Academic Literature Review

The future of children's television programming

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Contents

Executive summary

This literature review examines the extent of academic research and debate in support of the need for a range of genres of children's programming and the need for UK-originated children's television.

This question is explored through academic literature from a range of subject areas – education, psychology, sociology, cultural and media studies – and from policy documents, some written by academics on behalf of government, broadcasting and regulatory organisations. This academic debate takes place within a broader context of discussions about children's rights, including their communications and media rights, as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Public service broadcasting (PSB) for children is generally defined as encompassing a broad range of programme genres, including factual, drama, entertainment, pre-school and animation, catering for different age groups, with the goal of helping children socially and preparing them for future citizenship, as well as offering relaxation and entertainment. PSB children's programmes have traditionally dealt with these issues in age-appropriate ways: programmes are clearly signposted as being for children, and broadcast at times when children are available to view.

There are some differences in the ways in which international research addresses these issues, with Americans being more concerned with protection and with overt education, and British, Commonwealth and European countries more concerned with the need for a range of genres.

The key findings from reviewing the literature are as follows:

The importance of a range of genres

Studies in this area suggest that children appreciate having a range of programme genres available to them and that individual favourite programmes are very divergent. Research in which children have developed their own imaginary schedules emphasises the need for a range of genres in order to be 'fair' to diverse audiences.

The benefits of having a range of genres for children, according to academic studies, come under three broad headings:

- learning;

- socialisation and citizenship; and

- personal fulfilment / identity.

Learning

Most research on learning concerns pre-schoolers, concentrating on their ability to derive linguistic and social skills, and information about the world, from programmes tailored for them. Research on younger and older children shows that learning is often incidental and informal for these age groups and entertainment programming, for example, offers social lessons, enjoyment, humour, peer-group interaction and opportunities to negotiate cultural identity so that learning is not restricted to factual programming or formal educational programming.

Socialisation and citizenship

It is well recognised through academic research that older children can learn useful social lessons from problem-related storylines in popular drama programming; they also draw on different generic forms and techniques to make critical distinctions between reality and fantasy.

There is also evidence that children value children's news and associated websites, particularly at times of crisis, conflict and danger. Children's news is currently offered only by the BBC's *Newsround*, but academic research on children and news is increasing in the UK and in Europe.

Personal fulfilment / identity

Research both with individual children (case studies) and with larger international groups of children shows that fun, excitement, humour and entertainment are important aspects of children's social and peer-group identities and facilitate social and cognitive skills.

The attitudes of parents and teachers have also been considered.

Attitudes of parents

Parents are seen in the academic literature both as individual consumers (on behalf of their children) and as political activists campaigning for 'quality' programming. Activism is particularly strong in the USA; parents have sought regulatory action, where necessary, to ensure enjoyable and informative programmes for their children. UK parents generally seem to support children's television and to approve of their children watching it, as do those in Australia and New Zealand, although there has been some parent activism in the UK in the past.

Attitudes of teachers

Surveys with pre-school teachers show an appreciation of special programmes for children from a diversity of sources, including feature length animations (e.g. *Finding Nemo*) and pre-school 'soaps' (such as *Balamory*). There is much evidence from studies on media education in schools that teachers around the world draw on a wide range of television formats and content to teach children communication and creative skills.

The importance of UK-originated programming

There is an increasing body of critical academic work about specific children's television programmes which indicates that children's broadcasting is seen as a significant component of British cultural life.

Empirical evidence from surveys suggests that children appreciate home-grown programming. For example, 'top tens' of children's programming are dominated by British-produced material.

The international policy debates on children's PSB focus strongly on the 'rights' of children (as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) to have access to indigenous programmes which reflect their own cultures. This is also seen as beneficial to individual countries' economies in which a thriving and competitive market in children's original production is seen as necessary to produce high-quality PSB criteria in programming.

Approach and methodology

This literature review examines the extent of academic debate in support of the need for a range of genres of children's programming and the need for UK-originated children's television.

Answers to this question have been sought through database and library searches and through official documents. Published research literature on children's television comes from diverse academic sources and this review accordingly draws on educational, psychological, sociological, cultural and historical academic research, and policy research commissioned by governments and official institutions, both in the UK and elsewhere (the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe).

Much of the research either examines the assumption that quality children's programming is necessary to benefit children educationally, socially and morally, or is based on concerns about violence and negative effects and ways of limiting children's access (for instance, the UK broadcasting watershed, or the US V Chip).

As required, this review focuses more on the need for, and the positive benefits of, a range of genres in children's programming and the need for UK-originated children's television. In general the research material reviewed here is drawn from the 1990s and 2000s, the most recent period of rapid technological change in broadcasting, but reference is also made to earlier studies, where relevant to the core question.

The review begins with an introductory discussion of the conceptual issues underlying academic discussions of children's media, and then addresses the main questions considering genre range and programme origin.

Context

1.1 Children's media rights

Public service broadcasting obligations to children have been defined by Farrel Corcoran (2004) as:

> to preserve a broad range of programming genres for children, within the mandate of informing, entertaining and educating, [in a way] that would address them as young citizens and introduce them in age-appropriate ways to the complexities of the world in which they grow up. (2004:161).

There are two primary sources of evidence and debate on the issue of genre range and programme origin in academic literature: first, discursive debate, both national and international, about the policy and regulation of children's broadcasting, including studies carried out by academics on behalf of governmental, broadcasting and regulatory bodies; this debate, in which producers and consumers are frequently seen to have common cause in their desire for high-quality children's programming, also includes contributions by broadcasters themselves, either in published form, (e.g. Home 1993, Corcoran, 2004), or as speakers at conferences (e.g. Bennett, 2007). The second major source of evidence is empirical studies on the reception of specific television material by children and their parents.

