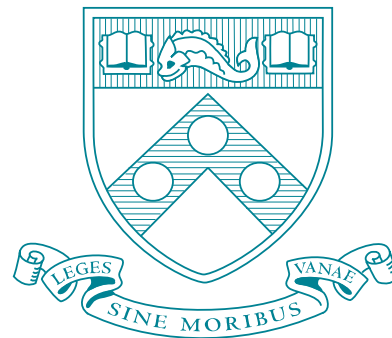


# THE THIRD ANNUAL ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER'S CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND TELEVISION: A SUMMARY

Report prepared by Melinda M. Schwenk

*22 June 1998*



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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

This report was prepared by Melinda M. Schwenk, doctoral candidate at the Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania.

## ABSTRACT:

*The Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania held its third annual Conference on Children and Television on June 22, 1998, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Conference participants included members of the television industry, advertisers, producers of children's programming, advocates, researchers and policy makers of children's television. During the previous year, broadcasters implemented the Federal Communications Commission's regulatory guidelines for children's television. In January 1997, the FCC required commercial broadcasters to identify the programs they considered to be "educational and informational" (E/I) for children. In September 1997, the broadcasters were also required to begin airing a minimum of three hours' worth of E/I programming between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. in order to qualify for expedited review of their license renewal application.*

*The conference reported the APPC's rating of quality of programming for children and the commercial broadcasters' educational efforts; the results of an independent, APPC-funded study of Latino-American preschoolers; and the findings of a national survey on television in the home. Three panel discussions addressed: 1) Children's television in the new regulatory environment; 2) Capitalizing on diversity in children's programming; and 3) News and public affairs programs for children. Susan Ness, FCC Commissioner, gave the keynote address, and Fred Rogers, the creator and host of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, was presented with the 1998 APPC Award for Distinguished Contribution to Children and Television, by his friend and APPC Advisor, Jonathan Kozol.*

## INTRODUCTION:

On June 22, 1998, the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania held its third annual Conference on Children and Television at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The conference is part of the 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 in need of improvement. This year's conference also explored two ancillary issues of children's television programming: cultural diversity and news for children. The results of three research reports were released and presented at the conference. The studies were 1) an annual national survey of parents and children to gauge children's television viewing behavior and parents' and children's 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 descriptive survey of Latino-American pre-school children's use of the media, conducted by researchers at Stanford and Harvard Universities and funded by APPC.

### THE ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

The conference began with a press briefing hosted by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and dean of the Annenberg School for Communication. Dean Jamieson introduced Dr. Amy Jordan, who directs APPC's children and television project. Dr. Jordan presented an overview of the three studies commissioned by the APPC, which were released at the briefing.

### THE RESEARCH REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND TELEVISION

***The 1998 State of Children's Television Report: Programming for Children Over Broadcast and Cable Television*** (Jordan, Davis, Fishman, Maxwell, Park, Schwenk and Wray)

Because the 1997/1998 season provided commercial broadcasters with their first real opportunity to implement the FCC's three-hour rule, the focus of this report is on E/I (educational and informational) programming under the new guidelines. The study found that commercial broadcasters in the Philadelphia area were each programming at least three hours of educational shows between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Five of the seven broadcasters in Philadelphia provided 4 to 5.5 hours/week of educational shows, preliminarily allaying fears that the FCC's ruling would encourage stations to view the three-hour rule as a ceiling to be reached, rather than a floor to be exceeded. Broadcasters were also found to be fulfilling the FCC requirement that they label E/I shows on-air and notify publications like *TV Guide* of their educational offerings.

No single formula or network cornered the market on quality E/I shows. Those labeled as "highly educational," excellent E/I shows comprised 28.6 percent of the sample and consisted of news programs for children, narrative and expository shows, and cartoon and live-action formats. Roughly the same percentage of programs (25.7) were found to be only "minimally educational," while 45.7 percent were rated

“moderately educational.” Programs were thought to be appropriately labeled as educational if they contained 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. In comparison with the 1996/1997 season, the quality of the programs offered to children remained roughly the same, with slightly more rated “moderately educational” and slightly fewer rated “highly educational.” Broadcasters, however, have not settled upon a consistent way of labeling on-air E/I programs. The creative diversity in E/I symbols, as well as their brief appearance at the beginning of the shows, appears to be confusing parents (See Stanger, 1998).

