

THE SECOND ANNUAL ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER'S CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND TELEVISION: A SUMMARY

Report prepared by Stacy M. Davis

9 June 1997

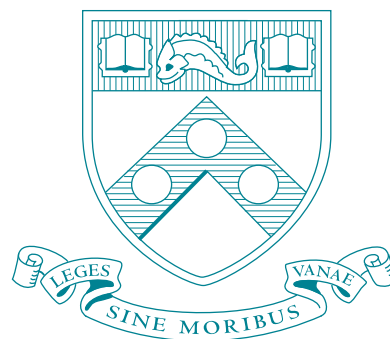


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FOREWORD

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT:

The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania held its second annual Conference on Children and Television on June 9, 1997 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Conference participants included members of the public and commercial broadcast and cable television industries, producers of children's programming, representatives from advertising agencies, and advocates and researchers of children's television. The conference took place at a time when the future of children's programming was being shaped by several new FCC guidelines. In June, 1997 commercial broadcasters had just begun to follow the new FCC requirement that stations help parents find quality programming by displaying an icon at the beginning of children's programs that contain educational or informational content. In addition, the regulation requiring stations to air a minimum of three hours a week of educational children's programming in order to qualify for license renewal was to go into effect in September. The conference centered around panel discussions of three topics: 1) The benefits of quality television; 2) FCC regulations and the local broadcaster; and 3) Strategies for increasing viewership of educational TV. The conference offered a forum in which participants could discuss their successes, frustrations, challenges, and concerns in the face of the new FCC rulings. Many of the participants were optimistic that commercial broadcasters will successfully develop quality children's programs to meet the FCC guidelines. However, it is clear that there are a number of serious obstacles that broadcasters will face in developing shows that are both educational and financially successful. These include: the challenge of developing programming that is both educational and entertaining for children; budget constraints which make it difficult to develop quality programming; and developing promotional strategies to encourage viewership of educational shows.

INTRODUCTION:

On June 9, 1997, the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania held its second annual Conference on Children and Television at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The conference is part of APPC's ongoing commitment to monitor the state of children's programming by recognizing noteworthy efforts and achievements in the development and distribution of quality children's programming, and pinpointing areas which need improvement. The purpose of this year's conference was to promote the benefits that high-quality educational television can have for children, assess the difficulties that local broadcasters face in trying to implement the FCC regulations, and develop better strategies to encourage parents and children to tune in to educational television. The results of four studies commissioned by APPC earlier in the year were distributed and presented at the conference, and laid the groundwork for the discussion of these topics. Three of the four studies were follow-ups to studies done the previous year: 1) an annual national survey of parents and children to gauge children's television viewing behavior and attitudes towards children's programming and television in general; 2) a content analysis of children's programming to assess whether programs are meeting the standards sought by those in the educational community and the guidelines set by the FCC; and, 3) a content analysis of newspaper coverage of children's programming to evaluate whether newspapers are adequately covering, listing, promoting, and critiquing children's programs so that parents can be made aware of the quality programming that does exist. A report from a fourth study examining local broadcasters' compliance with the new FCC guidelines was also released.



Dean Kathleen Hall Jamieson with Dr. Ruby Hearn of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

THE ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

The conference began with a press briefing held by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and dean of the Annenberg School for Communication. The results from four studies commissioned by APPC were released at the briefing which was attended by conference participants and reporters.



Dean Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Dr. Amy Jordan at the press conference.

Dean Jamieson outlined the three sets of research questions that were the basis for the 1997 studies:

- 1) Are stations following the new guidelines by designating shows as educational and do parents recognize the symbols that are being used to identify educational shows?
- 2) Are stations complying with

the new regulation which says that they must disseminate information about educational programs to newspapers and other media sources, and are parents making sense of this information?; and, 3) With the three-hour rule coming into effect in September, where does children's programming stand now? How many programs currently meet the standards of the new processing guidelines?