The benefits of television (in terms of learning, pro-social attitudes, preparation for school) have been more extensively studied with pre-school than with school-age children: see for instance the large number of studies on *Sesame Street*, starting with Lesser's classic work in 1974, reviewed more recently by Franklin et al, (2001); see also several sections in the edited volume by Asamen and Berry, (1998), on television and social behaviour; and the extensive recent survey on pre-school children's media use carried out at Sheffield University (Marsh et al, 2005).

This limitation of academic research to just one genre inevitably limits discussion of the benefits of 'a range of genres' – although pre-school television, within the limitations of the age group, is actually very diverse, ranging from drama to factual, animation to entertainment. In their review of the BBC's digital children's services, Patrick Barwise and Máire M. Davies pointed out: "CBeebies has amply fulfilled its commitment to deliver a mixed schedule, particularly in light of the mini-genres (storytelling, arts and crafts, drama, original animation) contained within many programmes on the channel."(2004:19).

Studies relating to the policy issues of provision, public subsidy and regulation are inseparable from audience studies on this topic. This is because public service children's programming exists only when a prior decision has been taken, usually with governmental authorisation, and with some public funding, to produce and broadcast such programmes in the first place. *Sesame Street* in the US (produced by Sesame Workshop, for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting) and the BBC and ITV in Britain (see Buckingham et al's History of Children's Broadcasting in Britain, 1999) are cases in point.

1.2 UN Rights of the Child and international debate

The academic policy debate is expressed in a context, both governmental and academic, in which the needs and rights of children, including their communication and media rights, are

seen as a matter of global political concern. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf./erc.pdf), formulated in 1989 and ratified by all but two of the 191 countries of the world, has a number of Articles concerning children's media and communication. Article 17 requires the State to encourage "the role of the media in disseminating information to children that is consistent with moral well-being and knowledge and understanding among peoples, and respects the child's cultural background, and to protect children from harmful materials." It also requires that mass media should: "disseminate information . . . from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources'; and attend to the 'linguistic needs of minority and indigenous children".

Dafna Lemish (2007), an Israeli media scholar, summarises how such policies are generally applied: "Policies in this realm are directed at limiting broadcast hours of such content [anti-social behaviour] to parts of the day when children are supposedly not around television . . . Complementary content-related policies are directed toward the encouragement of broadcasting quality programs for children that have an added educational and social value." (2007:198) She discusses the Children's Television Act 1990, in the USA, as an example of such regulation, requiring broadcasters to televise programmes of educational and informative value for children, as a prerequisite for the renewal of broadcast licences.

1.3   Public policy debate behind children's programming

Academic discussions of policy on children's broadcast provision in the USA, where there is no long-standing tradition of special, protected provision for children within the main networks, suggest that in a purely market-driven system, children's broadcast media needs cannot be guaranteed. These issues have been extensively addressed by Dale Kunkel and his collaborators (Kunkel, 1998; Kunkel, 1990; Kunkel and Wilcox, 2001; Kunkel and Gantz, 1992; Kunkel and Roberts, 1991; Kunkel and Goette, 1997). They have also been the subject of official policy reviews in the UK, some conducted by academics, commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the ITC and Ofcom. There is a difference between American policy concerns, very much focussed on violence, health issues and excessive commercialism, and expressing anxiety about a purely consumerist model of the child, and British, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and European models, with their stronger public service broadcasting traditions, seeing the child as a 'citizen in the making' and putting greater value on publicly-mandated range and diversity of generic provision, including entertainment. The polarity between consumer and citizen is hard to sustain in reality, both American and European research traditions emphasise the second of Lemish's two functions: "the encouragement of broadcasting quality programs for children that have an added educational and social value." (2007:198)

The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's report, *KidzTV* (1991), traces its regulatory structure to the "numerous submissions from parents and teachers concerned about the predicted preponderance of American programs on Australian television" and concerns about violence and commercialism (1991:333). As a result, its policy position statement asserts that "it was part of the public interest responsibility of commercial television licensees to provide . . . quality, age specific comprehensive programs geared to children's special cognitive abilities and experiences . . . Children, like adults, are entitled to a viewing choice . . and to the diversity of ideas and information that is central to broadcasting policy." (1991:333)

In addition to emphasising range of genre, the ABT report emphasised generic diversity, and the particular importance of home-grown drama for cultural identity: "'The Tribunal further noted that children's drama would play a positive role in developing an Australian cultural identity and at the same time children's drama production would contribute to the employment opportunities for Australian performers, writers/creators, producers etc and add another dimension to the Australian television production industry" (ibid: 350) In its survey of children's viewing habits, it noted the specificity of very local appeal: "local programs

(*Wombat* in Brisbane and *Ridgey Didge* in Melbourne) had greater appeal than programs from elsewhere in Australia" (ibid: 485)

1.4   The importance of television

A range of studies recognise that television is more important than other media primarily because of its universal accessibility to all classes, ages and types of children. As Buckingham et al (2004) pointed out in their review of academic literature for Ofcom's review of media literacy: "among the barriers to media literacy are several inter-related factors of which social class and economic status are the most well established. These barriers limit children's access to the internet although not to established media such as radio or television." (2004:3). Livingstone and Bovill (1999) found that, in contrast to other media usage, virtually all (99%) of their sample of 1,303 children watched television regularly, compared with 19% using the internet. These figures are of course higher now. Livingstone and Bober, in a more recent 2005 review, found that 41% of 9-19 year olds are daily users of the internet, but the youngest (9-11) and the oldest (18-19) plus disabled and poorer children, were less likely to use it. Ofcom's *Media Literacy Review* (2006) noted that television is still the most popular medium with children watching 13.9 hours a week and children in lower income groups watching more (15.5 hours). Although viewing is fragmenting across channels, and children have increasing access to a range of other electronic media such as computer games, the internet and portable electronic devices, research indicates the medium appears still to be a secure part of their cultural 'diet.'

