The Three-Hour Rule
Insiders' Reactions

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on the impact of the Three-Hour Rule – first implemented in the 1997/98 season – on the workings of the children's television industry and the kinds of television programs children see over the nation's free airwaves. Other research at the Annenberg Public Policy Center investigates the amount and quality of the broadcasters' E/I programs (Schmitt, 1999). In this research, the Three-Hour Rule is examined from the point of view of those who are charged with its implementation, as well as from the perspective of longtime observers and advocates of children's television. To this end, thirty-one telephone interviews were conducted with key players in and around the children's television industry in the winter and spring of 1999. Respondents included network executives, producers of local and network programs, syndicators, regulators, academics and advocates. The analysis of the respondents' observations revealed the following:

- **The landscape of children's television appears to be improving.** There are more programs and program venues than ever before, resulting in more quality and diversity. In addition, the recent regulatory activity has encouraged broadcasters to consider airing educational programs that they would have disregarded just three years ago.

- **The current social, regulatory and economic environments seem to discourage programmers from airing the worst examples of children's programs.** Many respondents felt that the "bad stuff" is starting to be replaced by the "good stuff." These impressions find support in Woodard's (1999) analysis of broadcast and cable children's programming, which finds fewer violence-laden, educationally-devoid programs than in the previous season (Jordan, 1998).

- **Though there is more educational television available over the free airwaves, many feel that there is still not enough.** Some argue that no one holds broadcasters accountable for their claims, while others feel that the networks' overwhelming tendency to include only prosocial programs (a claim supported by Schmitt's 1999 data) is a violation of the spirit of the Three-Hour Rule. There is also a sense, on the part of many advocates and academics, that three hours a week – even three hours of truly educational programming – is insufficient.

- **The Three-Hour Rule has affected the way children's television is made today.** Most network and syndicated producers involve educational experts in the development of the E/I programs now. Most – though not all – of these "consultants" feel there has been a greater openness on the part of writers and producers to their input. In addition, the Rule has shifted the locus of production and program selection away from the local broadcast stations and to the networks. The result is the sense among many that locally-produced educational shows are disappearing. This "sense" is supported by Schmitt's research, which reveals only 65 locally produced shows in a pool of 1,200 local broadcast stations.

- **Broadcasters face many challenges as they continue to abide by the new regulatory guidelines.** These challenges include an eroding audience base, a lack of advertiser support, low budgets for promotion, and low awareness – on the part

of parents, press and industry observers – of the educational programs that are offered.

- **Industry insiders and observers recognize the many opportunities the Three-Hour Rule presents, as well.** They point to a greater (and improved) dialogue between the broadcast industry and the scholarly and academic communities. Though most felt that parents are not yet "connected" to the broadcasters' E/I offerings, many believe that there are opportunities for foster greater dialogue. In addition, the respondents highlight educationally and economically successful shows that are beginning to emerge – countering the conventional wisdom that E/I programs are destined to be loss leaders (Jordan, 1996).

- The thirty-one respondents who work in and around the children's television industry made several recommendations that could maximize the impact of the Three-Hour Rule on the quality and availability of strong educational programming:

  Diversify educational programming to include more curriculum-based, traditionally academic shows in the overall line-ups;

  Increase awareness of E/I shows through better promotion and increased press coverage;

  Establish funds for the development of a new generation of creative, well-thought-out educational programs;

  Conduct research on the take-away value of E/I programs to ensure that the target audience is seeing and understanding the lessons;

  Provide outreach to families to inform them of the benefits of viewing quality television, the value of encouraging good viewing choices, and the importance of providing feedback to those entrusted with meeting the educational needs of children through television.

INTRODUCTION

The children's television industry has witnessed dramatic and irreversible changes in the last few years. The industry has grown increasingly crowded and competitive. New cable ventures targeting children are announced on a regular basis (for example, Nickelodeon & Children's Television Workshop's "Noggin;" Fox's "Boyz," "Girlz," and "Family" channels). Existing channels, moreover, are continually expanding their offerings (Nickelodeon, for example, has begun programming well into the primetime hours). Amid this growth is research that indicates that children are spending less time with television and spending more with other household media, including computers and videogames (Stanger, 1998; Television Bureau of Advertising, 1998). As a result, there are more stations competing for fewer viewers than ever before.

The industry has also felt the squeeze of recent regulatory activity. V-chip ratings for age-appropriateness and content appear on all cable and broadcast programs (with the exception of news and sports). In addition, commercial broadcast stations (such as those owned by or affiliated with ABC, NBC, CBS, NBC, Fox, WB and UPN) are mandated to serve the educational needs of children through their programming. A processing guideline known as the Three-Hour Rule went into effect in 1997 to close some of the loopholes that defined broadcasters' obligations specified by the Children's Television Act (CTA) of 1990 (FCC, 1996). Under the Three-Hour Rule, broadcasters who wish to have their license renewals expedited are required to air a minimum of three hours a week of educational and informational (E/I) television that meets the "cognitive/intellectual or social/emotional" needs of children. The E/I programs must be specifically designed for children ages 16 and under and must air between the hours of 7:00am and 10:00pm. Broadcasters are required to place an on-air symbol at the beginning of E/I programs to indicate to the public that they are educational, and they must provide this information to listing services, such as the local newspaper and TV Guide.

This report focuses on the impact of the Three-Hour Rule on the workings of the children's television industry and the kinds of television programs children see over the nation's free airwaves. While recognizing the simultaneous impact of other forces within the industry (for example, economic pressures), this report examines whether and how the Three-Hour Rule – first implemented in the 1997/98 season – has increased the quality, availability and viewership of educational television specifically designed for children. Other research at the Annenberg Public Policy Center investigates the extent to which the broadcasters' E/I programs are educationally strong and the types of lessons that are embedded in such shows (Schmitt, 1999). In this report, the impact of the Three-Hour Rule is examined from the point of view of those who are charged with its implementation, as well as from the perspective of longtime observers and advocates of children's television.

METHODOLOGY

We interviewed key players in and around the children's television industry; specifically individuals at networks, production companies, advocacy organizations, regulatory agencies and academic institutions. Of the 50 people contacted, 31 were interviewed.

The 19 non-respondents included those who did not feel qualified to comment on the current season, those who simply said they did not want to be interviewed, and those who did not respond to repeated phone calls requesting interviews. The sample consisted of seven university professors (referred to as "academics" in this report), two advocates focusing on children and media, four consultants (two of whom were connected with a university), five local producers who create educational programs for their local broadcast station, three national producers who create educational programs for a network, four network vice presidents who oversee children's programming, two syndicators who distribute educational programs on the open market, one FCC regulator, and three independent producers who create shows for the syndicated market.

Semi-structured, open-ended telephone interviews were conducted by research staff at The Annenberg Public Policy Center between February and May, 1999. The interviews lasted from 15 minutes to 40 minutes, and averaged 25 minutes in length. (See Appendix A for interview protocol.) Respondents were told that their comments would remain confidential, that any of their quotes used in the report would not be attributed them, and that their identity would be protected. The respondents' names and affiliations, therefore, do not appear in this report.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Below is an analysis of the 31 respondents' observations of the challenges, opportunities and impact of the Three-Hour Rule on children's television today.

