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## Children's Rights and the Media

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# Children's Rights and the Media

## Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, approved almost 20 years ago in November 1989, extended the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by acknowledging “that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance” (United Nations, 1989, ¶5). World bodies had already stated as much in “the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1959” (¶9). Among the rights of the child, this Convention included communication rights.

Article 12 acknowledges that a child has a right to expression in proceedings affecting the child. Article 13 extends this more generally to communication; it reads:

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals.

Article 17 adds to this:

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual, and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, States Parties shall:

(a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;

(b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange, and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national, and international sources;

(c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;

(d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;

(e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18. (United Nations, 1989).

In the years following the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, international groups have explored these communication rights and duties more directly. One, MAGIC (Media Activities and Good Ideas by, with, and for Children), developed from the Oslo Challenge Network, a UNICEF working group. This group explored the issues connected with children's communication rights.

In November 1999, young people involved in media projects, media professionals, and child rights experts gathered in the Norwegian capital Oslo to discuss the role the media can play in the development of children's rights throughout the world, under five headings:

- Children's right of access to the media, including new media
- Children's right to media education and literacy
- Children's right to participate in the media
- Children's right to protection from harm in the media and violence on the screen
- The media's role in protecting and promoting children's rights (MAGIC, n.d., briefing)

The group issued what became known as the Oslo Challenge, a comprehensive examination of the rights of children vis-à-vis communication. The Challenge addresses governments, organizations, and individuals working for children, media professionals, children and young people themselves, media owners and the private sector, and parents, teachers, and researchers (MAGIC, n.d., Oslo).

Professional media organizations have accepted different parts of the challenge. The International Federation of Journalists developed “Guidelines and

Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children” at a meeting in Recife, Brazil in 1998 (IFJ, 1998). Among other things, these call on journalists to work with an awareness of the “vulnerable situation of children” and act with the “highest ethical standards.” Among their guidelines, they include the following:

1. strive for standards of excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity when reporting on issues involving children;
2. avoid programming and publication of images which intrude upon the media space of children with information which is damaging to them;
3. avoid the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation to promote journalistic material involving children;
4. consider carefully the consequences of publication of any material concerning children and shall minimize harm to children; . . .
6. give children, where possible, the right of access to media to express their own opinions without inducement of any kind; . . .
9. use fair, open and straightforward methods for obtaining pictures and, where possible, obtain them with the knowledge and consent of children or a responsible adult, guardian, or carer;
10. verify the credentials of any organization purporting to speak for or to represent the interests of children . . . (IFJ, 1998)

The Soul City Institute for Health & Development Communication in South Africa has published a similar resource guide for journalists, available as a free download (Singh, Naidoo, & Usdin, 2000). Finally, The Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcast Development

(AIBD) has produced materials reviewing children’s rights and the media. These include an historical overview of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a description of particular challenges to the mass media, and a plan of action (Mahkonan, 2006). Each of these organizations has concentrated primarily on reporting about children. They acknowledge that children have special rights as subjects of media coverage.

Various religious entities, including the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, the publisher of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS, have typically focused attention on media education and media literacy (Kumar, 1985; Pungente & Biernatzki, 1993). This year, SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication, expands its commitment to children by taking Children’s Rights as the theme for its 2009 World Congress. It plans to study them under three headings: Current Global Issues on Human Rights and Children’s Rights, Emerging Perspectives on Media and Social Transformation, and The Challenges of Growing Up in a Digital Age.

Joining this effort, COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS offers this special issue on the theme of Children’s Rights and the Media. In a departure from its usual format of one long review essay, Guest Editor Katharine Heintz has invited five sets of scholars working with different aspects of media and children to introduce their work, particular projects, and the important issues developed in relation to children’s rights and communication. As usual, TRENDS has assembled a bibliography to guide our readers in further exploring these important topics.

## Guest Editor’s Introduction

Katharine Heintz

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Anniversaries are times that encourage reflection and projection. We look back at what has happened since the event being recognized, assess the current state of affairs, and anticipate future challenges and opportunities. Such is the case with this issue of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS, as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, paying special attention to the *communication rights* of children around the globe.

The current proliferation of media technologies has allowed the world’s children unprecedented access

to modes of communication, although access is not equal for all children. Geographic, political, social, financial, and cultural circumstances all contribute to a global situation where some voices and perspectives are heard louder, more often, and in more places than others. But the technology exists to redress some of the inequities in communication production and reception, and renewed emphasis on the rights of children in the communication process encourages us to reflect, assess, and project on what we know about children as communicators.

In their historical review of U.S. mass communication research, Wartella and Reeves (1985) discovered that public concerns expressed about children and media followed a recurring pattern with the introduction of each new medium in the 20th century. Initial concerns responded to the now-familiar trend of youth adoption of the new medium; issues related to amount of time spent with the new medium reflected the concern with *displacement*—what activities were being dropped in favor of time with this new medium? Inherent in this line of concern was the belief that the new medium was displacing *more beneficial activities*. This concern manifests today in the many discussions of how much time youth spend online or text messaging at the expense of time in face-to-face conversation, doing homework, or reading books.