THE RESEARCH REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND TELEVISION

The 1997 State of Children's Television Report: Programming for Children Over Broadcast and Cable Television (Jordan & Woodard)

This study, the second in a series of annual reports, was based on a content analysis of children's programming in the 1996-97 season. The study measured the amount and quality of children's programming available over the commercial and public broadcast stations as well as the basic and premium cable channels. The study found that while a large number of children's programs are on the air, fewer than half (about 40%) can be considered high quality. However, the study also found disparities in the amount and level of quality among programs aimed at children of different age levels. While the majority (two-thirds) of all children's programs target elementary age children (5-11 year olds), few of these programs were found to have educational value. In contrast, of the programs designed for preschoolers (roughly one quarter), the vast majority (over 80%) were found to be high quality. Shows aimed at pre-teens and teens were also found to be generally of high quality (over 80%), however there are very few shows available for this audience (only 4% of all programs).

Another focus of the study assessed whether programs designated as educational were meeting the guidelines set up by the FCC. Programs were thought to be appropriately labeled as educational if they contained the lessons that were 1) clear and explicit; 2) salient throughout the program; 3) challenging and engaging for the target audience; and, 4) relevant to the lives of children. Results from the analysis show that the majority (three-fourths) of programs designated as educational are meeting these standards. However, roughly one quarter of the shows need to be re-evaluated for their educational value. The authors suggest that the educational designators be dropped from those programs which are not currently meeting the FCC guidelines.

An additional finding from the study was that the designators used to indicate whether programs contain educational content are brief and inconsistent across networks and across stations, minimizing their value for parents who might use them to guide their children's viewing.

Newspaper Coverage of Children's Television: A 1997 Update (Aday)

The purpose of this study (a content analysis of nine newspapers) was to evaluate the type of coverage that newspapers are giving to children's programming. It found that media critics from these papers rarely covered children's programming. Critics were more likely to cover daytime and nighttime talk shows than review children's programming. In addition, the study found that, at the time of the study, parents were not provided with sufficient information to help them locate and select existing quality programs. None of the nine newspapers included the "E/I" ("educational and informative") designators in its television

listings during the first seven weeks in which stations were supposed to be making the designators available. The newspaper editors claimed that they were not receiving consistent and reliable information from the stations.

Television in the Home: The 1997 Survey of Parents and Children (Stanger)

This report was based on a national survey of over 1,000 parents and 300 of their 10-17 year old children. The survey, conducted by Chilton Research, measured parents' and children's uses and attitudes toward television and children's programming. Survey results showed that both parents and children are confused by the educational designators. Only about 2% of parents and children could accurately state what E/I means. This indicates that more effort needs to be made by networks, stations, and newspaper television critics to educate viewers about the designators. On a positive note, children indicated that they would not avoid programs designated as educational. While it is hard to gauge whether the designator would serve as an incentive to watch a show (self-reports on this measure are likely to be biased by social desirability), the data suggest that the labels will not, as some have feared, cause children to deliberately seek out only those programs that are not labeled educational.

Children's Educational Television Regulations and the Local Broadcaster (Jordan & Sullivan)



Ph.D. candidates Emory Woodard and John Sullivan

A fourth study was based on a series of interviews with representatives from 28 local stations around the United States to assess how they planned to implement the new FCC regulations. The interviewers found that local stations vary in the degree of control they have over the type of programs they get. Because they have different affiliations with networks and syndicators, they also differ in the process by which they receive their programming. This makes it difficult for parents to know who they should contact if they have a concern about a show.

A disturbing possibility that emerged from the study was that some stations may actually decrease the number of hours they devote to children's programming, seeing the three-hour rule as a ceiling, rather than as a floor. This was a discouraging prediction, since the three hour rule was enacted to encourage stations to expand the number of hours they devote to educational children's programming.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION CHAIRMAN, REED HUNDT

Kathleen Hall Jamieson introduced the keynote speaker, FCC Chairman Reed Hundt. In her introduction, Dr. Jamieson said that through his work at the FCC, Hundt “helped us reframe the way we have seen television, no longer seeing it as a toaster, but seeing it as a means of transmission of information not simply to the public as whole, but to the public as citizens, a public that includes children.”