FINDINGS

Investigating the impact of a public policy (such as the Three-Hour Rule) on an industry that is both dynamic and tumultuous (such as children's television) is difficult. This report presents a snapshot of an industry redefining itself in the wake of new expectations. Though the focus is on the impact of regulations, it is also necessary to recognize the cultural and economic forces that influence both the way television is made and distributed and the kinds of programs children see. With that recognition, the analysis of the interviews suggests that the Three-Hour Rule has had a palpable impact on the broadcast and production industries (influencing how, how much, and by whom children's educational television is made). It further suggests that not only do the regulations present numerous challenges, but also that they offer the industry and its audience new opportunities for using free, over-the-air television as a national educational resource for children.

The Changing Face of Children's Television

The vast majority of the respondents believe that children's television has undergone serious changes over the last few years. The three respondents who did not perceive significant change were the local producers – individuals who create educational programs that air solely on their host stations. (As I will note later, these producers find

it as difficult as ever to find the station, advertiser and audience support they need to thrive.)

The landscape of children's television has changed for the better, in the view of most respondents. The forces that have shaped the landscape appear to be twofold – economic and regulatory. On the economic side, there are more channels and more programs specifically targeting children. Indeed, as Woodard (1999) reports, there are now more than 1300 children's program airing on 29 broadcast and cable stations in an average week in a large media market (Philadelphia). Many believe that the result of this growth in children's television is a diversification of what's available. Not only are there more programs, but there are also more choices for children seeking different types of programs.

> When we talk about children's television, we're talking about the increase in the number of cable offerings available for children, which has affected the kinds of offerings that are available to children, both on networks and on cable. *Network executive*

Perhaps igniting the explosion of offerings is the increasing perception that the child audience is a profitable one. Children are now seen as a viable market for advertisers and marketers who seek both audiences and consumers for products and program-based merchandise.

> There is obviously so much more out there. In part because of the FCC regulations and in part because of a recognition on behalf of advertisers and marketers that there are so many young people out there with disposable incomes. *Local Producer*

The Three-Hour Rule is perceived by many as having influenced the offerings of the commercial broadcast stations. Most respondents felt that the mandate is being taken seriously by the networks and local broadcasters, and that it has encouraged the development and subsequent programming of educational shows that would otherwise not have made it to the air.

> I do think that there was a shift following the FCC's strengthening of the CTA rules, where the industry said, "We can't just creatively re-label. We're going to have to make sure that we have some programs that really do try to provide education, information." *Academic*

> I think its fair to say that, on the broadcast side, the FCC's Three-Hour Rule has had an effect by placing greater priority on shows to address educational issues for kids. I think it's a significant factor in the development choices. *Network executive*

Other respondents argued that while there is recognition of what it means to be educational (and more network support for educational programs), the effect hasn't been sufficiently pronounced. Several respondents argued that since no government agency is overseeing the claims made by the broadcasters, there are still too many programs being passed off as educational. When asked if the objectives of the Three-Hour Rule have been met, this consultant said: "I think they are starting to be met. I think there is kind of a desire to squeak by, in some cases." Another advocate argued: "The people who put the law together really wanted to see some delicious programming and that's not necessarily what's happening on every station."

Indeed, evaluations of the commercial broadcasters' educational offerings in the 98/99 season indicate that the majority of broadcasters are presenting shows that meet the letter – and sometimes even the spirit – of the Three-Hour Rule. However, according to the Annenberg Public Policy Center's analysis of the Philadelphia-area's educational programs, there is still a significant proportion of programs (one in five) that are not educational by the Annenberg benchmarks (Schmitt, 1999). Many of the network executives recognized the criticisms of their educational efforts, and argued that in the early going they would be on a steep learning curve.

> I think it's [children's educational television] on the right track, but I think there is always room for improvement. I think this is everybody's first stab at making high quality programming, and it's up from here. *Network executive*

While on one hand many of the respondents felt that there are still too few truly educational programs, they sensed, on the other, that the regulations have created an environment that has caused much of the most violent and otherwise offensive children's programming to disappear.

> [Regulation] enabled a few kinds of programs to show up on television that wouldn't have shown up without it. Unfortunately, I think the number isn't high enough… .Another change that the law made happen is that the programs that aren't breathtakingly wonderful are less violent, less disturbing probably than they would have been without the law. *Advocate*

Research on the overall quality of programming available to children in one large market supports the respondents' suspicions. The Annenberg Public Policy Center's evaluation of the 1998/99 season of programming for children over broadcast and cable channels in Philadelphia indicates that the number of programs that are devoid of educational content has nearly halved from the 1997/98 season – from 46 percent in 1998 to 25 percent in 1999. Unfortunately, the number of programs in the general sample that contain a lot of educational value has remained relatively constant (from 46 percent in 1998 to 49 percent in 1999) (Woodard, 1999). In addition, though Woodard has found that there is still a high percentage (47 percent) of programs with violence, most of the commercial broadcasters' E/I offerings contain little or no violence.

The Impact of the Three Hour Rule on the Commercial Broadcast Industry

Commercial broadcasters have been required to address the educational needs of children through their programming since the Children's Television Act of 1990. Though the CTA was explicit in outlining the broadcasters' responsibilities toward the child audience, its programming guidelines were vague. The vagueness resulted in many abuses and questionable claims (Center for Media Education, 1992; Kunkel and Canepa, 1994), and ultimately led advocates and policymakers to create a processing guideline known as the Three-Hour Rule, which clearly articulated the acceptable amount, air times and program types broadcasters could offer to meet their obligations (Kunkel, 1998).

The 1997/98 television season was the first in which the commercial broadcast stations had the opportunity to respond to the Three-Hour Rule with programs specifically designed to meet the FCC's new definitions and scheduling requirements (called "core E/I programs"). In this first season of implementation, the Three-Hour Rule was interpreted as "law" – most decided to offer three hours' worth of core E/I programming rather than air less and be subject to a more extensive license renewal process (Jordan and Sullivan, 1997). Now in the second year of implementation, it appears that, for many broadcasters, the regulations are still viewed as inviolable.

> I actually think that, to the extent that the guideline is labeled as a rule, it's sometimes confuses things a bit. It is indeed possible for a broadcaster to comply with the Children's Television Act without three hours per week, but it's not possible for them to get expedited license renewal. *Academic*

The Availability of Educational Television

Respondents were asked whether the objectives of the Three-Hour Rule have been met by the commercial broadcast stations charged with providing more educational television for children. On the whole, advocates, academics, programmers, producers and regulators answered with a qualified "yes."

> The FCC's recent shift in policy has accomplished palpable improvements. So I would react very positively to the policy shifts… We've seen improvements, and isn't that wonderful? But we haven't seen significant improvements. *Academic*

As mentioned earlier, there is a general sense among respondents that the broadcasters are making an effort but that it varies from serious to frivolous. Said one academic: "Some of them are making more of an effort than others to adhere to the spirit, if not the letter, of the law."