Researchers also evaluated the over 1,000 shows available to children over broadcast and cable TV in the 1997/98 season. In this sample, the findings indicate that less than 10 percent of programs for children are available during the prime-time hours. The elementary school age audience is the target for the most programs, but much of what is available to them is not enriching. Programs geared to five- to eleven-year-olds were significantly more likely to contain violence and harsh language and were significantly less likely to contain any enriching content than programs for the preschool or teen audience. Of this general sample, 36.4 percent of the programs were considered “high quality” (down 3 percent from 1997), 27.3 percent are “moderate quality” (up 4 percent from 1997) and a disappointing 36.3 percent are low quality (similar to 1997). Although there were more programs for teens this season than last, those programs received relatively lower ratings.

Also implemented in the 1997/98 season were the content labels designed to complement the age-based ratings system that will eventually work in conjunction with the V-Chip. Unfortunately, many children’s programs do not contain appropriate labels previewing violent content. Only 25 percent of programs that contained “a lot” of violence (intentional and malicious acts of violence in three or more scenes) carried the “FV (fantasy violence) warning at the beginning of the program.

### ***Television in the Home 1998: The Third Annual National Survey of Parents and Children*** (Stanger)

Jeffrey Stanger, associate director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center’s Washington, D.C. office, reported the primary findings of the third national survey, which included 1,208 parents and 300 of their 10-17 year old children. The survey, conducted by Chilton Research Services, Inc., measured parents’ and children’s opinions of television programming, viewing and other media-related behaviors, and knowledge of and attitudes toward relevant policy issues (such as the FCC’s three-hour rule, the new ratings system for television programming, and the V-chip). In comparison with last year, there was no change in parents’ perception of the amount of quality educational television for their children. The report found that there was little parental recognition of the E/I symbol. Not surprisingly, then, few parents are using the FCC-mandated symbol to guide their children’s television viewing. APPC’s national survey has tracked consistent support among parents for the impending implementation of the V-chip technology, which would allow parents to program out shows that contain content they consider to be objectionable.

Although 61 percent of households with children have computers, and one-third of those homes have online access, television is still important to children. The study found that 42 percent of children age 2 to 17 have a television in their bedroom. However, those children with computers spend less time

watching television (2.3 hours/day) than children without computers (2.9 hours). Not surprisingly, adoption of information technologies in the home lags among lower income families. Fewer than one-third (32.5%) of families with annual household incomes below \$30,000 report having a home computer in 1998, whereas nearly 61 percent of the families with incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 74 percent with incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and 89 percent with incomes over \$75,000 have computers. Comparison with data from 1997 indicates that the bulk of the growth in home computers has occurred in middle income households.

This study also looked at how people of different races are included and portrayed on television. The survey found that, across racial groups, children were much more optimistic than their parents about how racial groups were portrayed. Both parents and children, however, agreed that television does a better job *including* racial minorities than it does *portraying* them.

### *Latino American Preschoolers and the Media* (Borzekowski and Poussaint)

Dina Borzekowski, Associate Research Director at the Judge Baker Media Center at Harvard University, served as the project director and reported on the findings of a survey and content analysis funded by the Annenberg Public Policy Center. Conducted in the Winter and Spring of 1998, the study examined the 30 top rated shows watched by preschool children. In these shows only 6 of the 185 featured characters were identified as Latino. The researchers also evaluated non-program content (such as advertisements, network identifications and TV show promotions) found in and immediately after the programs. Only 6 percent of the non-program items featured a Latino character. Arguing that television plays an important social role in the lives of preschoolers, Dr. Borzekowski called on television producers for a more representative inclusion of Latino characters on American television programs.

Also reported was the study's survey of 128 Latino American mothers of preschoolers in Northern California, which found that every household had at least one television set and 52 percent had cable or a satellite dish. Although other researchers have suggested that less acculturated (Spanish speaking) Latino households will be heavy television watchers, this survey found little difference in television use between English and Spanish speaking Latino households. A majority of mothers felt that "watching TV improves the language skills of preschool children," although 40 percent agreed that TV makes children more aggressive or that watching can hurt school performance. Mothers were disappointed with the Spanish-language programs available to their children, but encouraged their children to watch *Sesame Street* and other PBS programs.

