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The First Annual Annenberg Public Policy Center's Conference on Children and Television: A Summary

by Amy B. Jordan

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Foreword

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania which would address public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels. Consistent with the mission of the Annenberg School for Communication, the Center has four ongoing foci: Information and Society; Media and the Developing Mind; Media and the Dialogue of Democracy; and Health Communication. Each year, as well, a special area of scholarly and social interest is addressed. The Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas. This series of publications disseminates the work of the Center.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson
Director

Amy Jordan (Ph.D., U of PA, 1990) is a Senior Research Investigator at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. She is author of “The State of Children's Television: An Examination of Quantity, Quality and Industry Beliefs.”

Endnotes

1 Peter D. Hart Research Associates, "Children/Parents: Television in the Home," The Annenberg Public Policy Center, Report No. 1, June, 1996.

2 Amy B. Jordan, "The State of Children's Television: An Examination of Quantity, Quality and Industry Beliefs," The Annenberg Public Policy Center, Report No. 2, June, 1996.

3 Marie-Louise Mares, "Positive Effects of Television on Social Behavior: A Meta-Analysis," The Annenberg Public Policy Center, Report No. 3, June, 1996.

4 The Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television is made up of: Dan Anderson (psychologist, University of Massachusetts); Ken Burns (documentary filmmaker); James Comer (psychiatrist, Yale University); William Damon (child psychologist, Brown University); Jonathan Kozol (author); Charles Ogletree (professor of law, Harvard University); Roger Rosenblatt (journalist and professor, Southampton University); Zena Sutherland (author, librarian emeritus, University of Chicago); and Marta Tienda (sociologist, University of Chicago).

- The Acknowledgment of Supporters: to tell the world who the "good citizens" of the children's television industry are and to encourage the continued financial commitment of advertisers, producers and programmers. Many conference participants said that annual awards would be one way to provide positive feedback and good public relations for key supporters of quality children's television.
- An Increase of Media Coverage: since so many parents and children seem unaware of the high-quality, educational programs that currently exist. Some conference participants suggested that newspapers include a box highlighting best bets for children, much as they do for adults.
- A Shared Research Agenda: that furthers our understanding of why children prefer the shows they do; the forces that influence the children's selections; and the new media environment that shapes their television viewing patterns. Many conferees hoped that research done by different players in the industry (advertisers, academics, broadcasters) could be shared in a way that would increase our understanding of how to reach children with educational television programming.

The First Annual Annenberg Public Policy Center's Conference on Children and Television: A Summary

by Amy B. Jordan

Abstract:

On June 17, 1996, the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania (APPC), in cooperation with the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), hosted its first annual Conference on Children and Television at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The conference was organized around four roundtable discussions: 1) the elements that characterize quality children's television; 2) the problems that producers confront in creating, producing and selling quality programming; 3) the dilemmas confronting advertisers, and; 4) The dilemmas confronting buyers and distributors. Conference participants included representatives from public and commercial broadcast and cable television industries, producers of children's programming, media buyers from advertising agencies, and advocates and researchers of children's television. Overall, the participants agreed that under the right conditions it is possible to create high-quality, educational programming that children will watch. (The Federal Communication Commission's three-hour rule was seen as positive step toward achieving that goal.) However, most also recognized the hurdles educational programs must clear to gain an audience and be seen as successful in the eyes of advertisers and broadcasters.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania, in cooperation with Children's Television Workshop, hosted its first annual Conference on Children and Television at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on June 17, 1996. The goal of this conference was to focus on what is good about current programming for children, the positive role that high-quality, educational television can play in children's lives, and ways producers and programmers can overcome the obstacles to provide more and better programs for children. To help meet this goal, three research projects were undertaken at the Annenberg Public Policy Center prior to the conference (a national, representative survey to determine parents' and children's uses of and attitudes toward children's programming and television in general; a content analysis of three days' worth of children's television programming, and a synthesis of two decades' worth of research on the positive effects of pro-social television). The results of the three studies were provided to conference participants and served as a foundation for the discussion.