The respondents' sense that the objectives have not been fully met stem from three consistently expressed concerns. The first is that the programming, while less objectionable, may not be truly educational. Said one producer: "Because it's self-defining … anything that's considered prosocial is therefore considered educational. Just because it's kind of the absence of bad." Said another advocate: "The law adds in 'social value.' … If they're not going to put each others' eyes out, the stations say it has redeeming social value. It can really make you sick!" *Advocate*

Related to this is a second concern – the sense that the majority of the programming is not "educational" in the traditional sense of the word but rather programming that addresses social and emotional issues (what many call prosocial programming). Schmitt's (1999) analysis of the networks' E/I offerings indicates that, indeed, the vast majority (75 percent) is prosocial rather than academic in nature. Though syndicated and local educational programs more often tackle subjects like those taught in school – such as science or current events – these are less visible to the nation's child viewers and adult observers because they typically air on "weblets" and independents and do not receive the exposure the network programs enjoy.

> There have to be entertaining programs that kids really want to watch that include content that's considered traditionally academic… I think, for the most part, that that's not being done. *Academic*

> When people say educational programming, they're using the word in the way schools use it … There is a model of "educate" in a broader sense of the word. It's perfectly obvious that you mean a program that really enhances a kids' ability to understand what's happening, why its happening, and to develop imaginations. *Advocate*

Network executives and producers are aware of this criticism and argue that television is much better suited for the narrative genre in which prosocial content is typically embedded. A number expressed concern over the advocacy community's reluctance to "count" prosocial programs as educational programs.

> I do believe it would be a huge mistake, on the part of those that think and write about the Children's Television Act, to say that prosocial programming, or programming that deals with social and emotional development, is not educational. I think there's a tendency on the part of some in the advocacy community to say that … to try to tie E/I to curriculum. *Network executive*

The fact is that many in the advocacy and academic communities – and even some in the production community – do not perceive "prosocial" as "educational." When asked to name current educational programs for children, most of the programs listed by respondents were, in fact, teaching traditionally academic skills. (See Appendix B) Broadcasters face a similar hurdle with parents. An Annenberg Public Policy Center survey conducted in the fall of 1997 revealed that parents believed academically-oriented shows such as *Bill Nye, the Science Guy* and *Beakman's World* were educational but were much less likely to label such prosocial shows as *Doug* or *Bobby's World* as educational (Holz, 1998).

A third issue is whether or not three hours is <u>enough</u> educational programming for children. While most would agree that there is more E/I programming available and broadcast during hours when children are likely to be in the audience, many also felt that the availability of educational programs for children is still quite limited. The judgment of availability seemed to depend on whether three hours a week is seen as enough.

> I think everyone is in compliance with the law, so I think there are at least three hours if not more on every network. *Network executive*

> Well, obviously just three hours a week. Beyond that, not a second more. *Local producer*

> I would say that if three hours a week of educational programs were airing on each station and I thought they were all terrific and in good faith effort and great educational value to children – with all of that being in an ideal world – I would still say that that is not a lot. *Academic*

Consolidation

The decision on the part of the local stations to treat the three hours as a rule rather than a guideline was probably made easier by the fact that the major networks – beginning with the 1997/98 season – provided their affiliates with E/I programming. In

previous seasons, broadcasters typically met their obligations under the CTA by acquiring programming through syndication or by producing their own shows (Jordan and Sullivan, 1997). The consequence of this has been a complaint by some of the respondents that there is a diminishing cadre of players in the production community.

At the network level, consolidation has been a way to reduce costs of a genre of programming that is seen as minimally profitable. It has also squeezed out many of the independent and local producers who had previously played an important role in the provision of educational programming to individual broadcast stations, even those affiliated with networks. As of the 1998/99 season, ABC/Disney produces most of its own E/I programming; NBC, through its partnership with Engel Productions does the same with its teen E/I shows; and CBS has an exclusive agreement with Nelvana, a Canadian company that provides its entire E/I lineup.

> One had hoped, you know, with all this talk about the growth of a lot of independent producers that we would have access to all these new hours for children's television and, frankly, it has not happened. There's been a real consolidation of the major companies that produce children's television. *Academic*

> There's been an ironic reduction of production, new production of children's educational television by network affiliates because it's expensive. And they can get certified as being educational and informational by their prospective networks. So there is possibly an ironic chilling effect on new ideas in local production. *Academic*

Others pointed out that the expense of producing programs in the U.S. is driving programmers to acquire E/I shows from other countries:

> We're getting a lot of programming from Canada. If you look on the credits on some of these programs, you'll see they're produced in Canada with Canadian money, Canadian subsidies from the Canadian government. They produce them up there, then sell them down here. *Syndicator*

Local Production

As noted earlier, for most local broadcast stations the majority of programs are supplied by the networks. ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and WB all provide their stations with most if not all of the three hours' worth, and the stations use these programs to meet their obligations. As one network executive pointed out: "Certainly you have a clearance situation that's better. The stations are clearing all of the children's programming which they may not have if the rule had not existed." Schmitt (1999) observes that in the Philadelphia market, commercial broadcasters affiliated with major networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) receive 100 percent of their core E/I programs from the network. Though the Fox, WB and UPN stations receive some programs from their network, the affiliates also fill out the three hours with programs obtained through syndication. As a result, there are no locally produced programs being counted as core educational programs in this large market.

Schmitt's research into the quarterly filing of broadcasters on the FCC's website did not reveal a significantly better picture nationwide. Out of the approximately 1200 commercial broadcasters filing quarterly reports on their E/I efforts, only 65 locally produced E/I shows were listed as fulfilling the requirement. Proportionally speaking,

these would represent a tiny fraction of the programs children could potentially see, since network titles such as *Pepper Ann* and *Saved by the Bell* air in hundreds of markets while a local program such as *Action News for Kids* airs in only one. These local educational programs seem to fill a niche, by offering programming that is specific to the needs and interests of the community – for example, taking children to local attractions or exploring local history (Schmitt, 1999). Though many local programs disappeared when the networks began offering three hour lineups (Jordan and Sullivan, 1997), a few independent stations and affiliated stations have opted to supplement or supplant network offerings with locally produced E/I shows.

Collaborating with Educational Consultants

Many respondents in this study felt that the Three-Hour Rule has brought with it a better "understanding" of what is meant by educational. Almost no one felt that today's broadcasters are trying to get away with wildly ridiculous claims– such as the infamous license renewal application in the early '90s that listed *The Jetsons* as educational because it teaches children about life in the 21st century (Center for Media Education, 1992). Said one FCC staffer: "There is more of an acknowledgement by producers and networks of what informational, educational programming is."

There was, however, a sense on the part of some that broadcasters haven't fully embraced the meaning of "educational." Achieving a consensus on what constitutes educationally strong programming presents serious challenges, even at the level where decisions about educational programs must be made. One respondent pointed out that local broadcasters have little training that will be of use as they select programs that are supposed to effectively meet children's educational needs. In addition, networks and national producers often have little experience with educational programming.

> The first thing people in the NEA [National Education Association] will tell you about teaching is that not just anybody can do it; that a good teacher has to understand how to convey content to a group of children. Well, it's not different with television because what you have to do is make teachers out of writers – out of comedy writers. Their training, their entire training formal and informal, has been oriented toward literature, myths, comedy sketches – everything but education. Absolutely everything but education. *Consultant*

Whether to ensure that the programs are meeting the spirit of the regulations or whether to obtain a seal of approval, programmers and producers are now regularly involving outside educational experts, or consultants, in their process. Many of the consultants felt that these partnerships would not exist without the Three-Hour Rule. As one said, "There has been a lot more active searching on the part of even the most commercial broadcasters and producers to legitimize themselves. I know that a lot of this collaboration was fueled by this regulation." Network executives also stated that the involvement of consultants was a direct result of the Three-Hour Rule.