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS: FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSIONER, SUSAN NESS

Amy Jordan introduced the keynote speaker, FCC Commissioner, Susan Ness, a chief proponent of the three-hour rule and a major voice for children at the FCC. The Commissioner's talk, "Kid-Tested Quality Programming: The News on the New Programs," presented evidence for a cautiously optimistic assessment of the three-hour rule's effectiveness. Each station identified a "point person" responsible for children's programming. In addition, the average amount of educational/informational programming broadcast was over four hours per week. "The vast majority of commercial broadcasters have accepted the need to provide at least three hours of educational programming and are making a good-faith effort to comply with the letter and spirit of the rules." She cautioned, however, that the FCC "is not poised to second guess the good faith programming judgments of broadcasters. The First Amendment circumscribes the government from making any content-based evaluations."

Commissioner Ness emphasized that the public must accept the responsibility for evaluating the quality of the educational offerings for children. Commissioner Ness encouraged local groups and individual parents to let their stations know what they think of the broadcasters' E/I children's programs. "Action at the local level makes such a difference in getting newspapers and other media to cover the story. It's also important because some stations are creating their own, high-quality, locally based shows. Stations need community encouragement to continue to provide such local programming." She also praised the Annenberg Public Policy Center for its "extremely helpful analysis of the core programming aired in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1997" and the Center for Media Education for its publication of a "preview guide" to broadcasters' educational and informational programs. Commissioner Ness urged both groups to "spread the word about the shows you believe have merit."

Commissioner Ness also urged newspapers and other television listing services to note, as *TV Guide* does, the E/I icon next to each program identified by broadcasters. In the same vein, she has asked and will continue to request that broadcasters promote their E/I offerings and give quality children's programs regularly scheduled time slots so that the shows can become "appointment viewing" for the younger crowd."



APPC Director Kathleen Hall Jamieson with  
FCC Commissioner Susan Ness

In conclusion, Commissioner Ness noted that "there is no single formula for success" in producing quality programming that kids like. She also noted that in the past year, broadcasters have demonstrated that a diversity of themes, targeted age groups, and program structures can become successful educational programs. "We simply must keep encouraging and supporting the efforts of broadcasters and others – for the betterment of our children."



# PANEL 1: CHILDREN'S TELEVISION IN THE NEW REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

## Moderator

Chris Stern, *Washington Bureau Chief, Variety*

## Panelists

Kathryn Montgomery, *President, Center for Media Education*

Jim Jinkins, *Creator/Executive Producer, "Disney's Doug"*

Donna Mitroff, *Vice President, Educational Policies and Practices, Fox Kids*

Jim Esser, *Director, Community Relations & Legal Affairs, KRON-TV, San Francisco*

Jonathan Mandel, *Senior Vice President, Grey Advertising*

## THE IMPACT OF THE FCC'S THREE-HOUR RULE

Chris Stern introduced the speakers and led them through a discussion of the complex issues surrounding children's television in the new regulatory environment. The FCC's three-hour rule requires broadcasters to air children's educational programs between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. Jonathan Mandel explained that this ruling has led many broadcasters to discard inadequate children's shows that were produced primarily to market toys and not to educate children. If broadcasters *must* air educational shows during the 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. time period, then lesser quality shows will likely not be broadcast. Donna Mitroff noted that the FCC's ruling has led to closer collaboration among networks, scholars and advocates to determine what constitutes educational programming for children. To help broadcasters meet the FCC's requirements, Mitroff and Kathryn Montgomery collaborated with others in the industry to develop "Building Blocks: A Guide for Creating Children's Educational Television."\*

Currently, the networks supply a three to four-hour block of educational programs to their affiliated stations to comply with the FCC's ruling. Jim Esser at KRON-TV, however, believes that his station should be part of the local community by providing local programming. Therefore, his station produces three one-half hour children's shows each week, while also airing 12 hours of syndicated shows, including one hour of the NBC network's educational offerings. Network executives, however, pressure local stations like his not to pre-empt network sports programming with local children's shows.

Broadcasters have also found that the FCC three-hour rule infringes on their ability to fulfill long-standing contracts to air sports programming on Saturday mornings. When networks air East Coast games, which may start at 9 a.m. on the West Coast, children's educational programs



Chris Stern, *Variety*

are often preempted. For example, *Beakman's World* was preempted 14 out of the 19 times it was scheduled to air because of sports broadcasting. Kathryn Montgomery emphasized how important consistent programming times are for parents and children who wish to find educational shows.