There was intense focus on issues relating to children and television in the weeks and months preceding the conference. Earlier in the year, a new telecommunications law was passed that included a requirement that television sets be manufactured with a V-Chip (a device that enables parents to block out programs they deem inappropriate for their children). After the passage of the V-Chip law, network executives were invited to the White House to discuss ways to implement it. The television industry ultimately agreed to develop a voluntary, industry-wide system of ratings.

Children's television advocates had worked for years to require broadcasters to set a mandatory minimum number of hours for the airing of children's educational programming. A base of three hours per week had been proposed by two FCC Commissioners, but two others were unwilling to approve the requirement. Days before the APPC Conference on Children and Television, a third Commissioner agreed to go along with a rule that stated that stations applying for license renewal must air a minimum of three hours a week of educational children's programming in order to qualify for renewal. Earlier in the week, President Clinton had issued an invitation to broadcasters and producers to meet at the White House to discuss children's television.

A number of producers felt that broadcasters have not given their educational programs appropriate time slots. The new three-hour rule, which mandates that educational programs be aired after 7:00am, was seen as a positive first step. In addition, producers felt that educational programs aren't given adequate time to build an audience before they are shuffled around and/or cancelled. Since these programs often do not have a "pre-sold awareness" (that is, they are not based on an existing toy or movie popular with children), they take longer to find a loyal audience.

Next Steps

The Conference on Children and Television generated many creative and ambitious suggestions for improving the quantity and quality of programming for children. Some of the more unconventional ideas for improving the state of children's television included: allowing more advertising time to educational programs to generate revenue; abolishing ratings for educational programs; and requiring all commercial broadcasters to air educational programming during a certain block of time.

In addition, conference participants suggested that next steps for ensuring the airing and viewership of high-quality, educational programming include:

- The Formation of Partnerships: between producers and advertisers; between advertisers and academics; between academics and programmers in order to share information about what works with the child audience. Alliance building between all key players in the field of children and television was seen as critical to developing commitment and support for educational children's television.
- The Design of a More Appropriate Ratings System: to address concerns about undercounting and unfair comparisons (with broad-based entertainment programs). Suggestions for revamping ratings included breaking the child audience into more developmentally age-appropriate categories; designing a subsample of children that can be measured and tracked; differentiating educational programs from entertainment-only programs and comparing within and not across subcategories.

programming, especially for the elementary school-aged child. The promise of an FCC rule that would require stations to air three hours a week of educational programming was therefore largely met with praise.

Many conference participants pointed to the successes achieved by educational programming that is both entertaining and informative. PBS and Nickelodeon were held up as examples of successful, child-friendly channels that children and parents could regularly turn to meet their educational/informational needs. Conference participants also pointed out that there is a large pool of talented writers and producers likely to benefit from networks that may take a second look at educational programs to meet the expected FCC requirement.

But the optimism of the conference participants was tempered by the realities that face the people who make, distribute and air educational programming. Foremost in many participants' minds are the inadequacies of the ratings system, which typically guides the decisions of advertisers and programmers. Advertisers currently look for the largest possible audience of 6- to 11-year-olds. To meet the advertisers' needs, broadcasters have come to believe that the way to reach the largest possible audience is to create action/adventure superhero cartoons that appeal to boys. (The conventional wisdom is that girls will watch boys' programs but that boys will not watch girls' programs.)

Participants pointed out that educational programs have typically not achieved the highest ratings, in part because they are designed to reach a narrower target age group. Some participants also argued that ratings undercount the audience for educational children's programs—whose viewers are often repeatedly exposed to this programming outside the home (for example, in daycare and school settings).

Conference participants were also concerned about the lack of promotional money that is allocated to educational shows. They felt low viewership may be partially due to the fact that parents and children are not as familiar with educational programs because the programs are not marketed effectively and because they often are not tied to merchandizing efforts.