> There was enough ambiguousness in the law, there was enough to cause the creative community to say, "We may need the help of somebody who knows more about child development and education than we do." And I think it was a very legitimate need, and it resulted in a greater outreach to that community. *Network executive*

Though most of the consultants interviewed for this research felt they played an important role in the development and selection of E/I programs, several expressed frustration at the networks' apparent lack of interest in following their advice.

> We all worked on the scripts very hard getting the educational goal up front. I think in all the scripts that I worked on, most of them were prosocial. I would write in the script or say: "Here is an opportunity to put in some history, some geography, get some science in this." Very little of it was done. So I think, why are the writers and the producers so reluctant to move into this territory that really could be important to our society? *Academic (ex-consultant)*

The Challenges of Producing and Broadcasting Truly Educational Shows

The Pressures of Increased Competition

Many of the industry insiders in broadcast production and programming worry about being able to attract and maintain an audience that will satisfy advertisers and sponsors. Added to this is the fact that affiliates of the three largest networks – ABC, CBS, and NBC – do not see the child audience as a primary audience. That has led several respondents to conclude that without the CTA or the Three-Hour Rule, programming for children on network television may have disappeared altogether.

Many broadcasters feel that their once-loyal child audience has deserted them for the all-children's channels that are available on cable. They argue that it is more difficult to attract children when you only program for them during small segments of the day or the week.

> Kids are really only watching cable and they are not coming to the networks anymore. It's become much harder to get kids to come to network television. … A network television channel – and this is across the board in network television in general – basically we are not just serving up just one thing to one audience. We are trying to do so many different things. And because of that, it's harder to get the little niche programming audience when you have a block of programs say on Saturday mornings or Sundays or wherever they are that are targeting a specific viewer. It may not be a channel just for them. *Network executive*

Nielsen ratings from the 98/99 season indicate that the commercial broadcasters do face an uphill battle in gaining kids' viewers – but not only from children's cable channels. In fact, ratings data consistently show that children's favorite shows are not children's shows at all; they are general audience and adult primetime shows. The top rated programs for children ages 2-16 in the first week of November, 1998 were those in ABC's TGIF lineup: *Sabrina the Teenaged Witch*, *Boy Meets World*, *Two of a Kind*, and *Brother's Keeper*. Following those were ABC's *Wonderful World of Disney*, Fox's *The Simpsons*, *Guinness World Records*, and *That '70's Show*, and NBC's *Friends* (Nielsen Media Research, 1998).

Some respondents feel that children's viewing of adult-like programs reflects their interest in watching television when adults watch television – during the primetime hours. In fact, Nickelodeon's venture into programming children's shows into primetime has yielded high ratings for such cable shows as *The Wild Thornberrys*, *Hey*

Arnold, and *Cousin Skeeter* (Nielsen Media Research, 1998). It may also be the case that when adults and children watch television together, it is typically the adults who choose the programs rather than the children. As one consultant pointed out, adults are much less likely to co-view programs intended solely for the child audience**.** Said one network executive: "I think it's difficult for adults to watch these E/I shows, period. Most of our co-viewers – our adult viewers – go in and out of the room."

Similar trends in children's preferences for non-children's programs hold up in the weekday afternoon dayparts as well, when children are more likely to make decisions about what they want to watch.

> You know, you're up in the top ten shows and you have to go down to something like number ten to even get to a kids' show. Kids in the daytime viewing – when they're making their own choices – are watching things that we wouldn't want them to be watching. What we're trying to puzzle out is: what are they getting from those shows? … What are they getting from *World Wide Wrestling Federation*, because that's a big winner. And what are they getting from *Jerry Springer*; *Jerry Springer* is up there pretty high. *Network executive*

Despite the challenges of wooing children away from adult shows, there have been some breakthroughs in the broadcasters' educational programs. ABC's *One Saturday Morning* (which consists of *Doug*, *Recess* and *Pepper Ann*) is considered a ratings success – beating out even *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Beverly Hills 90210* among children 16 and under (Nielsen Media Research, 1998). An executive from a different network crowed:

> The fact that when our primetime numbers are down significantly and we are actually up on Saturday mornings is a story that no one can explain, except that we are doing what we are doing well.

Lack of Advertiser Support

Despite examples of successful educational programs, many network programmers and every local producer bemoaned the fact that there is little advertiser interest in educational programming for children. Truly educational shows will probably attract smaller audiences than action/adventure or purely entertainment programs. Indeed educational programs almost by definition will have a smaller audience since they narrowly target their audience to ensure that the educational lesson is appropriate (neither too hard nor too difficult). Going after the largest possible child audience could mean that the lesson will be watered down or off-base for the majority of the child viewers (Jordan, 1996). An analysis of this season's E/I programs indicates that the majority do target a relatively narrow age span – typically six years or less – rather than the broad 2-12 year old appeal that a typical cartoon would have (Schmitt, 1999).

> Advertising interest goes hand-in-hand with ratings. One of the things we have noticed is that some of our educational shows don't fare as well ratings-wise as the "actions" or some of the more "comedy" shows. There is definitely a lack of interest on the part of advertisers to advertise on the shows that get lower ratings. So definitely, from a business standpoint, it's a hard sell. *Network executive*

Because advertisers watch the ratings so closely, programmers try to keep lower-rated shows out of lucrative time slots where "actions" or "comedies" – genres that rake in

higher advertising dollars – could go. One therefore sees in the broadcasters' lineups some strange placement of educational programs. In the Philadelphia market, Fox's *Magic School Bus*, which targets elementary school age children, airs weekdays from 2:00-2:30 – a time when virtually all of its target audience is in school.[1] An executive from another network relayed this story:

> We even had, with one of our shows, a teacher calling to ask if we could change the time period it was on because she was requiring it as homework. It was, unfortunately, being broadcast during that time zone when kids are still in school.
>
> Q: Did you switch it?
>
> We tried, but tried unsuccessfully. It got back into the whole question of advertising. When we moved to a higher viewing time period, no one was willing to move the hit show to make room for the struggling educational show.

Local producers and syndicators also struggle to find advertising support for programs. A number complained that the re-establishment of commercial time limits during children's programming[2] and the ban on host selling[3] had presented a serious burden and eroded their profits. Others felt that they were constantly searching for sponsors or having to replace ones that were not willing to stay with them for more than one season. They pointed out that they were more dependent than networks on advertising dollars, particularly since local or syndicated programs do not typically have other revenue streams (such as licensed products). In this respect, the Three-Hour Rule has been of little help. As one national producer of a syndicated program pointed out:

> I don't think it changes the bottom line. Children's programming is the lowest rung on advertiser's list. … When you are producing a show that's not attached to toys, it's still as difficult as it was before… The FCC ruling does help you get on the air but it's not helping the issue with money.

Low Awareness of E/I Efforts

Most respondents recognize that the increased information available for the purpose of bringing children to educational programming has not yet been fully utilized in American homes. While many believe that there is a small minority of parents who are concerned and vocal, they also feel that that the majority of today's parents are too busy and too stressed to look upon the medium as anything more than a babysitter.