Chris Stern asked Jim Jinkins, the producer of the educational (and successful) program *Disney's Doug*, whether the FCC's three-hour rule had changed the creative process behind the show. Jinkins responded that the FCC's three-hour rule has encouraged the use of educational consultants. At first he was concerned that educators and academics would not understand that children's shows need to be entertaining, but he found that they have been more a help than a hindrance. Kathryn Montgomery was pleased to hear that the "culture of creation" is changing in children's television programming. "Educational television does not have to be, what I call, 'blackboard television.' Educators know that children are very active, avid learners and that whatever you provide for them in terms of the learning experience has to be creative and engaging. There does not need to be a dichotomy between education and entertainment."

## MONEY FOR PROMOTION AND PRODUCTION

Jonathan Mandel of Grey Advertising believes that the FCC's three-hour rule has not significantly changed networks' abilities to generate ratings and revenue. Considering that networks had feared that the ruling would cause them to *lose* money, Mandel believes that the stationary numbers are actually a good sign. All panelists agreed that the networks need to *spend* money to promote their educational fare. Jim Esser of KRON-TV, however, has found it difficult to interest local advertisers in supporting his locally produced children's shows and in finding the air time on his station to promote the shows outside of their time slot. Kathryn Montgomery noted that her non-profit organization, the Center for Media Education, supports a web-page listing all the E/I shows on the various broadcast networks.

Besides the need for more network promotional efforts for children's educational programs, the panelists agreed that there is still insufficient funding for quality shows. Kathryn Montgomery suggested, in this competitive environment, public television tends to act as the laboratory for new shows. Successful programs are then picked up by the commercial broadcasters. For example, Donna Mitroff announced that the Fox network will now be airing *The Magic Schoolbus*, which used to appear on public broadcasting stations. She said Fox will be spending considerable resources both to maintain the show's loyal viewers



Donna Mitroff, Fox Kids TV

and to introduce new audiences to this educational and entertaining show. Jonathan Mandel warned, however, that funding cuts at PBS may impede public television's ability to produce new educational shows for children.

In his struggle to find advertisers for low-rated children's shows, Jim Esser has found that it is difficult to get accurate data on who is actually watching the shows, since adults normally fill out the program diaries. Jonathan Mandel pointed out that the advertisers he works with want to buy national spots rather than local air

time. He also pointed out the need for advertisers to recognize that half the audience for children's television are adults. Jim Jinkins also emphasized how important it is for children's programs to be appealing for adults. "Programs must be written smart and be entertaining for the entire family."

Jim Jinkins showed an episode from *Disney's Doug*, which discussed the problem of eating disorders in teen athletes. Fellow panelists praised the show for its handling of social and emotional issues and emphasized that educational programs are not necessarily tied to school curriculum subjects. Donna Mitroff presented two of



Jim Jinkins, "Disney's Doug"

the ten public service announcements (PSAs) produced by Fox, with the assistance of educational consultant Bill Damon. The PSAs show children how to manage their anger and other difficult emotions by taking a moment to "Stop, Breathe, and Count to Three." Fox will be promoting these spots in their print and website materials.

Kathryn Montgomery urged the development of more news programming for children which will encourage young people's growth as citizens, but Jonathan Mandel cautioned that such programs are not likely to find an audience at a time when only 12 percent of adults are watching local news. From the audience, Peggy Charren,

the founder of Action for Children's Television, made the point that broadcasters should not always seek to maximize profits. Charren hoped television broadcasters would recognize the importance of children and be willing to take creative risks in producing programs, such as news shows, that will be both good for children and interesting to them. Agreeing with Peggy Charren, Kathryn Montgomery noted that since the market place may not support quality children's programming, broadcasters should be encouraged to see children's television as a way to elevate society and to improve the level of civic understanding and engagement.

## HDTV'S IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

In response to an audience question about what the public interest obligations will be for high-definition television (HDTV), Kathryn Montgomery explained that the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which gave the broadcasters spectrum for HDTV, also gave broadcasters the flexibility to choose how that spectrum will be used. Besides the three hours per week of educational broadcasting for children, Montgomery said she and other advocates will be urging that in the digital age new commitments be made for children. The new technology will, she said, offer important interactive capabilities, which may add substantially to the educational impact of television for children.