The intense activity in the public policy arena focused much of the discussion at the APPC Conference on the production, airing, and viewership of educational programming and the implications of a three hour-rule for children, their parents, and the industry. Most of the conference participants felt that a three-hour rule from the FCC would increase the amount and quality of educational children's television. Many were optimistic that broadcasters and producers would rise to the challenge of creating educational shows that children would watch. The talent, the commitment, and the momentum gained, promised, as Vice President Gore said, "to usher in a new era of high-quality, educational television for American children."

The optimism of the conference, however, was tempered by a heavy dose of realism. Ratings still determine what stays and what goes on network television—ratings, many believe, that underrepresent the viewership of educational children's television. Money is tight, moreover, especially in an industry in which high-quality programs may be more expensive to make but less lucrative than their entertainment-oriented counterparts. Without money to promote educational programs, children and parents may be unaware of their very existence. Finally, much about the child audience remains understudied and/or misunderstood. Without reliable information about children's viewing habits and preferences, broadcasters find it hard to break from a conventional wisdom that forecasts success for programs for 6- to 11-year-old boys with action, adventure, and male superheroes.

What follows is a summary of the Children and Television Conference held on June 17, 1996. The speeches and discussions are condensed, with quotes used to illustrate the opinions of the conference participants.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center's Press Conference

Immediately preceding the conference, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and dean of the Annenberg School for Communication held a press conference to release three recently completed studies and to announce the formation of the Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's

Television. Conference participants and reporters attended the press briefing. Also in attendance were Vice President Al Gore and Congressman Ed Markey of Massachusetts.

The Research Reports on Children and Television

The first APPC-commissioned survey, administered by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, examined parents' and children's uses of and attitudes toward television.[1] This survey, conducted in May, 1996 with 1,205 parents and 308 of their children, yielded some surprising results:

- The majority of parents surveyed felt that television had done more good than harm for their children.
- Parents expressed satisfaction with the amount and quality of programming for their preschool children; but they were much less happy with the quality of programming available for the elementary school-age child.
- Parents were quite familiar with the high-quality, educational programs for young children but were largely unaware of the high-quality, educational programs that air for school-age children.
- Parents said they were more likely to use the V-Chip to try to encourage their children to watch quality programming than to simply block the negative programming.

Overall, the survey suggests active, interested parents who will gravitate toward quality but who are frustrated by a perceived lack of high-quality programming for older children and who are concerned about the types of lessons their children might carry away from the screen.

A second study included a content analysis of three days' worth of children's television programming, as well as interviews with industry representatives to explore the forces that shape the quantity and quality of children's television.[2] The analysis confirmed what parents perceive: there is a great deal of high-quality programming available for preschool children, but much less for those of school age. Moreover, the majority of high-quality programming available to children airs on basic and premium cable channels—channels unavailable to one-third of all American homes with children. The study concluded by reviewing the barriers to the production and

are show themes.' I suppose that if Joe stopped on his way to murder and mayhem to eat an orange they'd say that the whole thing was nutrition education!...The only thing this proves to me is that self-regulation doesn't work."

"To get to what we're really talking about today, commercial broadcasting doesn't really [accomplish it], at least not in regularly scheduled series. And when it does do it, the shows appear before the kids get up in the morning. At 6:00am Saturday in Boston—and I checked this out—WNAC airs "News For Kids" and WSBK shows "Bill Nye the Science Guy." These educational programs are certainly not designed for preschoolers, which is the only audience you could possibly think of that might be up at that hour. And that's why, for the FCC guideline, 7:00am is so important, because otherwise we will have three hours a week and it will all be between six and seven [in the morning].

"This meeting is so important because it's going to happen. It is really going to happen. And you can always say, 'Well, it's not going to be terrific and they're going to try to get by with something that isn't wonderful.' At least it won't all be "X-Men." And, little by little, it's going to get better and better. And I think that as it gets better, there will be more audiences for better. We're going to teach kids to like better programming because there's going to be more of it around for them to see."