> I don't think that parents watch television for their children. Or very seldom. I think probably the younger the child, the more likely it is that parents will watch. And I think parents watch primetime with kids because the shows are entertaining for adults as well. A lot of sitcoms would fall into that category. But very few parents are watching television in order to find content for their children. *Consultant*

Research at the Annenberg Public Policy Center indicates that, in fact, parents <u>are</u> largely unaware that there are regulations in place designed to increase the amount of educational television available to children. Only 35 percent of parents in the

[1] Perhaps this is a time when the program can be used as a "babysitter" for child care groups or as instructional programming for schools.
[2] Advertising on children's programs was limited to 12 minutes per hour on weekdays and 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends.
[3] Characters from the programs are no longer able to act as advertisers within the show as this creates a "program-length commercial"– a type of programming not allowable under the CTA.

Annenberg Public Policy Center's 1999 survey recognize that on-air icons exist to alert them to the broadcasters' educational offerings (Stanger and Gridina, 1999). In addition, parents are virtually ignorant of the commercial broadcasters' recent educational offerings. In the APPC spring survey of parents, only 15 percent had ever heard of WB's *Histeria!*, a history-based program for school aged children that airs weekday afternoons, and only 5.7 percent had heard of ABC's *Squigglevision*, a science-based program that airs on Saturday morning. (Of course, the fact that this program recently changed its name from *Science Court* may have exacerbated the problem.) Of those parents who had heard of *Histeria!* and *Squigglevision*, less than half (42.4 percent and 46.8 percent, respectively) knew that they were intended to be educational (Stanger and Gridina, 1999).

Industry insiders and observers, though disappointed with the lack of parental response, are not particularly surprised. As I noted earlier, many doubt that parents have any interest in their children's viewing. One network executive made the point that parents are working under old assumptions about children's programming.

> Parents aren't necessarily aware of what is actually being offered now. They are still very much caught up in the idea that TV is bad and cartoons are even worse. They haven't really checked out the landscape in awhile. *Network executive*

One of the more interesting trends that emerged is the difficulty respondents had in talking about the current season of educational programming. Respondents were told: "I'd like you to name three programs that you consider to be educational for children. Please name one for preschoolers, one for elementary school age children, and one for adolescents or teens." (See Appendix B) Of the 31 respondents in this study, 22 had difficulty coming up with an example of a commercially broadcast educational show in at least one of the age categories. In fact, this question typically elicited a listing of PBS or cable educational offerings. Of the 143 programs that were named (and multiple listings were included), only 59 shows (41%) were commercial broadcast programs (and most of the commercial broadcast programs named were listed by those who aired, produced or consulted on them). [4]

The lack of salience of the commercial broadcasters' offerings can be explained by numerous obstacles that currently face the industry. First, it highlights the recency of the commercial broadcasters' entry into the arena of educational television. Indeed, many of the programs initially listed by respondents are ones that have been around for many years – *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, *Sesame Street*, *Reading Rainbow*. Other commonly mentioned programs that "counted" as commercially broadcast E/I shows had a previous life (or have a concurrent life) on PBS or Nickelodeon – *Magic School Bus*, *Bill Nye, the Science Guy* and *Nick News*.

Second, many respondents were reluctant to list prosocial programs as educational. Many of these programs were mentioned, but with qualifications. Others were aware of what was being claimed as educational, but, since they disagreed with the claims of

[4] This number includes programs that were mentioned after the interviewer asked specifically for a commercially broadcast program designed to meet the FCC's E/I programming requirements, in addition to the E/I programs mentioned initially by the respondent.

educational value, they refused to list them. This was often the case with the E/I lineups of the "big three" networks, where most if not all of the programs address the social/emotional needs of children.

> They all strike me as being, many of them as being similar in nature. They're not being very educational, but entertaining and having some prosocial value. And most of them not having much education. *Academic*

A third explanation lies in the fact that many of the respondents simply did not know what was airing on commercial broadcast stations for children. The admission of unfamiliarity with the offerings cut across respondent types – from producers, to advocates, to academics to syndicators.

> You know, because my kids are now teenagers, I really have not looked at what's happening for elementary school aged kids now. *Syndicator*

> I don't know, I mean, they really haven't promoted. *National producer*

> I should know what the networks are claiming. I normally do. *Academic*

That parents and "experts" would have trouble attending to the commercial broadcasters' educational offerings is troubling from a public policy standpoint, but not terribly surprising. The landscape of children's television is an increasingly cluttered one, and the presence of the commercial broadcasters' educational shows is miniscule when one considers the overall availability of programming. As Woodard (1999) points out, of the over 1,300 children's programming that air in a typical week in one large market, only 11 percent come from commercial broadcast stations, and only a fraction of those are considered core E/I programs.

The Lack of Promotion

Connected to the general public's lack of awareness of the E/I offerings is the sense, on the part of many respondents, that broadcasters are not adequately promoting their programs. This seems particularly problematic for the local producer, who often feels that the show could do better with more visibility.

> It's hard, because we work for a news station and their focus is news. We are fulfilling a requirement for the FCC, and sometimes we feel like that's about it. That's all we do. We don't get as much of a promotion as we feel like we should, and it's a shame, because this is what we need more of. *Local producer*

Several independent producers with network-aired programs also felt that though the network was willing to air their show, they were less willing to display the effort needed to make it a ratings success. One metaphorically described how promotion is akin to watering a garden:

> If you are told to plant vegetables in your garden, you say: "Okay, I've planted my garden with vegetables instead of candy. But I don't have any water and I'm not going to spend any money buying water so it's not my fault if the vegetables don't grow."

The Opportunities Presented by the Three-Hour Rule

Though interview respondents typically had much more to say about the challenges presented by the Three-Hour Rule, respondents in every category expressed optimism that the Rule has created new opportunities for programmers, producers and families.

A New Dialogue

Not all have been pleased about re-opening the issue of educational television, but many say they welcomed the increased dialogue that the regulations have initiated. Network executives and producers say they have connected with educational experts they might not otherwise have consulted and that, as a result, their programming has improved. The Three-Hour Rule has encouraged an interaction between the academic community and the children's television industry, said one network executive – an interaction that was initially viewed with some skepticism.

> I think the producing community embarked upon this with a feeling of reluctance because those school teachers are going to tell us how to make programs. But I think that there were enough informed people who said: "No, we come to serve another purpose, not to make your programs." And as I said, I hear a few bad stories, but I think, for the most part, it has been a successful relationship.

Other programmers have talked about the increased interaction with teachers and schools that has resulted from more academically-based programming. Two network executives said that their outreach efforts had been accepted by schools that see their programs as reinforcing their curriculum. Said one:

> I think you have a lot of teachers and educators embracing some of the educational shows and being much more open to study guides and awareness. At the same time, it's offering, hopefully, it's offering something of value to both the students and the school in general. The study guide is probably the best example. In the past, it would be an awfully hard sell to go into the school system and say "We have an interesting study guide we did with our character," when, in fact, the show doesn't support that at all. But now that the shows do, it's kind of a natural connection.

Though most would agree that parents are not yet "on board" with the commercial broadcasters' educational offerings, many do feel that the increase in information about E/I programs increases the potential for parental interaction with broadcasters. Many of the local producers described positive interactions they've had with parents who enjoy and support their children's viewing of their show. An academic pointed out that parents' and children's increasing access to the internet might also encourage feedback. For the most part, however, respondents believe that an increase in communication between broadcasters and families is needed.