In his remarks, Chairman Hundt described the impact that the FCC regulations are having on the future of children’s television. He said that the FCC ruling “started a feeding frenzy among producers and creators of potentially educational programming,” as broadcasters work to find ways to meet the new guidelines. He commented that shows such as “Blues Clues,” which premiered to record ratings, are examples of how what once seemed impossible, now seems inevitable. After listing a number of educational programs that have already been developed in response to the ruling, Hundt said that “these developments... vindicate the effort of the last three and a half years to prove that the public’s air waves can be used for public purposes and the public will respond if that happens. They vindicate our effort to demonstrate that there is a balance between family values and market values, but it is not always the case that reorienting oneself to family values in fact means undercutting or prejudicing market values.”

Chairman Hundt stressed the importance of continuing the partnership between public and private institutions in the future development of this new genre of educational programming. He encouraged academic and other research institutions to stay involved by offering fair and objective evaluations of the programs to ensure that they are truly teaching the children of America. He also argued that as the number of broadcast channels increases with the development of digital technology, it will be important to make sure that good decisions are made about the role of educational programming. He argued against shifting educational shows from the popular broadcast channels to separate channels designated for educational programming only.

Chairman Hundt closed by reiterating that “we see now the rhetoric of the last three years quickly becoming a reality. It’s a wonderful thing to see the creative community respond so quickly and to see broadcasters look around and say ‘well, you know, maybe I can make this work after all’.”



Keynote speaker Reed Hundt

PANEL 1:

THE BENEFITS OF QUALITY TELEVISION

Moderator

Josephine Holz *President, Holz Research and Consulting*

Panelists

Sandra L. Calvert *Associate Professor, Georgetown University*

Joanne Cantor *Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

William Damon *Professor, Brown University*

Bill Isler *President, Family Communications, Inc.*

Valeria Lovelace *President, Media Transformations*

John Wright *Professor, University of Texas-Austin*

DISPELLING THE BELIEF THAT TELEVISION IS INHERENTLY BAD

The goal of the first panel was to challenge the notion that television is inherently bad, by focusing on the educational benefits that television can have on both the social and cognitive development of children. John Wright (University of Texas-Austin) opened by saying that television should not be thought of as a monolithic entity, and that it is important to look at the type of programming children are watching when talking about television's effects on them. He cited research which shows that the positive effects of watching educational programming on academic achievement outweigh the negative effects of watching commercial entertainment programming. In his words, "both kinds of effects are out there, and it sure as heck does matter what you watch." Bill Damon (Brown University) added that research does not indicate that television viewing has a negative effect on cognitive processes such as attention span and mental activity. He argued that television viewing can be an active or passive experience in the same way as reading or paying attention in school. In addition, he said that a moderate amount of television viewing (up to ten hours a week) is positively correlated with reading.

Several panelists also argued that television content can be both entertaining and educational. Joanne Cantor (University of Wisconsin - Madison) cited a regional program called "Get Real" which uses MTV style editing techniques as an example of a show that is very popular with children, and has also been shown to increase children's self-esteem and interest in science (especially among girls, a target population that is often neglected). Bill Isler (Family Communications, Inc.) added that we are underestimating children when we assume that they will automatically be turned off by programming that is educational. He said, "I think we need to give children a little bit more credit than we do. I think to say that (children) are going to walk away from educational television is wrong. If we take a close look at the research being compiled by the Annenberg Center, we are seeing that that is not true; children are not necessarily walking away from educational television... (they) want a wide number of experiences."

WHAT KIND OF LEARNING IS TELEVISION BEST ABLE TO PROMOTE?

The panelists were asked to consider whether television is better suited to teach cognitive skills or social and emotional skills. Bill Damon (Brown University) began by adding that along with teaching explicit cognitive or emotional lessons, television also teaches implicit lessons, such as attitudes toward learning and stereotypes of others, and that producers and parents need to be conscious of this.