Conclusions and Next Steps

The first annual Conference on Children and Television, hosted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center in cooperation with Children's Television Workshop, brought together representatives from the broadcast and production industries, advertisers, advocates and researchers in a day-long meeting to develop strategies to increase the amount and viewership of high-quality children's television.

In each of the roundtable discussions there was a sense of optimism that high-quality television (often defined as curriculum-based, education-oriented programming) can indeed succeed, even in a competitive environment. It was acknowledged, however, that market forces alone have not produced enough educational

Luncheon Address: Peggy Charren, Founder of Action for Children's Television, Visiting Scholar, Harvard University.

Prior to giving her luncheon address to the participants and press in attendance at the Children and Television Conference, Peggy Charren was presented with the Annenberg Public Policy Center Award for Distinguished Lifetime Contribution to Children's Television. In presenting the award, Kathleen Hall Jamieson called Charren the "godmother of children's television." Peggy Charren began Action for Children's Television in her living room in 1968 and started a social movement to bring more educational television and less commercial advertising to child viewers. Her efforts culminated in the Children's Television Act of 1990, which Congress unanimously passed to require commercial broadcasters to serve the educational and informational needs of the child audience. In the years since the passage of the CTA, she has urged the FCC to mandate a minimum number of hours of educational programming for children.

Peggy Charren recounted her early days as an employee working in the television industry and her early days as a mother working to change the industry. "The first words out of my mouth were 'What can we do to get more choices on television for children?' without saying 'Take it off the air, I don't like it.'...The whole point was to find out what was missing, not to move in on what was there....That's why I'm so excited about what happened at the FCC [with the three-hour minimum]."

Ms. Charren argued in her address that a three-hour minimum processing guideline from the FCC was necessary to get broadcasters to air educational programming in addition to the Children's Television Act of 1990. "No wonder we got the bill unanimously, no wonder the industry didn't object to anything about the Children's Television Act, they had no intention of paying any attention to it. And it took a little while to figure that out. They listed G.I. Joe [as educational] ... and said that 'G.I. Joes fight against an evil that has the capabilities of mass destruction of society. ...Social conscientiousness and responsibility

airing of high-quality children's programming: the intense competition for advertisers' dollars; the heavy reliance on ratings; the perceived need to target the largest possible audience; and the narrow margin of profit.

A third study synthesized research carried out on the effects of pro-social programming on children.[3] The review of research on the positive effects of high-quality television indicates that there are consistent and moderately strong effects of pro-social television on children's willingness to share, show empathy, and play with children who are somehow different from them.

The Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television

During the press conference, Jamieson also announced the formation of the Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television, whose membership includes nine experts on children, television, and American culture.[4] The Council will help guide the Annenberg Public Policy Center's efforts to increase both the amount of quality programming available for children and adolescents and the audience for it.

Remarks by Vice President Gore and Congressman Markey

Attending the press conference was Vice President Al Gore, who stated: "The Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television, which begins its work today, will establish private sector guidelines for what constitutes educational programming for children. This blue ribbon commission is the most recent sign that the movement for quality children's television has really begun to pick up steam... With the buzz of activity occurring in only the last few weeks and months—the V-Chip, the voluntary ratings system, the three-hour educational television requirement, the PBS icon proposal and today's announcement—I believe we are ushering in a new era of high-quality programming for American children."

Also in attendance was Representative Ed Markey, author of the Children's Television Act of 1990. Optimistic about the FCC's movement toward adopting a three hour per week minimum of educational children's programming on commercial broadcast television, Markey said: "This may indeed be the last conference where those who are good about talking about children's TV outnumber those who are good at producing it."