A second recurring concern related to media and children addresses the promise of the new technology to provide educational benefits and/or opportunities for disadvantaged children. These promises are often used by manufacturers of the technologies to encourage parents to purchase them for their children. Television initially featured a full slate of children's programs at all times of the day to encourage parents to purchase sets for family entertainment. Cell phone manufacturers promised parents "peace of mind" when their young drivers were alone in the car at night, and a GPS device to pinpoint their location. Witness the myriad claims currently made regarding the educational benefits of baby videos and software (commonly known as "lapware"), almost none of which are substantiated with research evidence (Garrison & Christakis, 2005; Thorn, 2008). But the promise of technology as a means to address educational and social inequities is a recurring theme throughout the 20th and into the 21st century.

Concerns over children's physical and emotional well-being surface with regularity in the debates about children and media. Movies were considered by some to be too emotionally involving for some children, and countless parents (including mine) warned their children not to sit too close to the television set, for fear of "ruining your eyes." Heavy use of computers and video games has been linked with carpal tunnel syndrome and "Nintendenitis." Of current concern worldwide is the link between media use and childhood obesity, a health issue of near epidemic proportions in the United States.

While the impact of the media use *situation* is a recurring cause for concern, a companion issue relates to the impact of media *content* on children's physical

and mental health. For nearly five decades, researchers have studied the mechanisms for learning from electronic media and consistently concluded that the media are powerful educational tools. Children are socialized into values and belief systems promoted by the media they consume. They learn behavioral scripts for conflict resolution that often promote the use of physical and verbal aggression. They learn sexual mores, courtship rituals, and sexual scripts from television programs, movies, video games, music videos, websites. They are exposed to drug, alcohol, and tobacco use and learn the cultural and subcultural values associated with them. Through patterns of inclusion and exclusion, children learn which people are valued by their cultures and whose voices and opinions matter. Children are hailed as consumers, and encouraged to participate in the marketplace. In a global media system dominated by commercial interests, children learn to value consumption.

It is not surprising then, that as we reflect on the 20th anniversary of the U.N. Convention, we are grappling with many of these same issues with the technologies that permeate the world of 21st century childhood. Concerns for the physical and mental health of children, for their safety and education, for their protection and empowerment are as powerful today as when the first media of mass communication were introduced. And the authors contributing to this issue of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS address these issues in the context of 21st century global life and technologies which provide opportunities to represent and connect the children of the world in ways not possible before.

### *Children, childhood, youth*

The social construction of those we define as "not yet adults" varies widely among cultures and historical time periods. It is not unusual to find the same physical being described as "naïve" and "sophisticated," as "innocent" and "savvy," depending on the describer. It is common among U.S. marketers to talk about "kids getting older younger" (or KGOY). We know that youth are active consumers and new marketing strategies encourage young people to act as product promoters via viral marketing techniques common on digital technologies. Youth today are exposed to more graphic depictions of sex and violence than previous generations and can access "adult" content via the Internet with ease. Many young people raise children, financially support their families, join the military. At the same time, "helicopter parents" hover over their adolescents, and many young

people take years to obtain full time employment and living situations independent of their parents. The range of lived experiences makes it difficult to develop a single definition of “childhood” or “youth” on a global level, but it is clear that most societies identify a period of “not yet adulthood” in which the interests and well-being of young people are privileged. And the U.N. Convention as well as the various follow-up documents illustrate the importance of communication rights to the healthy development of youth worldwide.

The articles contained in this number of COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS take up the issue of children’s rights and communications media. The five authors have contributed six pieces that fit under the three headings designated by the SIGNIS 2009 World Congress:

### *The Challenges of Growing Up in a Digital Age*

Michael Rich, M.D., M.P.H., and Sonia Livingstone, D. Phil., each provide articles that address the challenges of growing up in a digital age. Dr. Rich presents an overview of the large body of research evidence linking exposure to electronic and digital media to various physical, mental, and social health outcomes. He argues that the reactionary “values-based paradigm” guiding much of the past research is ineffective for proactively developing policies and programs for a healthy media environment for children going forward into the future. He suggests that “given children’s near-total immersion in one or more media during their waking hours, it can be argued that we should understand and respond to media as an *environmental health influence* (emphasis mine) that is powerful, but neutral in valence. Like the natural environment, there are some elements that can help and other elements that can harm the developing child” (p. 12). And children have the right to grow up in a safe, healthy, nurturing environment.

In her article, *A rationale for positive online content for children*, Dr. Livingstone also acknowledges the centrality of communications media in the lives of children, and argues that a *communication rights framework*

can point the way ahead without pitting adult (or commercial) freedoms against child protection. Instead, it is more productive to balance children’s freedoms against children’s protection, for both are encompassed by a children’s right’s framework. Moreover . . . freedoms should be understood positively as well as negatively, for ‘empowerment’ is not just free access to any information, but rather means enabling children to do what they can do best—a matter of posi-

tive regulation as well as limiting restrictions” (pp. 12-13).