Joanne Cantor (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Bill Isler (Family Communications, Inc.) agreed that educational programs can simultaneously teach cognitive and social skills. Cantor illustrated her point by describing an episode of “Get Real” which combined elements that were both cognitive and affective, but put together in a meaningful way so that it “doesn’t seem educational, it seems interesting and fun, and yet kids come away from it with a message that has a lot of different components, but that really speaks to the whole child.”



Dr. William Damon and Dr. John Wright

TELEVISION AS A SOCIALIZING AGENT

The panelists discussed where television fits as a socializing agent relative to other powerful influences, such as parents and schools. Bill Damon (Brown University) noted that television introduces children to many aspects of the social world that they haven’t yet experienced first hand, such as violence and sex. As a result, it is important to consider the implicit messages taught by the ways in which these topics are handled.

Valeria Lovelace (Media Transformations) agreed that television plays an important role in the socialization process. For instance, research at “Sesame Street” showed that the creators need to be very explicit in the messages they convey about race relations, by showing adults being supportive of interracial relationships. They found that it was important to show parental approval when children on the program interact with children of other races, so that preschoolers understand that there is community support behind the values being taught.

WHAT CAN TELEVISION DO FOR CHILDREN AT DIFFERENT AGE LEVELS?

The discussion turned to developmental differences in children’s educational needs, and how television can best address them. Valeria Lovelace (Media Transformations) stated that, for preschoolers, the most important objective is to instill a desire to explore and learn about the world and how great it is, and to open young children up to feeling that they are capable of trying and becoming anything they want.

In terms of school age children, Bill Damon (Brown University) argued that television could make a powerful contribution by getting children more interested in math, science and history, and by carrying on where schools leave off by helping to reach those who are not connecting with the school curriculum. He also added that television can teach social values such as honesty, empathy and respect for authority, values that children are not getting from other places such as family and church where children used to learn about these kinds of things.

While there is very little programming designed specifically for teens, Sandra Calvert (Georgetown University) noted that television can help adolescents by teaching them how to interact with others, both as friends and in romantic situations, by modeling appropriate relationships.

WHAT CAN WE TAKE AWAY FROM THE SUCCESS OF "SESAME STREET" AND "MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD"?



Dr. Valeria Lovelace

The last topic of discussion was an evaluation of why "Sesame Street" and "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" have been two of the longest running programs in the history of television. Valeria Lovelace (Media Transformations), a former researcher for Children's Television Workshop (the producers of "Sesame Street") stated that the success of "Sesame Street" can be attributed to the fact that the organization had a mission to create a show that would have a dramatic long-term impact on the children who grew up watching it. She said: "...in the production of ("Sesame Street") there was a dream that there would be a change in terms of society...it took on a larger

slice, took on society, and what children would be like twenty years down the road." The strengths of the show are its clear educational message (which is developed through extensive research and consultation with experts), a willingness to try new things, and the diversity of role models. As she put it, "when we would go out in to the field and work with children, the children would say: 'Oh, that looks like me! That looks like me!' That is really at the core and the key, so children are able to come back and see that they too can succeed and learn." She also cited the importance of extensive research in monitoring whether the programs are working, and keeping attuned to the wants and needs of the preschool audience.

Bill Isler (Family Communications, Inc.) who is President of the company that produces "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" attributed the success of that show to its focus on teaching children ways to cope with the world by "starting with the inside - feeling good about oneself and being willing to make mistakes, being willing to express fears, and being willing to express emotions." He also added that parents trust Mr. Rogers and his knowledge of children, and know that he respects children. He concluded that trust and respect are "the two words that, when we talk about children's programming,....we have to keep in our vocabulary."