Similar findings have been produced elsewhere. In a 2005 study carried out by Lealand and Zanker in New Zealand (forthcoming in *Journal of Children and Media*) with 860 8-13 year olds of mixed class, gender and race, children's use of diverse media including television, computers, radio and mobile phones, was examined. The researchers found that there was consistency in reported levels of daily television viewing across all phases of their research, with 77% in 1999 and 76.8% in 2002 being daily viewers. They comment: "This suggests that claims of a decline of this long-established medium may not hold true for New Zealand children, at least." The study found that younger members of many New Zealand households (between 19% and 40%) had individual access to a wide range of media (radio, television, computers, mobile phones) for use in their own time and spaces. Nevertheless, the authors noted that "students without access to newer media forms (especially digital or portable media) were still the majority in 2005."

The need for a range of genres in children's programming

Academic studies focusing on the 'benefits' of genre diversity can be summarised under the following headings:

- learning;

- socialisation and citizenship; and

- evidence of enjoyment/personal fulfilment.

In this section, evidence for these benefits from a variety of programming types is summarised, together with sections on parents' and teachers' views of children's television.

2.1   Critical studies of specific programmes

The traditional range of genres and types of children's programming – drama, game shows, different forms of animation, children's 'soaps', comedy, fantasy, storytelling – have begun to stimulate critical analyses of specific children's programmes, in the way that literary academic writing has long focused on particular literary texts. This expanding sub-category is indicative of a greater scholarly awareness of, and respect for, the cultural value of children's television. Publications in this field include *Small Screens* (ed Buckingham, 2002); *In Front of the Children* (eds Bazalgette and Buckingham, 1995); *The TV Genre Book* (ed Creeber, 2001); *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives*, (eds Lacey and Bignell, 2005); *Turning the page: children's literature in performance*, (eds Ridgman. and Collins, 2006), and a special edition of the journal *Screen*, based on a conference on children and screen media in Glasgow in 2005 (Screen, 46, 3, Autumn 2005). Academic studies of children and media, as mentioned, have tended to focus on audience research, or policy issues: critical studies represent a new direction in academic writing, very much stimulated by the diversity of programme types, writing, production techniques and different types of representation found in children's programming. (See also Kleeman, 2001, on the diversity of programming in the international Prix Jeunesse).

2.2   Learning

2.2.1   Defining learning

Research suggests that some learning from television comes about as a result of intentional instruction, teaching skills such as letters, numbers, concepts and factual information, especially in the case of pre-school programming. But much learning from television – as well as from other experiences – is incidental and dependent on children's own selective attention. Children pay selective attention to different programmes, not only according to taste and interest, but also according to the programme's appropriateness to their stage of development. Anderson and Pempek found that children aged 12 to 24 months paid higher levels of attention to *Teletubbies*, a programme aimed at their age group, than to *Sesame Street*, a programme for slightly older children (2005: 510). *Teletubbies*, controversial when it was first created because it was one of the first UK programmes aimed at under-threes, attracts high levels of active attention "with singing, dancing, pointing, imitating behaviours,

speaking back to the television and generally reacting enthusiastically with great joy" according to Lemish, (2007: 46).

Diverse forms of television can also facilitate what Hodge and Tripp (1986) have called 'modality judgements' – the ability to distinguish between different levels of reality. Davies (1997) found that children aged between 6 and 12 employed a large number of generic markers, such as "it's comedy"; "it's a fairy tale"; "it's for little kids", to identify different levels of reality, realism and fantasy. Modality markers for judging the degrees of reality of different material included: 'acting' (only permissible in drama and comedy programmes); 'special effects' (seen as appropriate for fantasy shows, not for news); 'camera movements' (used possibly misleadingly in advertising to make products attractive); simple animation (OK for 'little kids', less so for themselves). The wider the range of genres, and of production techniques, the more opportunities are offered to children to make these necessary critical distinctions.

A number of studies, which show how young children's language acquisition can benefit from age-appropriate television programmes with specific educational purposes for 3-5 year olds, are summarised by Kondo (2007). These studies are based on a variety of programmes and programme types: *Sesame Street* (Lemish and Rice, 1986; Rice et al 1990; Wright et al, 2001); *Blue's Clues, Dora the Explorer, Arthur and Clifford* (Linebarger and Walker, 2005); *Barney and Friends.* (Singer and Singer, 1998); *Pokemon* (Bromley, 2004). *Sesame Street*, which has been on the air since the 1960s, enabled some long-term follow-up studies with high school students which showed apparent lasting effects and higher grades among those who had watched the show as young children. (Anderson et al, 2001; Huston, et al, 2001). Uchikoshi (2005) found differences in responses to different production techniques: the effects of the pre-school programme *Arthur* on the narrative skills of Spanish-speaking English language learners in a kindergarten group led to greater and more rapid improvement than those in a control group who saw a different show, *Between the Lions*. *Between the Lions*, "instead of focusing on the narrative . . . puts more weight on text structure, individual words and other print features". (2005:466). This study found "viewing *Arthur* assisted in the development of the children's extended discourse" whereas *Between the Lions* did not (2005:474).