Keynote Address: Commissioner Susan Ness

The Conference on Children and Television was opened by David Britt, president of Children's Television Workshop, who underscored the need for the conference by reviewing the statistics on the amount of time children spend in front of the medium. "Children have spent, before they start their first day in school, the equivalent of four full years of school watching television." Britt then introduced the conference's keynote speaker FCC Commissioner Susan Ness.

In her remarks, Commissioner Ness described the proposal before the Commission that would require broadcasters to air three hours a week of educational programming specifically designed for children. After the passage of the three-hour rule, however, "We need to focus on how we really get quality programming on the air for kids to watch." Referring to President Clinton's upcoming White House meeting of children's television representatives, Ness said she hoped the president would encourage:

- broadcasters to form partnerships, possibly between public and commercial stations to help marshal the financial resources to produce quality programs;
- advertisers to support educational programming; and
- communities to hold broadcasters accountable for the programs that they designate as educational.

Commissioner Ness also noted that "it would be great if the local television listings would have a special page or a special box which would list all of the programs that the broadcasters themselves have designated as educational and informational. [Then] the parents will know the programs are out there."

Commissioner Ness concluded by stating that while there is a great deal that we know about the influence of television on children, there is much that remains to be learned. Specifically: "what elements characterize quality children's programs?; what program formats are most attractive to kids?; what issues are facing

There was some concern over whether the definition of "educational" would include programs that are popular with children but are not specifically "children's programs." Throughout the day, ABC's "TGIF" lineup of situation comedies was pointed to a block of "family" programming that was popular with children. Joanna Lei (C3 Media and Marketing) asked: "Are we talking about children as the primary audience or children sometimes as the secondary audience? Because all my colleagues from the last panel [of advertisers] will tell you that advertising monies are designated differently for the Saturday morning time period as well as the other time periods when you have a tag-along kind of older kids and teen audience."

Will the Amount and Quality of Children's Educational Television Increase?

In spite of the difficulties in defining quality educational programming, the programmers expressed optimism that, if done well, such programs could find audiences. Neil Hoffman (USA Network) felt that "good-quality elements can be packaged properly so as to not speak down to the child." He also said that if, in the beginning, the ratings are not strong, programmers could "put a little pressure [on the advertiser]. You can say 'You can buy "Power Rangers" but you're gonna take a couple of spots in these new programs as well'."

Alice Cahn felt that the pending FCC three-hour rule would encourage more and better educational programming. "There are good stories that can be produced by talented producers and, once this FCC-friendly rule goes into effect, what I maybe naively hope and believe is that it will give people a new standard to shoot for. We will have this new goal. The bar will be raised just a little bit. We're going to have to jump a little bit higher to get over it."

Neil Hoffman (USA Network) pointed out that "As soon as someone does it right there will be a million copies."

Roundtable Four: The Dilemmas Confronting Buyers and Distributors

Moderator: Ron Milavsky (University of Connecticut); Roundtable Participants: Alice Cahn (PBS); Neil Hoffman (USA Network); Joanna Lei (C3 Media and Marketing); Peter Moss (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation); Horst Stipp (NBC-TV).

The representatives from cable, commercial broadcast, public broadcast and the Canadian broadcast industries began the roundtable discussion by returning to the definition of "quality" in children's television.

Revisiting the Definition of Quality

Peter Moss (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) said he would discuss the "nature and quality of child-centered television in talking about programs that will encourage growth and encourage learning in all its forms and all its facets, both emotional and cognitive and social, in terms of problem solving...So I wouldn't personally, and in terms of the Canadian Broadcasting System, wouldn't restrict the programs to educational programs without mentioning that this is not formal education and that the range of education is lifelong, as it is for adults."

Horst Stipp (NBC-TV) agreed that educational programming should be defined such that it "look[s] at what television does best, which is to deal with a broad range of social skills, family relationships, [and] peer relationships and teach children about that, whereas school seems to be much better at instructional kinds of things..."