PANEL 2: FCC REGULATIONS AND THE LOCAL BROADCASTER

Moderator

Harry A. Jessell *Executive Editor, Broadcasting & Cable*

Panelists

David Donovan *Vice President, Association of Local Television Stations*

John Ganahl *Program Director, KCRG-Cedar Rapids*

Andrew Lester *Agent, International Creative Management*

Penny Martin *Program Director, KNSD-San Diego*

Cori Stern *Director of Development, Saban Entertainment*

Participants on this panel discussed the challenges that they face in trying to meet the FCC guidelines for children's television. Among the biggest concerns expressed are how to judge what constitutes quality programming, and how to create programming that will be both educational and profitable.

JUDGING THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF PROGRAMS

The discussion opened with several members of the broadcast industry voicing their concern about how to judge whether programs will meet the FCC requirements. Many of the panelists agreed that it is hard to define what is meant by “educational” and yet they are expected to create and air “quality” programs without timely feedback from the FCC. John Ganahl (KCRG-Cedar Rapids) stated that he found it unfair that the FCC does not want to be the “quality police,” and yet they are the ones that are responsible for renewing licenses. He said that it seems that it will be up to the educational community to decide what constitutes quality programming, and yet the programming will ultimately be judged by the FCC. David Donovan (Association of Local Television Stations) added that asking broadcasters to evaluate the educational value of shows puts them into an area where they are “uncomfortable.” He said “....getting involved in debates over (educational) theories is very unsettling for people who have to answer to stock holders and ultimately payroll.” One broadcaster relies on the producers at the networks to identify programs as educational, because they have better resources to evaluate shows carefully and critically. Another panelist added that shows are selected if they have been endorsed by a respected organization.



David Donovan, John Ganahl and Penny Martin

David Donovan (Association of Local Television Stations) also questioned whether the FCC ruling is an infringement of the First Amendment. He said that many broadcasters feel that the FCC ruling “comes very close to putting someone in my programming department...” by saying “we want you to do X. We want you to put on a lesson plan.”

THE ECONOMIC REALITIES OF THE LOCAL BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

Another concern that emerged from the discussion was how the new FCC regulations will affect the economics of the broadcast industry. Much of the discussion focused on the economic realities that the local stations face that make it difficult for them to implement the new regulations. David Donovan (Association of Local Television Stations) argued that the three-hour rule will erode the ability of commercial broadcast stations to make a profit. He stated that it is very difficult to develop educational programming that children will watch, and that it is counterproductive to develop educational programs if there is no audience for them. He added, “I think the academic community, in many respects, doesn’t recognize the economic imperative of the (broadcast) industry and how hard it really is today.” He stated that the regulations, which force broadcasters to air educational (often less profitable) programming, will take away revenue from the broadcasters, who are already facing stiff competition from cable stations. It will also encourage viewers to turn to cable channels for the entertainment programming that they want, which “further erodes business, and in the end, hurts us all.”

Cori Stern (Saban Entertainment) stated that while her company has not profited from educational programming in the past, she believes that it can in the future. She said that she would welcome information from the academic community to help dispel the misconceptions in Hollywood that children don’t watch educational television and that “boys control the remote.”

MERCHANDISING AS AN ANCILLARY SOURCE OF REVENUE

There was heated debate over the sale of program-related products to encourage viewership of educational shows, and to help generate revenue for shows that may not be profitable without them. Both producers and broadcasters argued that the economic realities of the children’s television industry make product merchandising an important part of the equation. Cori Stern (Saban Entertainment), stated that production companies generally rely on merchandising and licensing to increase profit from children’s programs. Andrew Lester (International Creative Management) agreed, saying that he thinks that it is going to be crucial for educational shows and merchandising to coexist in order for educational programming to be successful. Both disagreed with Harry Jessell’s comment that it sounds like “what we’re getting here is not educational programs, but marketing vehicles.” They argued that the central focus is on developing quality shows, and meeting the educational goals first and foremost, but that tie-ins play a critical role in getting the shows on the air. David Donovan (Association for Local Television Stations) also defended product tie-ins saying “on the one hand, everybody wants more educational programming in the commercial setting....this has to be funded some way, and that is either going to come through advertising or product

branding....You can't on the one hand ask us to provide - in a commercial setting - additional educational, quality type shows and then hinder the mechanism by which that would be funded."