In an article about the American situation, "Policy battles over defining children's educational television", Kunkel (1998) outlines the US criteria for 'educational' programming – none specifying particular genres or programme titles. To qualify as an 'educational programme' it must:

- have education as its significant purpose;

- the educational purpose and target audience must be specified in writing in the station's children's programming report;

- it must be aired between 6 am and 11 pm and regularly scheduled;

- it must also be of at least 15 minutes in length; and

- it must be identified as children's educational programming at the time it is aired (1998:49-50).

In Britain the distinction between entertainment and education, as Kondo (2007) points out, is less obvious, and such detailed attempts at defining 'educational children's programming' have not been made, although 'educational value' was one of the criteria required in the Barwise and Davies review of the BBC's digital children's channels (ibid: 2004). In this

review learning was very broadly defined as anything that was factual, instructive, explanatory and/or socially useful; it could be any kind of genre, including original drama.

But Kunkel also acknowledges the industry's self-justification that children learn from entertainment as well as specifically educational programming, a point also made by British academics. However, as Kondo (2007) notes: "there is very little existing research concerning the potential beneficial impact of children's entertainment programming, and even less research that relates to British experiences and British programmes, where the categories of education and entertainment are often blurred." (2007:2).

2.2.2 Evidence of support by parents

Ofcom's *2007 PSB Annual Report* noted that the BBC channels, both terrestrial and digital, and Five, were all rated highly by parents "on delivering almost all the PSB purposes and characteristics in children's programming." (2007:8)[1] A number of academic studies have also been carried out on parents' individual attitudes to children and television, the most extensive being Marsh et al at (Sheffield University, 2005). This found that parents of children under 6 were positive about the educational benefits of high-quality children's television for pre-schoolers, with 79% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that television helped their child's language development (Marsh et al 2005: 33). Parents described children as 'actively engaged' with television content, singing, dancing, copying characters' actions, shouting out answers and role-playing stories. (Marsh, 2005: 27). Pre-school children's favourite programmes had a wide generic range (*Tweenies, Balamory, Big Cook, Little Cook, Dora the Explorer, Scooby Doo, Bob the Builder, The Fimbles, Noddy, Come Outside, Teletubbies*). There are also a number of studies on the role of parents as citizens as well as consumers, taking organised political action to ensure that television served the diverse educational and emotional needs of their children (Pecora et al, 2007; Clark's 2004 account of Action for Children's Television - ACT; Trotta, 2001; Walsh et al, 1998). Such activism is most highly developed in the USA, although Corcoran (2004) noted parental success in opposing legal action by Nickelodeon against the German PSB children's channel, Kinderkanal in 1997, which led to Nickelodeon pulling out of the German market. There has also been some parental activism on behalf of PSB programming in the UK (British Action for Children's Television, and the Voice of the Listener and Viewer).

2.2.3 Attitudes of teachers

The Marsh 2005 study surveyed early-years practitioners and found that 92% of them agreed or strongly agreed that children learn from television, 67% disagreed that it was harmful for children's language development, and 83% felt that children watched too much (2005: 48). The use of shows such as *Bob the Builder, Spiderman, Balamory* and *Finding Nemo* as learning materials was found to have a positive impact on children's oral development, especially for children without English as a first language (c.f. Uchikoshi's 2005 *Arthur* study.) The teachers found this useful: "we never thought of developing activities around media so I think we will do that more and more as we have seen how children relate to it. "(Marsh et al 2005: 61-2). Davies (2001) found that the teachers whose classes participated in the various scheduling exercises carried out as part of the *Dear BBC* research were highly appreciative of the educational value of requiring children to act collaboratively as schedulers, censors and regulators. The success of these procedures depended on children having a very wide knowledge of different television programmes and genres, and a well-developed sense of different audience needs, in order to carry out the tasks. Many teachers were not aware of how knowledgeable children were about all forms of television. On the other hand, media education in schools is now well established in many

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[1] According to p 12 of the Ofcom review these are: informing our understanding of the world; stimulating knowledge and learning; reflecting UK cultural identity; representing diversity and alternative viewpoints.

countries of the world and there is a considerable body of academic literature on this topic: see the international overview edited by Kubey (2001); Hobbs (2001); and the pioneering UK work of e.g. Masterman (1985); Alvarado, Gutch and Wollen (1988) and Cary Bazalgette and others in the Education Department of the British Film Institute (Bazalgette, 1988; 2001).

2.2.4   Australian findings

Australia has been particularly concerned to consult both children and parents in formulating broadcasting policy. The nation-wide study carried out by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal in 1991 on 'C time' – the period between 4.00 and 6.00 pm allocated to children's programming, with 50% of C programming required to come from Australian production houses - asserts that "children have particular and special needs in relation to television and that they are entitled to be provided with quality, age-specific and comprehensive programs geared to their special cognitive abilities and experiences... Children, like adults, are entitled to the diversity of ideas and information that is central to broadcasting policy." (1991: 281).