Jim Esser felt it was a little premature to look at the opportunities for HDTV because the consumer equipment simply is not ready and television stations are not set up to broadcast digitally. Local broadcasters cannot yet address content changes because they are still trying to manage the technical issues. Jim Jinkins admitted that he, like many producers, has not yet considered how HDTV will impact his ability to tell a good story through *Disney's Doug*. Because the Telecommunication's Act only governs broadcasters, Jonathan Mandel believes that any benefits of digital television for children's programming will be limited until the government expands its regulatory authority over cable networks.

## PANEL 2: CAPITALIZING ON DIVERSITY

### Moderator

Marta Tienda, *Professor, Princeton University, member of APPC's Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television*

### Panelists

Jo-Ann Rullan, *Executive Producer, Univision*

Lois Salisbury, *President, Children Now*

Deborah Tang, *Vice President, Black Entertainment Television*

Ophira Edut, *Publisher, HUES Magazine*

Lillian Beard, M.D., *Professor, George Washington University/Howard University*

### THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF MINORITY REPRESENTATION ON TELEVISION

Marta Tienda started the session by outlining the changing demographic landscape of the U.S. population. Whereas the total racial and ethnic minority U.S. population in 1970 was 17 percent, 36 percent will be minority in the year 2020. The proportion of minority children is growing even faster. In 1990, 31 percent of 5 to 13 year olds were designated in a minority category, but in 2020, nearly half (49 percent) will be Latino, African-American, Asian or from another minority group. In conjunction with the growing minority population in the United States, Dr. Tienda reported that ten percent of those residing on American soil were born in other countries. These numbers suggest that television could be targeted to address the needs of both minority and immigrant children. Dr. Tienda emphasized, however, that the title of the session was “capitalizing” and not “managing” diversity because she wanted to avoid what she considers to be “a reactive way to think about what is happening to our society as demography has taken its toll and altered the race and ethnic landscape.”

Panelists agreed that there has been little improvement on network television over the past twenty years in its representation of minority populations. According to Jo-Ann Rullan, even when “Hispanic actors do get roles, the roles do not represent Hispanic culture.” Lois Salisbury highlighted some findings from a recent study by her organization Children Now. Children Now polled 1,200 children from age 10 to 17. In the poll, the researchers spoke to 300 children from each of four self-identified racial groups: White, African-American, Asian and Latino. The study found that “children of all races understood the inherent importance of seeing themselves as well as others reflected on television.” Salisbury emphasized that representation tells children “I count,” and that the lack of representation of Latinos and Asians seemed unfair to children of all races.



Marta Tienda, Princeton University

Children Now's 1998 study also found that children were disturbed by television shows, particularly situation comedies, which portray the United States as a segregated society. One child respondent asked: "Is the adult world telling us that we *can't* get along or that we *should not* get along?" Salisbury pointed out that MTV's research into their young audience has found that "this is a generation that doesn't see itself as majority or minority, but sees themselves all as a group of 'others.'" Children, Salisbury stated, want to see programming with every race. "They want to see diversity on TV."

Pediatrician Lillian Beard discussed how pre-school children who watch *Sesame Street* have greater intergroup relationships than children who do not watch this ethnically diverse show. Not only does television have an effect on how children feel about people of different races, Dr. Beard stated, "it enhances real relationships."



Jo-Ann Rullan, Univision

## TARGETING THE MINORITY AUDIENCE

Jo-Ann Rullan of Univision and Deborah Tang of Black Entertainment Television (BET) outlined their strategies for targeting their respective audiences. According to Rullan, Univision addresses their viewers' national identities more than racial issues because they have found that the Latino perspective transcends race. "Although we try to focus on universals, we also celebrate diversity by showing the different Latino humors and realities of life." Both Rullan and Tang agreed that their networks play an important role in building the self-esteem of their minority audiences. Tang chastised the major networks for showing only white men in positions of authority. "On the other hand, people of color are more often seen in a negative light, most often with their hands above their head or behind their back."