A New Incentive to Create Enriching (and Profitable!) Children's Programs

Many of the consultants and producers say they have witnessed a new openness to educational programming that did not exist prior to the Three-Hour Rule. Writers and programmers are less resistant to, in the words of one consultant, "trying something different than they've done before." Another consultant pointed out that the success of several E/I programs, in addition to the Three-Hour Rule, has improved the climate for educational television.

> The networks felt – and I feel this is pretty universal about the networks – they really felt that they couldn't get the ratings from an educational show or prosocial show that they could get from an entertainment show. So, a lot of projects weren't even looked at because they had an educational component. Now, I think networks are seeing that good quality, high quality, educational programming gets good ratings as well as entertainment programming. So I think that it has opened the networks' eyes to look at projects that they would not have otherwise looked at.

From the perspective of many, the provision of educational television makes good business sense. As mentioned earlier, vertical integration in the children's television industry has meant that there are fewer "homes" for educational programs produced for the local, syndicated and network markets. For those who have managed to establish a presence, however, there is a demand for their product. Several local producers say they were hired explicitly to create programs to meet the station's obligations under the Three-Hour Rule.

> [The station] came to [the producer] and said: "The FCC's mandated three hours of educational programming a week and instead of us going out and buying something, we want to try to create one [new educational] program a year and see how it goes." *Local producer*

A syndicator (based in Canada) also said he has seen an increased market for his educational shows. As this academic stated: "There is a real business reason to develop programming that, from the outset, is designed to be beneficial for children."

Of course, not everyone sees children's programming as a serious money-making venture. Many complain that the high costs of production, the networks' unwillingness to put serious money into production, a dearth of funding at the local level, the lack of advertiser interest, and the overall narrow profit margin make the business of educational programming quite difficult and challenging. These complaints, however, fall on deaf ears among those who feel that children's educational programming is a fair price to pay for the opportunity to use a portion of a scarce resource for free. Said this advocate:

> I don't believe anything these characters say about making money. Because it's not written anywhere that every program has to be number one in the ratings. No communication system can work where everything is number one. The commercial broadcast industry spends fortunes of money for adults on programs that sometimes disappear within months. … The children's programs don't even get pilots; they come straight from the drawing board, mostly animated stills.

SUMMARY

This research was conducted in order to determine – from the perspective of those who work in and around the children's television industry – whether the broadcasters' efforts have been adequate to meet the objectives of the Three-Hour Rule. The answer appears to be a qualified "yes."

The majority of those interviewed feel that the Three-Hour Rule has stimulated a new openness to educational programming, a re-visiting of what "educational" means, the inclusion of educational experts in the development of E/I programs, an overall

decrease in the amount of objectionable and/or violent television, and an increase in the quality and variety of programming that airs for children. Said one producer: "It has tried to get better, and it probably has. The worst stuff has dropped out of the bottom. There is probably more good stuff and less bad stuff." Most believe that the regulatory and economic incentives have yielded significant and mainly positive changes in the trajectory of children's television.

Respondents were more equivocal about whether the policy has had a significant enough impact on the quality, variety and quantity of programming available. Many feel that the quality of the educational programs that air varies from program to program and station to station. While some networks were recognized for creating strong lineups, others were routinely criticized for making a half-hearted effort. Related to this is the argument that many respondents make against the consideration of "prosocial" programs as "educational" programs. Though FCC guidelines clearly allow programs that meet the "social and emotional needs of children" to be counted as "core E/I" programs, many producers, academics and advocates believe that such programming is weak and frequently abused.

The consolidation of the production community (the result of vertical integration, foreign imports, and exclusive partnerships) has led many to complain that there is little variety in what's being offered to children as educational programming. Network affiliates around the country obtain nearly all of their three hours' worth from their networks and typically add nothing that would take the station beyond the minimum amount. As a result, there is little room for syndicated or locally produced programs on the local broadcast stations affiliated with large networks. Indeed, Schmitt's (1999) research indicates that most of what comes from the networks is very much the same – three-quarters of network provided programs are prosocial in nature.

While there are more educational programs being offered on commercial broadcast stations, many feel that there still aren't enough. Some argue that many of the so-called educational shows have only entertainment value. Others believe that even if the networks' E/I shows were consistently educational, three hours a week is still not enough.

Networks and local broadcasters continue to face many obstacles in creating, airing and developing an audience for educational programming. First and foremost may be a general lack of awareness of the E/I offerings. A recent survey shows that parents are largely unfamiliar with the current season's E/I programs and few recognize the E/I icons that air on these programs to inform parents about such offerings (Stanger and Gridina, 1999). Moreover, the respondents in this research who work in and around the children's television industry were also relatively unaware of the commercial broadcasters' lineups. When asked to list educational programs for preschoolers, elementary school age children, and preteen/teens, many resorted to PBS and cable programs. When specifically asked to list commercial broadcast E/I shows, many could not. Some felt there were none (this was particularly true in the preschool category), but many also admitted to paying no attention to these programs, sometimes blaming lack of promotion for their "ignorance."

Broadcasters also complain that they have difficulty finding the advertiser support they need to help a struggling show along. They worry that if they put an educational program in a choice time slot, they will lose the money they could earn on a more profitable genre – for example, action/adventure cartoons. Producers of educational programs, moreover, say that inadequate promotion creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. They say that programmers believe the E/I shows will not obtain a large audience so they don't put the money into the programs to find an audience.

Though there are numerous challenges facing those who make and distribute children's educational television, there are also more opportunities than in the days prior to regulation. Syndicators and local producers who have found a niche in the broadcast community believe that the Three-Hour Rule opens doors and grants their programs a protected spot on the schedule. Most educational experts have found a greater willingness on the part of writers and producers to include their suggestions for strengthening the educational value of the program. The increased interaction has not been limited to producers and consultants – some networks have also found that schools and teachers are more willing to incorporate their program-related materials into the classroom. Though many are disappointed in the lack of parental response to the E/I programs, respondents in all categories feel that there is greater opportunity for parents to find these programs and direct their children to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 31 participants in the interview process made insightful observations about the current state of children's educational television, but also had suggestions for ways to realize the potential of the Three-Hour Rule to improve the quality, availability and viewership of the broadcasters' educational offerings. What follows are recommendations culled from these interviews.

1. Diversify The Educational Programs

When asked whether children's television – specifically children's educational television – had reached its potential, many respondents said that too much of what's airing "looks the same." Indeed, much of what is offered as E/I programming by the networks is the same – prosocial, narrative lessons that address the "social and emotional" needs of children. While Schmitt (1999) found that syndicated and locally-produced educational programming is more often "academic" in nature, it unfortunately doesn't reach the same large audience as the networks' other programming. Respondents also asked for live action, literature-based shows for older children; more and better programming that specifically addresses the needs of girls; and greater diversity in the gender roles, ethnicity and SES of television characters.

2. Increase Promotion and Encourage Media Coverage

The finding that too few children and parents know about the commercial broadcasters' E/I programs (Stanger and Gridina, 1999) is not surprising given the intensely competitive and crowded environment of children's television. Broadcasters therefore have to work hard to separate their programs from the clutter and convince children (and their parents) that E/I shows are worthy of attention. Though promotion takes

money and time, it appears to have tangible results. ABC's "One Saturday Morning" is heavily promoted during the network's TGIF lineup, and products associated with its programs are connected to everything from McDonalds' "Happy Meals" to feature films. These programs came in as some of the top-rated children's programs in recent Nielsen ratings (Nielsen Media Research, 1998).