2.3   Socialisation and citizenship

2.3.1   Socialisation

As Ofcom's PSB purposes and characteristics (including 'understanding the world'; 'representing diversity and alternative viewpoints') would indicate, television for children has traditionally been expected to provide social lessons and to prepare them for adult society. The extensive body of academic writing on television's negative effects (e.g. Winn, 2002) also rests on an assumption of television's powerful social influence. There are useful summaries of television and children's socialisation in Lemish (2007) and Zillman et al, (1994). In the UK, there has been less concern about the negative effects and more research on the positive aspects of socialisation. For example, in the study: *Young people, media and personal relationships* (2003), Buckingham and Bragg discussed with children and young people aged between 9 and 14 years old how their television viewing influenced their attitudes to sexuality. Drama was seen as particularly helpful in provoking such discussion and among the programmes used in the study, there was one example of children's drama – *Grange Hill* (BBC1, independently produced by Mersey Television, now Lime Pictures). Discussions of this programme among the 9 -10 year old age group focused on a storyline about a sexual relationship between two sixth-formers, which appeared to be consensual, but which then led to accusations of rape; no definite conclusions were drawn in the story about who was 'right'. The authors of the study comment: "while some children read the message as a straightforward warning . . . others perceived it as more complex and ambivalent. The programme 'worked' pedagogically because it enabled the children . . . to empathise with the characters' dilemmas rather than simply offering warnings." (2003:57). The use of the term 'pedagogical' is interesting because, unlike PBS American programmes dealing with health and social issues (e.g. *Zoom*), *Grange Hill* is not an education programme and has no overt pedagogic or curriculum-related goals. The children's responses here are an example of 'incidental' social learning. The fact that *Grange Hill* was locally culturally specific may also have made its social 'lessons' more compelling and relevant to these children.

In Marsh et al's 2005 report on pre-school children's use of popular culture, media and new technologies, parents identified various pro-social behaviours in their children including "social interaction, consideration of others, how to deal with situations" (2005:36). In this study parents were able to identify examples of pro-social behaviour learned from television, which linked to criteria from the foundation stage curriculum, such as maintaining attention, learning to sit still and being sensitive to the needs and views of others (Marsh et al: 2005: 35-36). Davies and Machin (2000) found strong pro-social influences in the ways in which 7-13 year old children constructed schedules for other children, with 'fairness', 'something for

everyone' and concern for protecting the vulnerability of 'little kids' being primary considerations; this was despite being prompted by the research task to bear in mind commercial considerations. When asked to cut their schedules because "their channel was losing money", they invariably ended up making their final choice on pro-social grounds, rather than on what might be profitable.

2.3.2 Citizenship and news

David Buckingham (2000), in a study of children's and young people's relationships with news in the US and UK, states the function of news as: 'how television addresses and constitutes the viewer as a citizen and as a potential participant in the public sphere of social and political debate."(2000:35). He argues that: "these questions are even more acute in relation to young people and to news programmes specifically for them." (2000:35). There are now a number of news programmes for children in different parts of the world, particularly in Europe (see Davies, 2007, for a review of these). Pre-dating them by decades was the world's first children's news programme, starting in 1972, the BBC's daily bulletin, *Newsround*. This programme remains a model for producers in other countries, and it remains popular with UK children.

After the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001 and the subsequent Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the issue of what children were learning about national and international conflict became one of acute concern to a number of scholars of children and the media. The International Central Institute of Youth and Educational Television (IZI) held a special seminar of international scholars in Munich, as part of the Prix Jeunesse, in June 2004; the material produced here formed the basis for a special issue of *Televizion* (ed Goetz, 2004), in which scholars from the US, UK, Germany, Holland, Israel, Egypt and Austria discussed news coverage of, and children's responses to, these events. A recently-published book was further developed from these discussions: *Children, media and conflict in time of war*, edited by Lemish and Goetz (2007).

Buckingham's 2000 study tended to confirm the view that children and young people were not particularly interested in news media. As the research in Lemish and Goetz's book indicates, the events of September 11th 2001 and the subsequent wars appear to have changed this. The IZI seminar and subsequent publications indicated how much children turn to news programmes in their various countries for information and reassurance about what is going on in the world, especially at moments of world-wide crisis. At a VLV seminar in November 2001, *Newsround* producers pointed out that their website 'hits' went up from 200 to 2000 a week after 9/11.

Programme-related websites continue to be an important source of information, sharing of views, and outlets for comment for children (see Carter, 2004, 2007) in the continuingly unstable state of the world. Studies of children's responses to news after 9/11 carried out in the UK by Carter et al (e.g. *'After September 11',* 2002), indicated a high level of use, knowledge and engagement among children over issues arising from war and conflict, but also – and particularly – a sensitivity to, and indignation about, the negative and dismissive ways in which children themselves were covered in the news; they were too often seen as passive 'victims' or conversely, as one child put it, 'hoolagins', (Davies, 2005).

The role of children's news bulletins, such as *Newsround*, and other children's factual and serious drama programmes which address socio-political issues, would seem to be more than ever essential in "how television addresses and constitutes the viewer as a citizen and as a potential participant in the public sphere of social and political debate." (Buckingham, ibid: 35). The providers of this kind of material around the world continue primarily to be PSB broadcasters, but the case for plurality of information sources made in the Television Without

Frontiers provisions for adult news, would appear to hold for children too. At present no commercial PSB or satellite/cable broadcaster in Britain provides news for children.

2.4   Enjoyment and personal fulfilment

2.4.1   Enjoyment

Hannah Davies et al (2000), at London University's Institute of Education, in a qualitative study with London primary-school children, found that children's enthusiasm for 'silly', vulgar, action-packed, colourful material of the kind produced for Saturday morning children's magazines and cartoons, was a form of 'identity work' – an assertion of their own tastes and an independence from those of adults. In Australia Palmer (1986) explored positive socialisation skills, prompted by television, with over 800 Australian primary school children, and argued that the 'fun' and 'excitement' factors of children's relationship with the medium were crucial outcomes of children's entertainment and other programming and enabled creative peer-group social interaction in a variety of ways. M. M. Davies (1989, 2nd edition 2001), reviewed positive research outcomes on children's play, learning, social attitudes and imagination, prompted by a variety of genres available on UK television including children's news, adult news, schools programming, magazine programming, art and craft programming, comedy, soap opera, film, drama and music.