Alice Cahn (PBS) took exception to Dr. Stipp's notion that television is best at conveying social lessons. "Television is a great storyteller, but to say that what it does best are some of the softer, affective, pro-social lessons and that it cannot, within the context of a great story, teach anything from science to mathematics to history is ignoring successes that commercial, public, and cable television have had over the last twenty years."

the distributors in their efforts to sell quality children's programs?; what will motivate advertisers to fund children's programs?; what will motivate the public to ride herd on the stations so that there are quality children's programs available for their children?"

Roundtable One: The Elements that Characterize Quality Children's Programming.

Moderator: Milton Chen, KQED-San Francisco; Roundtable Participants: Dan Anderson (University of Massachusetts); Margaret Cozzens (National Science Foundation); John Fuller (PBS); Larry Goldman (American Medical Association); Marjorie Hogan (American Academy of Pediatrics); Dale Kunkel (University of California-Santa Barbara); Keith Mielke (Children's Television Workshop); Lisa Reisberg (American Academy of Pediatrics); Don Roberts (Stanford University); James Swanson (University of California-Irvine); Ellen Wartella (University of Texas-Austin).

Defining Quality

The first roundtable discussion of the conference addressed the questions: How can we define "quality" in children's television and how can we insure quality? Roundtable participants began by listing the most important characteristics of a "quality program." These included:

- entertainment value;
- high production value ("You don't want to see...the stuffing coming out of Barney's suit," John Fuller, PBS);
- curriculum-based programming, that is, a set of goals for the show that inform the story ideas and the scripts;
- advisory panels and boards ("So that, collectively, people can determine what quality is," Margaret Cozzens, National Science Foundation);
- an extensive "generative process," that includes, in addition to advisory panels and boards, "research that brings children themselves into the decision making process; getting a report card for whether you are doing it [educating children] or not; community outreach that tries to get localized utilization of your program to give it maximum impact," (Keith Mielke, Children's Television Workshop);

- programming that enhances children's development outside of the viewing situation, ("because too much of television is to capture children and not to somehow enhance what they do when they leave the set," Ellen Wartella, University of Texas-Austin);
- programming that is age appropriate;
- programming that includes positive messages and lessons (such as how to get along with others and how to be healthy and safe); and,
- programming that excludes negative messages (such as, violence, stereotyped views of others, and degradation of women).

Ensuring Quality

While the roundtable quickly generated a list of the elements that characterize quality television, participants argued that it would be difficult, although not impossible, to ensure that high-quality programs are aired and viewed. To address this concern, Dan Anderson (University of Massachusetts-Amherst) recommended that local stations convene a panel of parents, teachers, pediatricians and educators in the community to discuss the kinds of offerings that are available at the station. Midge Cozzens (National Science Foundation) suggested that researchers and producers spend more time talking with teachers: "[Teachers] are very much aware of what their children are watching when they're home." Ellen Wartella (University of Texas) felt that broadcasters must put more effort and money into the marketing of high-quality programs. As Dale Kunkel (University of California-Santa Barbara) pointed out, "How many educational shows have ever had a major marketing campaign with one of the major fast food chains in this country? How many educational children's programs have ever been put in an attractive time slot and kept there and promoted on air? I would assert that this has never happened."

There was some debate over the value of identifying quality programs with an icon. Don Roberts (Stanford University) worried that it would drive children away. He cited Joanne Cantor's work at the University of Wisconsin which found that adolescent boys were attracted to programs that advised parental discretion. Ellen Wartella (University of Texas-Austin) pointed out, however, that while the advisory labels attracted one age group of boys, it succeeded in getting

- Advertisers could be given recognition for supporting high-quality, educational programming. Consumers and the press need to convey their appreciation more frequently. "This is a joint responsibility. We have to give credit to everyone who's doing something right and make the companies feel good about doing it," (Peggy Charren, Action for Children's Television).