While the panelists seemed somewhat frustrated by the challenges that lay ahead, several optimistic comments were made. One panelist said that the three-hour rule has encouraged them to package their educational shows at regular times so that there is a consistent time slot when viewers will be able to expect to see them and (hopefully) watch them. In addition, an audience member (a writer for "Blues Clues") said that although programming is a business, if you focus on producing quality programs which speak to children, they will tune in. John Ganahl (KCRG-Cedar Rapids) closed the discussion saying, "we're a tool and we want to use these programs as tools. We have no objection to educating children, it's just that when you forget the fact that this is a business as well, then you cut the feet out from under it."

PANEL 3: STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING VIEWERSHIP OF EDUCATIONAL TV

Moderator

Peggy Charren *Founder, Action for Children's Television*

Panelists

John Carroll *President, Carroll Creative*

Brown Johnson *Senior Vice President, Nick Jr.*

Lucy Johnson *Senior VP, CBS Daytime/Children's Programs and Special Projects*

Bill Nye *Bill Nye the Science Guy*

Alvin Poussaint, M.D. *Professor, Judge Baker Children's Center*

Kate Taylor *Director of Children's Programming, WGBH-TV*

The third panel discussion focused on how to increase viewership of educational children's programming. Panelists discussed issues relating to promotions, ratings, merchandising, and outreach.

The panel began with a discussion of how to measure whether a show is reaching "enough" viewers. There was some discussion of the use of ratings to judge whether a show is getting through to children. Kate Taylor (WGBH-TV) argued that ratings are not always the best way to measure the success of a show. She said that in the public broadcasting arena, a show might do a really good job of reaching a particular age group, and focusing on them in depth. Public broadcasters talk about the need for a qualitative rating system, in addition to a quantitative one, in order to be able to measure this. As she put it, "It's certainly possible to create a show that's having a large impact on a small number of people. And is that worse than a show that's being watched by a larger amount of people and having a smaller impact?"

Lucy Johnson (CBS) added that the goal of CBS in its first year of complying with the FCC rules was simply to make viewers aware that they have children's programming ("Kids don't even know that we are on the air."). She said that the network is committed to providing good quality programs even if they do not generate good ratings in the beginning. She added that once they have established their reputation, ratings will become more important, but shows that are not as popular will be replaced with other quality shows. Peggy Charren commented on the need for broadcasters to give shows time to develop an audience, because it often takes time for viewership to grow.

CREATE HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMS

Throughout the discussion, many of the panelists stressed that the most important factor in bringing viewers to educational programming is to create high quality programs. Bill Nye (“Bill Nye, the Science Guy”) emphasized the importance of creating shows that are fun and exciting for children. He said that the creators of “Bill Nye, the Science Guy” think of it as an entertainment program first and that their goal is to “make the best show they possibly can.” Kate Taylor (WGBH-TV) also credited the success of “Arthur” to her belief that it is a “really good show.” She added that, because of budget constraints, the show had to depend on people to find it without advertising, but that children were drawn to it because it was well done. An audience member (a producer and co-creator of “Blues Clues”) agreed that word of mouth is the most important form of promotion, adding that if a show is really good, then marketing people will get behind it. Several panelists commented that it is important to remember that there are skills that need to be learned in order to create programs that are both educational and entertaining, and that it is important that producers get the training and information they need to produce quality shows.



Bill Nye

Brown Johnson (Nick Jr.) noted that one of the ways to produce successful children’s programming is to understand and connect with the target audience by developing storylines and characters to which they can relate. She said, “know what’s interesting for them, what kind of stories resonate with them and above all, create characters who are really interesting for them...creating characters who resonate and create this emotional connection with the audience...it’s why people watch “Seinfeld” and it’s why little kids watch Fred Rogers.”