These kinds of studies, privileging children's own tastes and responses, do not characterise children, in the words of American Cultural Studies scholar Marsha Kinder, "as timeless, innocent victims who desperately need to be protected from popular culture. Rather they are seen as historically situated participants who actively collaborate in the production of cultural meanings." (199:26). In *Playing with Power* (1991) Kinder celebrated the enjoyment demonstrated by her own 8 year old son of television, movies and video games and the intertextual connections between them: "the history of entertainment is driven by the pleasure principle – the alleviation of boredom and the pursuit of control and mastery" (1991:1). A similar celebratory approach to children's entertainment tastes was taken by British author Gerard Jones (2002) in *Killing Monsters: why children need fantasy, super heroes and make-believe violence*, which robustly defends children's attraction to violent stories, again with reference to his own son. Close analysis of individual children (as with Kinder and Jones) can provide detailed qualitative insights into children's media experiences, but larger-scale studies with more representative samples of children are also necessary to address policy concerns.

2.4.2   Children's tastes and preferences

Where there have been relatively few large-scale studies with socially representative groups of children about television use, there is evidence that British children favour a range of genres. For instance, Livingstone and Bovill (1999) noted: "There is considerable diversity among children's favourite programmes. The most popular (*Eastenders*) is named by only 18% of the sample". They identified 13 different genres in children's favourite programmes. (1999:10).

In an analysis of BARB viewing figures published by the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the ITC in 2003 (*What Children Watch*) Atwal et al noted that the top programmes for children in 2002 (including adults' programming) encompassed drama, entertainment, situation comedy, feature films, sport, soap opera and – reflecting that it was a World Cup year – several World Cup matches (2003: 57). Top children's programmes in 2002 included the following genres: news, factual, magazine, animation, drama and 'light entertainment' – a category, like animation, covering a multitude of diverse programming. The authors comment:

> "In general all children like to watch a variety of programmes.
> Watching anything for too long becomes boring. . . they value
> diversity in programming, something which is underpinned by the
> viewing figures which show top programmes". (2003:89)

Davies (2001), in a study with 1,332 6 to 12 year olds in England and Wales, used a variety of methodologies, including questionnaires to all children, and qualitative tasks which required children to make choices based not just on their own preferences but on what they thought would be desirable for other children. When small groups of children were asked to role-play 'programme controllers' and to construct schedules of six to eight programmes from 32 different programme titles (including the option of adding titles of their own) they came up with lists such as the following: *Top of the Pops*, (BBC, adult, popular music) *Rugrats*, (children's animation, Klasky-Csupo/Viacom, USA, broadcast on BBC); *Home and Away* (adult soap opera, Australia, broadcast on ITV), *Blue Peter* (children's live magazine show, BBC), *Slot Meithrin* (preschool, broadcast by S4C) *EastEnders* (adult soap opera, BBC1), *Live and Kicking* (children's magazine, BBC1), and *Ren and Stimpy* (adult animation, USA, then broadcast on C4). This list, from a group of Welsh 12-year-olds, represents both range of genre and plurality of provenance.

'Fair for everyone' was a much-repeated slogan by the children in this study: range and diversity of genre was seen as necessary in order to reflect diversity of audience. These comments indicated a strong pro-social and civic-minded influence in the children's judgements, and also echo adult arguments in favour of market plurality and diversity of programme sources.

In 2005, the market research company, MediaCom, asked children in four different age groups (junior boys; junior girls; senior boys; senior girls) about their favourite and most-watched programmes with a view to determining their attitudes to home-grown and imported programming. Fourteen different titles were mentioned as favourites and genres included animation, - both children's (*Spongebob Squarepants*) and adults' (*The Simpsons*) - , children's drama, sport, reality game shows, adult drama, soap opera, car documentaries and situation comedy.

In general, whether the research is academic, government-sponsored or market-sponsored, the findings support each other: children watch, enjoy and register appreciation of a very wide range of genres, both on their own behalf and on behalf of other children. Their most favourite programmes will include dozens of different titles; there is great individual variation in people's favourites, among adults as well as children (see Pearson and Davies, 2005). There is evidence of enjoyment, identity formation, cognitive skills, language benefits and social learning from these studies.

2.4.3 International studies: humour and imagination

Work carried out at the International Central Institute of Youth and Educational Television (IZI) in Munich, regularly focuses on the benefits of entertainment media for children, using larger-scale audience studies. A recent international IZI study on what children find funny, with over 400 8-12 year olds in Germany, USA, South Africa, UK, Ireland and Israel (Goetz et al, 2005), found similarities in what children found amusing across a range of humorous programming from each country. Physical comedy such as slapstick produced universal laughter, but there were also local variations in the children's responses, arising from linguistic and cultural differences; for instance a war film parody in a Wallace and Gromit sequence was not understood in South Africa, although it produced some lively analytic responses from British and Irish children. These findings, presented at the 2006 Prix Jeunesse, were seen as useful for children's entertainment producers, indicating that genres such as comedy may need to be locally specific to be fully understood; some jokes do not

travel, and this was an argument for locally produced programming for children. Another research project from IZI (Goetz et al, 2005) reviewed the positive contribution of television and media to children's imagination and fantasy in four countries: the USA, Germany, Israel and Korea, with a sample of 193 8-10 year old children. The researchers found a considerable diversity of media influences in the stories and drawings children produced, which the authors argued were primarily beneficial. The book concludes with a direct challenge from the academic community to media producers: [they] "have a responsibility to offer children texts and characters that open up possibilities for experimenting with a wide range of roles and plots that are not constrained by gender, race and other common stereotypes and that are characterised by diverse interests and issues of concern for children." (2005:203)

These studies provide an evidential base for children's responses to entertainment programming on which producers of children's material can draw. Such applied research may be partly funded by the industry (as in IZI's case, by the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation) which means that findings will be specifically presented in order to inform children's production, rather than to contribute to general theoretical, academic concerns. Research on negative effects is more likely to be sponsored by academic and governmental research funding sources with an intended policy outcome, although there are exceptions to this, particularly when it comes to parental campaigns demanding quality programming for children (as discussed).