Advertisers Ask for More Research

Participants in the roundtable discussion also had many recommendations for needed research. They too had reservations about reliance on Nielsen ratings. Jayne Spittler's (Leo Burnett) concern had less to do with the undercounting problems of the PeopleMeter ("I'll take that over the diary any time") than with the fact that so many children are viewing television outside of their own homes. She pointed out that "children's lifestyles have changed so much as our lifestyles have changed so much. There's much more viewing going on in day care centers or going on in homes that aren't registered [by Nielsen] as 'homes with children.' The child is a visitor because [he or she is] at grandma's or their aunt's or the family day care provider's." Spittler recommended that a separate viewing sample be constructed to measure children's viewing "just as we have a separate sample that measures Hispanic television viewing."

A number of participants also asked for greater access to the academic research on children and television. Vicky Rideout pointed out that her organization, Children Now, is in the process of creating such a bridge between the academic world and the children's television industry.

Jana O'Brien (Leo Burnett) asked that researchers go beyond the study of what children watch and try to gain insight into what children find compelling and desirable about their favorite programs. In addition, she challenged researchers to break up the 6- to 11-year-old audience—arguing that just because Nielsen breaks down the child audience that way, no one else has to.

program produced by Children's Television Workshop. "It went extremely well. We got two of the prestigious major marketers to children—that is, McDonald's and Mattel—to come aboard as full sponsors for a year, which is great. And they agreed to a commercial exhibition that's different than what you see in commercial television. In 'Big Bag' we have a [commercial] 'pod' as we call it—up front for a couple of minutes. Then we run the show in its entirety and there's another closing commercial 'pod.' It's a nice way to maintain sponsorship but do it in a responsible way." Jana O'Brien (Leo Burnett) pointed out that her client, McDonald's, benefited from the "Big Bag" arrangement by being one of only two sponsors. "[The result is that] my message will stand out and I'll really have a presence there."

How Advertisers Can Support Quality Programming

When asked how advertisers might help to support more high-quality, educational programming for children, a number of suggestions were offered:

- Advertising agencies, whose business it is to understand children and capture their attention through mediated messages, could share insights. "Our marketing savvy can mix with your creative talents to make some of this work," (Jayne Spittler, Leo Burnett).
- Major advertisers and their ad agencies could form a coalition to encourage better quality programming. Such a coalition, called Television Production Partners, currently exists for adult programming. Television Production Partners pools money to produce programs and then takes the programs to various broadcasting and cable entities to get the programming to air. "We could do something like that with the 30 or so children's advertisers that exist," (Jayne Spittler, Leo Burnett).
- Educational programming could be pitched to advertisers and the public in a way that distinguishes it from entertainment shows. "I think the win for the commercial sponsorship of educational programming is setting it up as a different animal altogether from entertainment-based programming," (Karl Kuechenmeister, The Cartoon Network).

its message across to other age groups and to girls. She indicated that the wording of the label would be the key. Horst Stipp (NBC-TV) feared that educational labels on the programs would be a turnoff for young viewers.

Roundtable Two: The Problems Producers Confront in Creating, Producing, and Selling Quality Programming and How to Solve Them

Moderator: Karen Jaffe, KIDSNET; Roundtable Participants: Linda Carpenter (KidStar Interactive); Erren Gottlieb ("Bill Nye the Science Guy"); Geoff Haines-Stiles ("Passport to Knowledge"); Marjorie Kalins (Children's Television Workshop); Casey Keller ("Beakman's World"); Susan Koch (Koch TV Productions); Twila Liggett ("Reading Rainbow"); Noel Resnick (Lancit Media); Angela Santomero ("Blue's Clues"); Jane Startz ("Magic School Bus"); James Steinbach ("Get Real"); Ken Wales ("Christy").

Participants in this roundtable discussion laid out the obstacles that they face as producers in creating and pitching their high-quality programs. The obstacles, it appears, are formidable and multiple. One of the most basic problems seems to be the ratings system.