Children and parents are not the only segment of the public that needs to keep track of educational television. These interviews indicate that many of those most involved with the children's television industry have little familiarity with the current season – even listing long-cancelled programs as their favorite shows of 1998/99. Networks may want to take a page from Nickelodeon's play book. This cable channel routinely sends out copies of programs it feels particularly proud of (*Blue's Clues*, episodes of *Nick News*). This move has the effect of making those in the advocacy and academic community aware of the programs, and has the added benefit of allowing "experts" to speak knowledgeably about current children's shows. It is likely that very few industry observers or insiders have the time (or perhaps the inclination) to sit down and survey the landscape of children's television.

Related to this point is the continuing lack of media coverage of children's television. Though TV Guide does occasional special issues devoted to children's television, it rarely focuses on educational programs and almost never looks at the commercial broadcasters' E/I offerings. Such a dearth in media coverage is not new. As Aday reported in 1997, children's television is covered significantly less often than primetime dramas, sitcoms, talks shows and even soap operas. A recent meeting with journalists who cover kids' TV revealed that there is little interest on the part of most newspaper editors in this kind of coverage. What's more, TV critics rarely obtain timely information about the programs. They do not receive pilots for new shows, and almost never get episode-by-episode summaries. In short, there isn't a public relations mechanism in place that is effective at getting timely information into the hands of the right journalists.

3. Establish (or Re-Establish) Funding Sources for New Educational Programs

The lack of advertiser support presents a serious obstacle for a genre of programs that is typically only marginally profitable. Children's programming today reaps much of its profit from the licensing and merchandizing of program-related products and from international distribution. These revenue streams are less available to educational programs – in part because there are often no obvious tie-ins (no action figures, for example) and there is almost no international market for American educational lessons (programs about science or literature do not travel well). Furthermore, since educational programs typically target a narrower audience than entertainment shows, advertiser interest is frequently low. It is therefore unlikely that producers and programmers will set any money aside for the development of novel programs. It is also unlikely that they will take creative risks. As a result, one sees Canadian-made programs airing on American networks, and PBS-developed shows being acquired by Fox or airing in syndication. One is less likely to see original, U.S. programming that is created to meet the criteria set forth by the Three-Hour Rule.

There are ways to replenish evaporating funds. First, networks and local broadcasters might consider turning to sponsors in much the same way PBS has corporate underwriters. These sponsors may find that an association with a highly regarded, highly educational program puts them in a visible "good citizen" role. Second, the Children's Television Act of 1990 established a government funding agency called the National Endowment for Children's Educational Television. In the early going, this endowment provided funds to help develop exceptional programs like PBS's *Arthur*. Still on the books, a Congressional allocation of funding to the endowment might provide much-needed seed money for the production companies and broadcasters that are seeking to address the educational needs of children in new and creative ways. Finally, the philanthropic community may have a role in supporting educational ventures that address the needs of children and society through the medium of television. In addition to funding production ventures, this community might also consider supporting the evaluations of the effect of educational television on the child audience. Such information, fed back to the policy and production communities, would advance our understanding of the most effective ways to use the medium as an educational resource.

4. Formative and Summative Research – Not Just Market Research – Is Needed

A number of respondents representing the advocacy and academic fields argue that more research is needed in order to create effective educational programs that appeal to children. Though many networks and producers rely on educational experts to inform the development of programs and review scripts, few invest in studies that explore whether and how the program's lessons are addressing the "educational and informational needs of children" (FCC, 1996). One academic said that she did not know whether the objectives of the Three-Hour Rule were being met: "I don't know yet of any studies that have come out that have shown impact. I've seen that Annenberg has come out with content analyses of what's there, but I haven't seen any evidence of the impact on kids actually watching."

Conducting this sort of research is admittedly challenging and requires a substantial commitment on the part of the networks that produce the programs. It is possible that evaluations of the educational effectiveness could be conducted within the academic communities, perhaps with funding from broadcast associations, government agencies or foundations. There is still so much to learn about children's viewing of educational television, particularly children who are past the preschool years. What do they want from television? What do they learn from television? How do they incorporate prosocial and academic lessons into their lives? Ultimately, research insights into how to develop programs with educational content that is both interesting and informative will yield information on how to build a better program. As CTW has learned with *Sesame Street* and Nickelodeon has learned from *Blue's Clues*, research is an investment that benefits both the industry and the audience.

5. Create a National Public Information Campaign

It is not entirely clear why parents seem to stop directing their children to educational television once they reach school age (Jordan, 1990). It is especially perplexing when one sees press reports that parents are increasingly concerned about the impact of media – television included – on their child's social and intellectual development. It may be the case that parents feel that they have their hands full dealing with the

antisocial programming that children seem drawn to. It may also be that parents aren't convinced that television has much to offer their school age child – they may believe that educational television is not particularly beneficial or that educational television is simply not widely available.

What is clear is that parents do not know enough about what's available, what's educational and why it matters to consistently mediate their children's television viewing choices. It is an opportune time to begin to address this knowledge vacuum. Several respondents suggested that the local broadcasters and networks themselves establish an informational campaign. Said one academic: "One thing that could really help, I think, [would be] for the television stations themselves to do a little bit more self-promotion… it would be a very good public relations move for them. A very worthy allocation of resources for them." Others suggested that the campaigns should come from grassroots or national advocacy organizations:

> There are more [parents] that don't know and don't care than do. We need massive opportunities for parent education – and media literacy in particular – to help them understand the role of broadcasting. We need public information campaigns and we need major funding to support public education around media issues. *Advocate*

CONCLUSIONS

The Three-Hour Rule and the concurrent economic expansion of the children's television industry have stimulated the children's television industry to create more and better educational programming. While this research finds that the industry appears to be headed in the right direction, it also reveals the many challenges that must be overcome and opportunities that must be realized before children's educational television develops into the valuable national resource it can be. In the seasons to come, we expect that broadcasters, producers, and their consultants will continue to work on their E/I programs until they are educationally strong and economically viable. We expect that academic researchers, policymakers, and advocates will continue to press for the positive, diverse and enriching programming that is the obligation of those who are licensed to serve the public interest. Finally, we hope parents and children will soon have easy access to a wealth of programs that develops children's knowledge, curiosity and imagination.

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APPENDIX A

IMPLEMENTATION STUDY: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

Hello. My name is _____ and I am a researcher with the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. We are doing research on the current state of children's television. As someone who [*fill in how their job involves kids' TV*], we feel that your insights and perspectives are important to include in our study.

The interview will take about 20 minutes. Is this a good time to talk or should we set up an appointment for another time?

Let me assure you that whatever you say will be kept confidential. Only the members of this research group will be privy to your comments. Your name will not be connected to any of the quotes in the report that we generate.

Our report on the state of children's television will be released at our annual June conference in Washington, DC. I'll give you more information about the conference at the end of this interview – you might be interested in attending.

Before we begin, may I have your permission to record our conversation so that I can be freed from trying to keep up with what you're saying?

[*If they say yes, turn tape recorder on*]

Okay, the tape recorder is on now.
Are you ready to begin?