2.5   Conclusions: range of genre and its benefits

There is a range of evidence suggesting that variety in terms of genre is beneficial, and preferred, by children, parents and teachers, both as citizens and consumers. In addition to formal learning of concepts, language skills and so on, particularly on the part of pre-schoolers, the benefits cited include the social effect of television in providing children with communication skills with which to interact with their peers. Television not only encourages children to develop understanding of narrative structures and character conventions, it also encourages them to try out 'new' social roles and identities (Marsh et al 2005; H. Davies et al, 2000). The general arguments, which suggest that media inform other activities, help to negotiate identities, and contribute to social interaction (Suess et al 1998) further support this case. Similarly, there is plentiful evidence that children of different age groups and different backgrounds tend to watch different programmes and that there is great diversity in their 'favourite' programmes. This suggests that children are negotiating programmes differently and that genre choice is necessary to facilitate this.

The benefits of UK-originated content for children

3.1   Introduction

In this section, evidence for the benefits of UK-originated content is drawn both from research about children's preferences and from academic discussion of the needs and rights of children to have their own cultural backgrounds represented in their media. This discussion takes place in a number of countries throughout the world.

The emphasis on the needs of 'indigenous' children has been used by policy makers in the area of children's television in different countries around the world to 'defend' their schedules against encroachment by imported, predominantly American-sourced children's material; for instance, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's report, *Kidz TV*, (1991), notes "widespread community concern about the lack of good quality, age-specific children's programs produced in Australia." (1991:282). Similarly, in South Africa, *Kids News* was set up in 2004, with production funded by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, to address specific problems of South African children who "have been and continue to be abused, tortured mistreated, neglected and abandoned." (Hlongwane-Papo, 2007:2). Arguments for indigenous programming have also been used in the UK both by consumer groups and producers, for example, Anna Home, former head of the BBC's Children's Department: "Children need to hear their own cultural voice . . . their own books, their own customs, their own cultural background, their own history. [If they don't] they just lose the past." (Davies and O'Malley, 1996: 139). More recently, (July 2007) Jana Bennett, Director BBC Vision, in a speech to a conference on children's media, claimed: "We play a key role in preparing and equipping British children for the lives they are going to lead. . . a storehouse of skills and knowledge that stays for life. . . an important element of common experience, part of the social glue that keeps a generation together."

The New Zealand Broadcasting Authority report: *The younger audience: children and broadcasting in New Zealand* (2001) - states as its rationale: "The role and influence of media in the lives of children are ongoing sources of political and academic debates [which] . . . reflect a commitment both to educate children and to regulate their media experiences." (2001:11). Such documents establish the provision of children's media within the realm of public policy and legislation around the world.

3.2   UK children's preferences

There is much empirical evidence of children's preference for home-grown programming. In *What Children Watch* (Atwal et al, 2003), the tables showing the most popular programmes with children in 2002, according to BARB viewing figures, indicate a preference for home-grown programming, especially in the overall category of 'children's'. In the top ten children's programmes none, apart from the feature film *Snow White*, came from outside the UK. In the overall 'top ten' list, which included adults' programming, some were of non-UK origin: these were mainly films. The inference can be made that, given the choice, children do prefer home-grown children's programming, despite the fact that viewing figures are now fragmenting across the multi-channel universe provided by the 20+ different children's channels available in the UK, which makes it harder to track specific preferences through audience data. The MediaCom 2005 research found that nine out of the top ten children's shows were British, with one (*Arthur*) of Canadian provenance.

The quotes from children selected as typical by the market research carried out by MediaCom (2005) include: "kids are seeing too much of the American lifestyle and not enough of what's happening on their own doorsteps." "They [home-grown shows] have understanding of the British culture and sense of humour." Children also showed an awareness of commercial aspects, and the economic benefits of a healthy, indigenous media industry – another aspect of media literacy as defined by Buckingham et al (2004): "It is good that British programmes are made because it creates jobs." "They are important because they showcase young talent from the UK".

The majority of children were able to tell the difference between UK and US shows, with home-grown drama (*Tracey Beaker*) being particularly strongly identified as British by 83% of all children. Seventy-two per cent of all children aged 8 to 16 thought it was important to have UK shows made for them; reasons given indicated an awareness of what Farrel Corcoran (2004), writing about the Irish public broadcaster RTE, refers to as 'cultural discount', in which: "the audience appeal of a programme or film diminishes as it crosses national boundaries. This translates economically into a percentage reduction in potential value to the exhibitor or distributor. . . arising from a substantially decreased ability [in the audience] to identify with the style, values, beliefs, history, myths institutions, physical environment and behavioural patterns embedded in the foreign content". (2004: 158)

Corcoran, himself a former executive with RTE, now a professor of media and communication at Dublin City University, defends PSB for children because "only a broadcasting system with a public service remit can provide the necessary infrastructure for producing a broad range of television programming for children" (2004:161). He argues that "severe damage has already been done to the infrastructure across Europe in a number of ways." (ibid: 161) and regrets that the Irish green paper on broadcasting, in 1995, had no public debate informing its chapter on children and broadcasting.