The Problems with Ratings

Throughout the conference, but especially in this round-table, there was much discussion of the Nielsen ratings system. Twila Liggett ("Reading Rainbow") argued that "everybody helps the ratings to live by giving them a whole lot more credit that I think they deserve." She pointed out that her program, which targets 5- to 8-year-olds, isn't serviced at all by Nielsen ratings, which break the child audience down into 2- to 5- and 6- to 11-year-olds. Others in the panel said that while their high-quality, educational programs receive respectable ratings, the ratings are consistently lower than the action/adventure cartoons. This situation, they argue, is due to such factors as non-prime time airing of educational programs, the lack of promotion, and the narrower target age range of such programs. Marjorie Kalins (Children's Television Workshop) also pointed to

the fact that many educational programs take time to build an audience—time the programs are not given. Since many programs for children are based on existing cultural products (she gave the examples of network cartoons such as "Timon & Pumbba," "The Mask," and "Dumb and Dumber") "they have, in advance, a way of tapping into something that a kid will respond to."

One consequence of broadcaster reliance on ratings is that programmers are less likely to air high-quality, educational programs and, when they do, are less likely to give them adequate production and promotional budgets. Casey Keller ("Beakman's World") said: "I find myself going in and pitching budgets rather than premises, being able to say 'I can shoot two of these a week' rather than 'I can fascinate you with wonderful characters.' ... My work on 'Beakman's World' pays me about half of what I make on situation comedies."

Others on the panel and in the audience suggested that ratings can provide the producer with valuable information. Linda Carpenter (KidStar Interactive) pointed out: "Where you know what that 11-year-old boy wants, it doesn't mean that that's the exact program that you develop. It means you take those elements and incorporate them into your production." Horst Stipp (NBC-TV) also argued that ratings are the best way for his network to know what young people like and what messages are "getting through."

Finding the Necessary Financial Support

Solutions for securing adequate production and promotion money were suggested by a number of producers of high-quality children's programs. Noel Resnick (Lancit Media) recounted the success of "Where in the World is Carmen SanDiego?" "'Carmen SanDiego' is a show that was not a toy but originally a CD Rom and in the best example was made into a television show on PBS and even a better example was put on Fox network television and [was] doing very well and merchandizing. Merchandizing is great—merchandizing is feeding the television show, the television show is feeding the CD-Roms, and kids who are having a lot of problems with geography and have been for many many years are actually learning something." Jane Startz ("Magic School Bus") concurred.

"The money you get from licensing, ancillary sales, really is a necessity and that money gets pumped back into the show."

Noel Resnick (Lancit Media) also felt that producers' relationships with advertisers "can be a good thing." "In addition to making the show better, they can offset a lot of the costs that initially networks don't want to pay. Also, certain sponsors bring a strong cachet—certain sponsors that are associated with quality products and family products."

A number of producers pointed to the importance of international sales of their programs. Said Startz, "That's one of the large ways in which we're financing 'Magic School Bus'."

The Need for A Curator

James Steinbach ("Get Real") pointed to the need programmers have for an independent "curator." "There's an enormous amount of kids' stuff that comes across my desk, and most of it isn't any good, but some of it is. I think I'm pretty careful, but I don't have time to be as careful as I'd like.... Some kind of help for programmers would be a good idea. Something like the Parent's Choice Award—something that lets you know that somebody's curated this for you."

Roundtable Three: The Dilemmas Confronting Advertisers

Moderator: Vicky Rideout, Children Now; Roundtable Participants: Karl Kuechenmeister (Turner Broadcasting Sales/The Cartoon Network); Debbie Solomon (J. Walter Thompson); Jana O'Brien (Leo Burnett); Jayne Spittler (Leo Burnett)

The discussants of the third roundtable, made up of representatives of the advertising and cable sales industry, focused on the role of the advertiser in supporting high-quality children's television.

"Selling" Educational Programming

Karl Kuechenmeister (Turner Broadcasting Sales/The Cartoon Network) was asked to describe his experience in selling "Big Bag," the Cartoon Network's new educational preschool

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