, Indonesian accents, develop a penchant for French phrases, watch the Eurovision song contest. But cut the Valley talk. Because frankly, dudes, I am so, like, totally over it!

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