3.3   International debate on indigenous programming

The issue of home-grown programming and 'resistance' to imported material predominantly from the US, which, in order to maximise its international marketability, "contains characters and messages that are, at best, simply not relevant to local cultures and at worst convey violent images and mass marketing messages", (Gigli, 2004:4), is of ongoing concern to international television scholars. David Kleeman (2001), in an article on the Prix Jeunesse, comments: "Within many countries children's television fails to represent adequately the diverse makeup of its audience . . . A country that extends and cherishes childhood will create very different programming than a country whose young people are expected to assume adult roles early on. A nation with rich and competitive media resources . . . will probably devote more attention to the entertainment value of its programming than will a place with fewer options. Tastes, traditions and taboos all contribute to the style and substance of a country's children's television". (2001: 521-523)

Kodaira, a Japanese researcher, in a 2005 review of children's television trends around the world, describes a key issue as one of 'cultural invasion' of imported programmes, mostly of American origin, which has actually become greater with the increase of dedicated children's channels. She credits the United Kingdom as "being quick to perceive the potential dangers" and cites the analyses by Blumler (1992) and Davies and Corbett (1997), commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Commission, which showed that, as more channels were introduced, so the proportions of imported animation increased and factual programming declined, thereby "undermining the cherished variety in British children's programming". (2005:107). She also praises the BBC's digital channels, especially CBeebies, and notes that as early as its first year (2002) "CBeebies was the most viewed of all 17 children's channels available in the United Kingdom." CBBC was tenth, but had "climbed to fifth place by the following year." (ibid: 109). Kodaira's article gives a detailed analysis of several

countries' provision, including the UK, Germany and Japan, and also a useful analysis of many different genres in different countries; she stresses the importance of international movements, such as the World Summit, and international awards such as the Prix Jeunesse (Germany) and the Japan Prize (Japan), in sustaining diversity and quality in children's programming. Here, international interchange and mutual support is seen as a prerequisite for defending local, indigenous production and provision.

Gigli, (2004) in a report compiled for UNICEF, stresses the importance of diversity of content as well as local relevance. She emphasises the importance of factual programming for "youth in countries with widespread poverty, corruption, political turmoil and or disease [who] seek realistic, relevant and meaningful content to help them understand and cope with hardships." (2004: 9) This requires the kind of news and factual programming which, without some public service obligation, it seems that commercial broadcasters do not provide. As noted, in the UK, the BBC's *Newsround* is the sole provider of children's news, after the closure of Channel 4's *First Edition* in 2003 and of Nickelodeon's *Nick News*. Yet for adults, plurality of news provision, with no one broadcaster having a monopoly of public information is seen as highly desirable. (See, for instance, Doyle, 2002; Bruck et al, 2002). The case for competition and plurality of supply on behalf of children's programming has been put by the Director of BBC Vision, Jana Bennett (2007): "there is no slackening of the BBC's commitment to this audience. But this isn't just about the BBC. It's about plurality of supply and plurality of commissioning. The BBC doesn't want to become anything like a monopoly. It's not good for us. Competition keeps us sharp." However, this discourse of market competitiveness and plurality in strengthening PSB for children has not so far appeared to any great extent in the academic literature.

For Kleeman, (2001) the value of the international Prix Jeunesse is that it "displays on equal footing programs from countries with massive and well-funded media industries and those from places with few resources." (ibid: 524). He points out that in Denmark, a frequent winner of the prize, Danmarks Radio makes 340 hours per year of programming on an annual budget of around $15m ("less than the cost of some single high-budget series in the USA": 2001: 525), to make 'cheap and fascinating' programs, attracting 50 to 65% of the 8-12 year old audience. These programmes are 'singularly Danish or, at times, more broadly Scandinavian' although their crews do travel to other parts of the world annually to provide a broader, international perspective for their audience. International professional competition and celebration are seen to be essential ingredients for fostering national and local uniqueness.

3.4   Conclusion: genre choice, cultural identity and local production

Research shows that once the benefits for genre choice are established – in terms of television providing socio-cultural identity signifiers and equipping children with educational, popular and social skills – then the argument for region- and nation-specific television becomes stronger. Support for locally-originated content is linked to support for 'quality' television. Providing children with the means to interact socially with peers implies socio-culturally specific elements, of the kind found in locally-produced realistic drama, news and magazine programming. In the UK, this has also been discussed specifically in relation to the production of indigenous language programmes in Wales and Northern Ireland (Ofcom, 2005: 48) which suggests the importance attached to providing local, regional and national choice. There is also evidence that local specificity applies to some forms of comedy, as in the international study on humour carried out by Goetz et al (2005). Despite general appreciation among children in all six countries of slapstick humour, there was considerable diversity of response arising from local cultural references; from linguistic differences, and from diverse, locally-specific generic, narrative and aesthetic styles.

Whenever children's own tastes are consulted, evidence can be found for a preference for home-grown programming; particularly in children's genres, less so in children's viewing of family or adult programming. Studies with British children show children's awareness of the difference between UK-produced and other programming, although this awareness is not absolute. Some genres, such as news, live interactive magazine shows, and realistic drama (e.g. *Grange Hill*) appear to be most effective in terms of their social and cognitive benefits for children.

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