Several panelists said that one strategy that has worked has based a show on a book or product that already exists. Kate Taylor (WGBH-TV) cited “Arthur” as an example of a show that was successfully developed from a book. The show encourages kids to read the books (she stated that “Arthur” books are now impossible to keep on library shelves), and the books encourage viewership of the program. Lucy Johnson (CBS) added that in their first year of airing educational shows, they often relied on “some sort of self-start marketing element” to help promote their shows, because advertising funds were limited. “GhostWriter Mysteries,” “Sports Illustrated for Kids” and “The Weird Al Show” were all based on well-known titles.

Alvin Poussaint (Judge Baker Children’s Center) was pessimistic about the commercial broadcast industry’s commitment to developing quality shows. He argued that there will need to be continued financial support from the public, the government and foundations because the market demands of the commercial broadcast industry will prevent them from devoting adequate financial resources to developing quality programs, which are often expensive to produce. He added “even if ‘Willoughby’s Wonders’ (a show Poussaint helped create) is a good show and it won two Emmys, they’re not going to pick it up if they can’t make money from it.”

DEVELOP MULTIPLE PROMOTIONS

Most of the panelists agreed that the best place to promote educational shows is through the media, especially television. Brown Johnson (Nick Jr.) stated that promotion on radio and television is probably the best way to reach older children since they don't read a lot of newspapers, or magazines. She added that for younger children, promotions should be geared towards the parents, who are the gatekeepers of what they watch. Kate Taylor (WGBH-TV) agreed that radio advertising is a good way to reach children, especially older kids. She also said that educating newspapers about how to write about children's programming is very important so that parents have a source to which they can turn to help them make decisions about the shows their children watch.



Brown Johnson, Lucy Johnson and Dr. Alvin Poussaint

There was also agreement that promotions should be multi-faceted in order to generate viewership. Brown Johnson (Nick Jr.) was optimistic that good programs can be successful if the networks support them by promoting them "all over the place." She cited "Blues Clues" as an example of a show backed by several promotional efforts including: advertising to children and parents on a number of cable channels, possibly running a sweepstakes, and potentially developing show-related products. She added that the increase in the number of mega-entertainment companies (such as Viacom and Time Warner), makes it possible for shows to be promoted through a number of outlets, which should enhance the ability of broadcasters to attract large audiences. Lucy Johnson (CBS) agreed that running multiple promotions is necessary in order to "get through the clutter" to reach kids, for instance by promoting shows in programs that are popular with kids in other day parts, running contests, or getting into schools.

RUN SHOWS IN BLOCKS

Several panelists also commented on the usefulness of running children's educational programs in blocks so that kids will be able to find them, and so that programs can be used to promote other shows in the block.

Kate Taylor (WGBH-TV) stressed the importance of airing a block of children's programs and not "one or two shows stuck in the late afternoon." She said that it is important to create an environment of programs for kids in order to increase viewership of the entire block of shows. She cited the 34% average increase in viewership of older children's programs when public broadcasting stations began scheduling children's programs together in a block called "PTV".

Lucy Johnson (CBS) added that it is problematic that the children's line-up on CBS is interrupted by two hours of news programming, because the network is less able to promote shows within other shows in a block. "We're more dependent than ever on outside knowledge, whether it be Weird Al on tour or CTW working in the schools or something on the local station promoting its own line-up. It's a big obstacle."

DEVELOP WEBSITES

Many panelists agreed that websites are a good extension of the show and help get children more interested in their programs. Kate Taylor (WGBH-TV) called the "Arthur" website "a way to extend the value of the show both in terms of education and entertainment." The website encourages children to write e-mail messages to the producers which supports the mission of the show to encourage children to read and write.

ENCOURAGE ADVERTISERS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

John Carroll (Carroll Creative) noted that while advertisers aggressively target children as consumers (even as early as preschool age), they do not support educational programming. He argued that more should be done to bring this to the attention of the public, in an effort to get advertisers to support quality programs for children. He said "If you want to make advertisers more responsive to you, put them on the radar screen. Say (to them), 'why is it that Nintendo can strap kids to an outdoor billboard, but can't support quality television?' That would be one of the ways I think you could go about bringing advertisers around. ...this may be coercion, but it's legitimate coercion. And if you can bring them to the attention of the public, what they do, how they try to do it, and what they don't do, then maybe you'll have a better chance of bringing them into the fold."