To counter negative images in the mainstream media, BET produces a program called *Teen Summit*, which allows young people to present their own image of themselves. BET's "Town Hall" program brings together a multi-racial group of teens to discuss, for example, pregnancy, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Tang advocated this kind of show which has "real kids on a real show talking about real issues" that's programming. "Ophira Edut of *HUES* magazine argued that it is very important to let more kinds of people into the media to tell their own stories. She warned, however, that there is a delicate balance to show different people without making everyone look the same. A person's culture should also not be the only thing that defines her, because then you create a stereotype." Her magazine, *HUES*, allows girls and young women to speak in their own voices, which, Edut hopes, "will expand people's definitions of what to expect from an African-American or a Latina."



## ADVERTISING AND AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

Deborah Tang discussed the difficulty of persuading companies to advertise on BET shows. “It takes a lot of work to convince them that you will have viewers for them at a particular time of day.” From the audience, David Walsh of the National Institute on Media and Family noted how advertisers are not just looking for viewers but for the “correct” viewers. In the early days of cable television, Walsh explained, “Ted Turner said ‘we don’t wire to the ghetto.’ He was telling advertisers not to waste their money on broadcast television because people in the ghetto don’t have the money to buy your product.” Walsh also cited Joseph Turow’s book, *Breaking Up America*, which describes how the advertising industry is a “very powerful force, which is behind media whose agenda is to break up America for market segmentation reasons.”

From the audience, Meredith Ross, senior producer of the PBS teen series *In the Mix*, said that her program shows teens in different social and ethnic groups, rather than having one group with a representative member from each minority group. By their teen years, Ross stated, “they are interested in seeing how different people treat the same issues.” However, she noted, and the other panelists agreed, there is little diversity in children’s programming between the *Sesame Street* years and the teen years.

David Walsh remarked that as much as advertisers may want to segment the viewing audience, the media also have a vested interest in representing this country as a diverse society where people can get along. According to Ophira Edut, “both segmenting and showing integration are important because the larger issue is ‘identity,’ and people need to experience both for creating a strong identity and self-esteem.” Lillian Beard agreed, stating, “we need to be ping pongs, we can’t be rigid. However, when children do not see themselves at all on television, they feel that their particular group is undervalued.”



Lillian Beard, George Washington Univ/Howard Univ

The session concluded with a call from Dr. Tienda to find out if “capitalizing on diversity” is a shared value among the programming and broadcasting community. “I think this is an issue that deserves a lot more time, and if diversity is not a shared value, then we need to formulate some key messages and goals about *why* diversity is important.”

## PANEL 3: WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW: NEWS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING

### Moderator

Peggy Charren, *Founder, Action for Children's Television, member of APPC's Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television*

### Panelists

Joe Garbarino, *Director of Special Programs, KARE-TV, Minneapolis*

Joan Konner, *Publisher, Columbia Journalism Review*

Jerome Brodlie, *President, American Academy of Child Psychology*

John Richards, *Senior Vice President, Turner Learning*

Bill Zimmerman, *Special Projects Editor, Newsday*

Georgette Rucker, *Reporter, Children's Express*

### WHY NEWS FOR CHILDREN?

With little “citizen education” taking place in children’s schools or homes, Joan Konner advocated using educational television to express a common agenda and to identify for children the nation’s common ideals and shared interests. Bill Zimmerman expanded on this notion by describing how television news for children could empower young people and explain the world to them. He believes news for children will give them a greater connection to the world and a greater sense of citizenship.

On a practical level, Joe Garbarino of KARE-TV in Minneapolis described how he persuaded the station’s managers to develop news for teens in order to cultivate this generation of children as present and future audience members. Besides, Garbarino notes, “our station is owned by Gannett, which also recognizes that news drives the local station in its quest for ratings.”

Peggy Charren asked whether some television news might be too frightening for children to watch. Child psychologist Jerome Brodlie advocated that parents take the time to discuss news events with their children. He chided those news organizations that focus on showing death and violence. “That’s not important news, and parents do not want their children to see people crying about their losses or bodies being carried away from violent events.” Instead, he urged news shows to cover political and international news, which is better fodder for family discussion. Joe Garbarino agreed, but also argued for news coverage of issues targeted to the interests and concerns of young people.