Interview Schedule

1. Do you think children's television has changed over the last couple of years?
   Probe: How has it changed?

2. Let's talk specifically about the regulations surrounding children's television [or let's go back to what you said about the regulations]. What do you think are the key objectives of the new regulations?

Interviewer: List out the key objectives.

3. Now, let's move to the "Three-Hour Rule" that is designed to encourage broadcasters to air three hours of educational programming each week. Do you see any changes as a result of this rule either in the industry as a whole or in children's programming?
   Probe: For example, in business practices?
   Probe: In production techniques?
   Probe: What about in company policies or directives?
   Probe: In advertiser interest?

4. What do you see as some of the challenges of the "Three-Hour Rule"?

5. What do you see as some of the opportunities of the "Three-Hour Rule?"

6. Let's talk about the current season of children's programs now. I'd like you to name three programs that you consider to be educational for children. Please name one for preschoolers, one for elementary school age children, and one for adolescents or teens. If you can, tell me where it airs.

Interviewer: List out programs

Preschool:
Elementary:
Preteen/Teen:

Interviewer: If the respondent did not give shows that air on commercial broadcast stations, please ask the following:

6a. Since we are very interested in learning more about what you think of the commercial broadcasters' response to the "Three Hour Rule," could you give me an example of programs for the same age groups that you think are educational and that air on stations that must comply with the new regulations? (As you probably know, these are stations affiliated with networks such as ABC, Fox, and NBC).

Interviewer: List out programs

Preschool:
Elementary:
Preteen/Teen:

7. Do you think that, overall, there are a lot of educational shows airing on commercial broadcast stations now?

8. Do you think parents are affected by the new regulations regarding children's educational programming?
   Probe: Do parents communicate with broadcasters?
   Probe: Do they encourage their children to watch educational shows?
   Probe: Do you have suggestion for how parents' role vis-à-vis these shows an be improved?

9. Now let's go back to the objectives you laid out at the beginning of the interview. *Interviewer: Review the respondent's objectives in question #2.* Do you think that these objectives have been met?

Interviewer: If respondent says "No" to question #9, ask the following:

9a. What do you think needs to happen for these objectives to be more effectively met?

10. Some people think children's TV is just about right. Other people think it has a ways to go before its potential can be realized. What do you think?

Interviewer: If respondent says "Ways to go" to question #10, ask the following:

10a. What do you think need to be done to improve the quality of television for children?
   Probe: What about the educational television programs that are currently offered to satisfy the "Three-Hour Rule"? Is there anything that needs to be done o improve in this area?

<u>Wrap-Up</u>

That concludes the questions that I have for you today. Thank you for your time and interest. What we're exploring with this survey is the implementation of the "Three-Hour Rule" from a variety of perspectives – including those of programmers, producers, advocates, scholars and policymakers. I'd like to be able to send you a copy of the report and an invitation to our conference on June 28th in Washington, DC. Can you give me your contact information?

APPENDIX B

ID #	Preschool Ed Programs	Elementary Ed Programs	Preteen/Teen Ed Programs
#1	Anatole (CBS) Franklin (CBS)	Pepper Ann (ABC)	Hang Time (NBC) Saved by the Bell (NBC)
#2	Blue's Clues (Nick) Bear in the Big Blue House (Dis) Sesame Street (PBS) Winnie the Pooh (ABC)*	Squigglevision (ABC)	Pepper Ann (ABC)
#3	Sesame Street (PBS) Reading Rainbow (PBS) Blue's Clues (NICK) Teletubbies (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Talk Box* (local)	Algo's Factory (UPN)
#4	Sesame Street (PBS) Mister Rogers (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Magic School Bus (Fox) Bill Nye (PBS and Synd) Doug (ABC, Nick, Synd)	Nick News(Nick and Synd)
#5	Blue's Clues (Nick) Anatole (CBS)	Magic School Bus (Fox) Wishbone (PBS) Doug (ABC, Nick, Synd) Hey Arnold (Nick)	Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)
#6	Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Zoom (PBS) Squigglevision (ABC)	Nick News (Nick and Synd)
#7	Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Squigglevision (ABC) Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)	Hang Time (NBC)
#8	Sesame Street (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Magic School Bus (Fox)	Ghostwriter (off air) no response for b-cast E/I
#9	Sesame Street (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Magic School Bus (Fox)	No response
#10	no response	Bozo Super Sunday (local)	Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)
#11	Blue's clues (Nick) Allegra's Window (Nick) Gullah Gullah Island (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Reading Rainbow (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Saved by the Bell (NBC) City Guys (NBC) One World (NBC) Hang Time (NBC)
#12	Teletubbies (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Magic School Bus (Fox) Arthur (PBS) Zoom (PBS) Squigglevision* (ABC)	no response
#13	Big Bag (Cartoon Net) Bear in the Big Blue House (Dis)	Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)	no response
#14	Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Histeria! (WB)	Saved by the Bell (NBC)
#15	no response	Critter Gitters (Synd) Did you ever wonder? (Synd)	Popular Mechanics (Synd)

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#16	Sesame Street (PBS) Bananas in Pajamas(Synd.)*	Beakman's World (off air) Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)	Saved by the Bell (NBC)
#17	Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Squigglevision (ABC) Disney's Doug (ABC) Magic School Bus(Fox)	
#18	Magic School Bus (Fox) Blue's Clues (Nick) Captain Kangaroo (Fox Family) Zoboomafoo (PBS)	Magic School Bus (Fox) Squigglevision (ABC) Kratt's Creatures (PBS)	Pepper Ann (ABC)
#19	Barney (PBS) Mister Rogers (PBS) Sesame Street (PBS) Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Bill Nye (PBS and Synd) Beakman's World (off air)	no response
#20	Sesame Street (PBS) Mister Rogers (PBS) Teletubbies (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Bill Nye (PBS and Synd) SI for Kids (Nick) Nick News (Nick and Synd)	no response
#21	Sesame Street (PBS) Mister Rogers (PBS) Barney (PBS) Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Kratt's Creatures (PBS) Bill Nye (PBS and Synd) Beakman's World (off air)	Learning & History channel no response for b-cast E/I
#22	Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Doug (ABC, Nick, Synd)	One World (NBC)
#23	Mister Rogers(PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	no response	no response
#24	Blue's Clues (Nick) Barney (PBS) Mister Rogers (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Magic School Bus (Fox) Wishbone (PBS) Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)	no response
#25	Sesame Street (PBS) Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	Carmen Sandiego (off air)	Myst. Files of Shelby (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I
#26	Blue's Clues (Nick) Sesame Street (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Nick News (Nick and Synd) Magic School Bus (Fox)	Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)
#27	Eureka's Castle (Nick) Blue's Clues (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	no response	no response
#28	Teletubbies (PBS) Noddy (PBS) Arthur (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	no response	Hang Time (NBC) In the Mix (PBS)
#29	Sesame Street (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Rugrats (Nick) no response for b-cast E/I	History Channel Discovery Channel

			no response for b-cast E/I
ID #	**Preschool Ed Programs**	**Elementary Ed Programs**	**Preteen/Teen Ed Programs**
#30	Franklin (Nick) Anatole (CBS)	Histeria! (WB)	Saved by the Bell (NBC)
#31	Blue's Clues (Nick) Sesame Street (PBS) no response for b-cast E/I	Bill Nye (PBS and Synd)	no response