EXPAND EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Kate Taylor (WGBH-TV) asserted that educational outreach has been successful for public broadcasting. She said that research shows that 97% of all teachers who receive materials from them use the shows as part of their classroom curriculum, either by referring to them, assigning them, or doing activities based on the shows. As she says, "what better way to get programs known than to get into the classroom, especially in this changing environment where kids actually think it's cool to be smart and get educated. I think that's a big change and I think we should take advantage of that sea change."

LUNCHEON ADDRESS: GERALDINE LAYBOURNE, PRESIDENT, DISNEY/ABC CABLE NETWORKS

The luncheon address was given by Geraldine Laybourne who was presented with the second annual Annenberg Public Policy Center Award for Distinguished Lifetime Contribution to Children's Television. Geraldine Laybourne is president of Disney/ABC cable networks where she is responsible for cable programming for the Walt Disney Company and its ABC subsidiaries. Prior to that, she was president of Nickelodeon, where she pioneered a number of creative children's programs including: "You Can't Do That on Television," "Clarissa Explains it All," and the Emmy Award winning "Rugrats." In 1996, *Time* magazine named her one of the twenty-five most influential people in America for her contributions to the children's television industry. In presenting her with the award, Kathleen Hall Jamieson called Laybourne "a strong force for better-quality children's programming."



photo: Steve Fenn

Geraldine Laybourne, recipient of the 1997
APPC Award

Geraldine Laybourne began by saying that she was especially honored to be receiving the award in the presence of Peggy Charren who has been such an inspiration to her, and who has been so influential in the debate over quality programming for children. She also said that the award had special meaning because her interest in young children developed when she was a graduate student in elementary education at the University of Pennsylvania. It was there, she said, that she began to appreciate the importance of observing children in order to learn about them. She said that since that time, "I cannot just read a research report and feel like I've learned anything. I actually have to see kids. I actually have to feel how they are responding to things. And I think that's something that is missed very often."

Laybourne told producers not to be discouraged because: "I am living proof, and Nickelodeon is living proof, that you can in fact make good programming, make it relevant to kids, and make it good business....you have to think big, and you have to think positively, and if you start out defeated you will go nowhere." She went on to speak about three main lessons that she has learned from her experiences over the last twenty years: First, she stressed that adults need to be around children in order to understand them so that they won't make assumptions about them that aren't true. As she put it, "know your audience, like your audience, respect your audience, have fun with your audience, observe your audience, and do it all the time." Second, she said that it is crucial to find creators who are passionate about their shows, the subject matter, and their audience. She cited Bill Nye as an example of a creator who has passion for the subject matter he teaches. Third, she said that it is important that there be a partnership between creators and people who offer other experiences with children, such as teachers, academics, and researchers. She said, "The academic versus creator should never be a puledog function. It should be a partnership that gets people working together, enthusing each other and spurring each other on to greater heights for kids,

because that's really what everybody in this room is interested in." Laybourne cited examples of shows which are being developed where these partnerships are working. For instance, in developing "Pepper Ann," a show about a seventh grade girl, the creator was partnered with the head of a girl's school to learn about the lives and interests of girls at this age, which should help make the show more relevant to them. She said "I think it's possible to use educators and use the knowledge of kids with creators to get them excited and have it work. And that's what I would encourage you all to do."

Laybourne concluded optimistically by saying that "I don't think that this debate is going to be going on ten years from now....because kids are different. ...For the first time in twenty years the number of hours that kids watch television a week has fallen off." Children are now turning to the computer, and are so savvy about technology that they are going to "demand a lot more from us, and a lot more from the medium (of television)." She added that she believes that television and the computer will converge so that "educational television for the first time will really be possible, because kids will be able to explore their interests and their questions."

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