Peggy Charren, Action for Children's Television

## APPROACHES TO NEWS FOR AND BY CHILDREN

Joe Garbarino has developed a local news program at KARE-TV where fifteen local young people are hired each year to develop, produce and report on news. Garbarino showed a clip in which teens at a local high school were preparing a memorial for a student who was murdered. Garbarino explained the importance of news for teens: "If something happens to the older generation, it gets lots of press. When there is something about teens and their peer group, the story gets two-column inches on the bottom of page three of the newspaper. Young people deserve to hear stories of interest to them and reported from a point of view which they can relate to." Recognizing that most advertisers prefer to purchase air time on national shows, Garbarino made a special effort to find local clients who had important messages for children, including health groups and milk advertisers.

Children's Express is a news service run for and by children age eight to eighteen. Georgette Rucker, a reporter for Children's Express, urged people to include children in their decisions on the media. "Once you invite a child to participate, you will learn so much about what they have to offer. I encourage you to incorporate children in everything you do every day." Peggy Charren praised the work done by Children's Express reporters, whose stories are picked up by newspapers around the country.

John Richards of Turner Learning explained that Ted Turner's belief in "global citizenry" has been behind CNN's spending \$20 million over the past ten years to prepare and disseminate CNN's *Newsroom*, a commercial free, cost-free news service offered to schools around the country. Every night, CNN broadcasts a half-hour of specially modified news stories which could be useful in the classroom. CNN producers make a news story more child-friendly by providing background information and context. Richards explained "when you begin by looking at the news and digging into the school curriculum, then you get to see why things are happening in the world. Making the curriculum real to students is the trick, but it's also the hard part of teaching." Joan Konner urged a change in how news is produced. "We need to move from a journalism of fear to a journalism of promise. With children, when dealing with connectedness and relevance to their lives, we have to push the boundaries of journalism." When Richards showed an example of a modified CNN news story on the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, panelists agreed that the historical background information and explanatory maps would assist not only children but also adult viewers.

Bill Zimmerman described how his Long Island newspaper, *Newsday*, at first hesitantly and now willingly and confidently publishes three pages of news each day targeted to children. "During the Persian Gulf War, we asked some of our best writers to contribute 500-word stories to the page explaining why the United States was involved." The newspaper asks children questions, then publishes the answers on subsequent days. Zimmerman stated, "the idea was to get kids to feel as if they own a part of the paper." To



Bill Zimmerman, Newsday



keep children interested, the newspaper addresses a wide range of issues, from economics to health and science, from ecology to Israeli-Palestinian confrontations. Zimmerman has found that the children's pages are very popular with adults, particularly with immigrants who are learning English. Many *Newsday* stories for children have links with internet web sites. Since 1996, *Newsday* has also published a news-oriented comic strip about a super-journalist heroine called "Chip Tracer," who has covered such stories as the Clinton/Dole presidential campaign, the work of Mother Theresa, global warming, and Jackie Robinson.

## THE FUTURE OF NEWS FOR CHILDREN

Bill Zimmerman hoped that the popular comic strip character "Chip Tracer" might find a home on the internet and on television. John Richards felt certain that new technologies would entice children into the world of news. "The most important thing that is evolving



(left) Georgette Rucker, *Children's Express*; (right) Joan Konner, *Columbia Journalism Review*

now is the sense that news is not just for consumption, because students, with the new technologies, can be in the position to produce news for airing or for a web-site." Richards added that the digital cameras and cheaper editing technologies will help give students a voice. "At the Hartford, Connecticut station affiliated with the Fox network, kids are already learning how to produce news stories," stated Peggy Charren, who showed a clip from the station's video designed to teach young people the technical aspects of creating a news story.

Joan Konner warned, however, that funding for public television, the traditional laboratory for new children's shows, is drying up. From the audience, Sue Castle, producer of the PBS teen magazine show *In the Mix*, also voiced concern over the lack of funding for children's news and said that children were often unhappy with how they are portrayed in the news. "We have to make news relevant to teens," Castle stated. The panelists agreed that television news can improve critical thinking skills and offer families and classrooms relevant materials for instruction and discussion. Peggy Charren closed the session with praise for the Annenberg Public Policy Center for having brought together the talented people for the conference. She concluded, "I'm going home feeling that children's television is really going to get better."

## LUNCHEON AWARD CEREMONY

### THE 1998 ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTION TO CHILDREN AND TELEVISION

#### FRED ROGERS, "MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD"

Jonathan Kozol, the award-winning author of several books on social justice and childhood in America,

introduced Fred Rogers and presented him with the 1998 APPC award for Distinguished Lifetime Contribution to Children and Television. "Like most of you," Kozol told the luncheon crowd of 150 conference guests and participants, "I guess I always knew Fred Rogers, but I never met him until two years ago in 1996, when I was at WQED in Pittsburgh for an interview. Suddenly, I heard this voice behind me . . . I turned around and there was Mr. Rogers. We became friends and some months later Fred went up with me one day to meet the children that I know in the South Bronx." Kozol recounted how the children at St. Ann's Episcopal church, who were attending an after-school program, recognized Mr. Rogers. "When Mr. Rogers walked in, there was a stampede of little feet. Children wanted to be close to him. They treated him as if they had known him all their lives, which in a sense they did. He treated them as if he knew them, too. He didn't make any hasty judgments on the children that he met. He listened a lot. He asked a lot of questions and he gave them time to answer."

At St. Ann's, Kozol explained, the children enjoy being sprinkled with holy water by the priest, who described her actions as "blessing children who are blessed by God already."



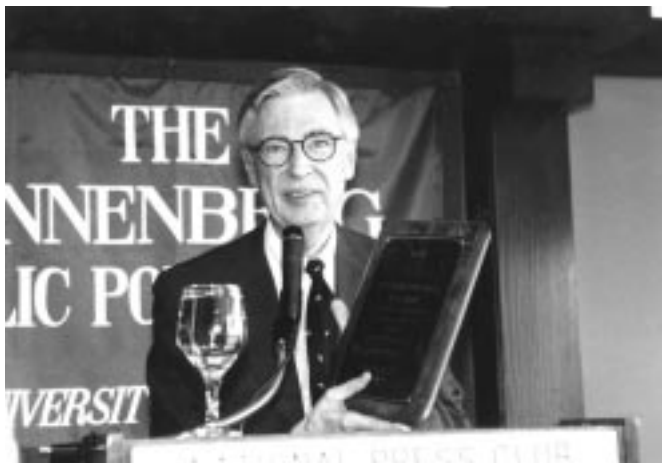
Jonathan Kozol

Kozol compared what Mr. Rogers' program does to a non-denominational blessing of children. "It isn't Catholic, Protestant or Jewish. It's like an ecumenical communion, where the wine, of course, is never alcoholic, and the wafer tastes as good as raisin bread. There's nobody else like him in the media today. To Mr. Rogers: this lifetime achievement award goes to you from all of us, and I am sure from all Americans, big ones and little ones alike. With every blessing and our deepest gratitude to you for letting us live the best parts of our lives within your neighborhood."

In accepting the Annenberg Public Policy Center Award, Mr. Rogers said: "This is a very special moment for me, and I feel that I need to talk about something sacred, too. I feel that appreciation is really a sacred thing. I've often wondered why I felt like bowing when people showed their appreciation for the work I've been privileged to do. I've come to believe that we who bow, bow to the sacred in our neighbor. Although it isn't terribly fashionable to talk about something being sacred or something being holy, nevertheless, if we ever want to rid

ourselves of personal and corporate brokenness, loneliness, emptiness and fear, we will have to allow ourselves room for that which we cannot see and hear, touch or control. So, after thirty years of being part of the PBS network, I guess one of the most important things that I've learned is that the more we appreciate others, cherish others, the more we will find ourselves. ”

Fred Rogers described the rich variety of the people who have worked with him on his television visits, and showed a video clip of a recent meeting he had with Koko the gorilla. Next, Mr. Rogers urged the assembled group to remember that television for children should not glorify violent problem solving, encourage addictions or undermine healthy virtues. He also asked the audience to remember that the noise of television should not drown out the moments of quiet solitude which allow people to grow spiritually and intellectually. “Right now I'd like to give you some quiet time to think of those who nourish you at the deepest part of your being; anyone who has ever loved you and wanted what is best for you in this life. ”



Fred Rogers, Award Recipient

After several moments of silence, Mr. Rogers concluded his remarks by noting “no matter what our job description may be, all of us have the real privilege of offering glimpses of what’s eternal, glimpses of what might be missing in our lives, glimpses of that which somehow connects us all, one to another. What a worthy gift to our civilization for the broadcasters of our country to use their creative talents not necessarily to be clever, but to be wise, to point in the direction of the simple, the quiet, the truthful, the generous, the kind. Thank you for encouraging me all these years to be part of this great mission. Thank you. ”

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