She reviews evidence of the effects and effectiveness of Internet content and services, identifying online opportunities and challenges for children in the 21st century.

### *Emerging Perspectives on Media and Social Transformation*

Much of the media content created for and distributed to children around the globe is rife with gender and racial stereotypes, violence, and commercialization. Critics charge that much of children’s media stifles imagination, provides limited opportunities for identification with a variety of types of characters, and encourages unhealthy and risky behaviors. Clearly, much of the media created for children does not promote the best interest of children.

Yet children have the right to media that respond to their needs, reflect their experiences, and respect them as more than consumers in a global economy. At a time when technological advances make it possible to reach more children around the world, and include more voices in the global information flow, we must examine the role of the media in social transformation of children’s lives. The three articles in this section provide examples of content that is inspirational and transformative.

Dafna Lemish, Ph.D., interviewed 135 producers of children’s television programs from 65 countries around the world about their motivations and goals for their productions. She identifies core elements that encompass the producers’ common goal of providing a “safe space” for children, one that is “true to life” and “gives voice to children themselves” (pp. 17-21). Her interviewees passionately argue that children’s television “offers a unique space for alternative discourse of deeply entrenched social, gender, and cultural inequalities and an opportunity to explore different worlds. . . . It may constitute a safe environment in which to explore the full range of roles children might wish for themselves, a vision for a different reality, and an aspiration for a better world” (p. 21).

Similarly, JoEllen FisherKeller, Ph.D., describes youth media programs around the world that engage young people as creators of media products. According to FisherKeller, most youth media programs “help young people challenge the status quo and create change where necessary, and thus help youth develop as powerful members of society, whether as workers, artists, citizens, activists, and/or leaders” (p. 22). Youth

media creators work in print and electronic media, analogue and digital, often offering a safe environment for expressing diverse opinions and publicizing social and civic issues that are important to them and their communities. These programs recognize and promote children's rights to be the subjects of media coverage as well as to freedom of expression.

June Lee, Ph.D., and Charlotte Cole, Ed. D., provide a case study analysis of *Panwapa*, a Sesame Workshop project designed to foster the "foundation for global citizenship skills and community activism in young children" (p. 26). Building on the solid foundation of research-based design created in the 1960s by the Children's Television Workshop (now Sesame Workshop), and over 35 years of international co-production experience, the Panwapa project is "a multi-platform world that immerses children in a unique and novel exploration of self, community, and cultures from around the world" (p. 26). Lee and Cole describe evidence from summative research assessing the

impact of the project on children's understanding of global citizenship, their engagement with the materials, and parent and teacher evaluations.

### *Current Global Issues on Human Rights and Children's Rights*

The final article in the issue was contributed by Dafna Lemish, Ph.D., and is a description of a collaborative effort between academics and professionals in the field of children and media to produce the *Convention on Television Broadcasting for Children and Youth in Israel*, recognizing Israeli children's rights to responsive and responsible media, and protection from exploitation and harm. Originally drafted in 2002, the Convention was reaffirmed and revised in 2008 to include Internet and interactive media contents. Described by Lemish as "the 'Ten Commandments of Broadcasting,' they specify five principles of 'thou shalt do' and five principles of 'thou shalt not do'" (p. 31). She presents the full text of the Convention, along with the challenge presented with its implementation.

## **Rethinking and Reframing Media Effects in the Context of Children's Rights: A New Paradigm**

Michael Rich

Center on Media and Child Health

Do children have rights? If so, what are they? And how are these rights to be interpreted and protected in a world dramatically changed by the media children consume and communicate with? The answers to the questions about children's rights are neither as straightforward as they seem, nor as much of a consensus as many believe they should be. When we consider the effects of media on children, the questions become more complex and the answers more contentious.

While most societies have come a long way from treating children as chattels or saying that they should be seen and not heard, progress that in 1989 was codified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), there remain substantial disagreements on the nature of those rights. Every nation on earth has ratified the UNCRC—every nation except Somalia, a war-torn country without an effective government, and, perhaps surprisingly, the United States of America, widely regarded as one of the world's most child-friendly societies. To complicate this apparent contradiction further, freedom of speech is one of the cornerstones of the U.S. Constitution, a right

that most Americans hold dear and that was adopted in concept by the rest of the world in the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly of the United Nations 1948). In relation to media, our right to freedom of speech has often been used as the ultimate veto of any attempts to improve the media to which children and all of us are exposed. According to the judicial system of the United States, media producers' right to freedom of expression overrides any concerns for the effects of those media products on children.

In approaching the issue of television, video games, cell phones, and the Internet from the perspective of children's rights, we must consider briefly what the rights of children may be, while acknowledging that everyone does not agree. In simplest terms, the diversity of opinions regarding children's rights lies on a continuum between "free will" and "best interests" of the child. The "free will" proponents argue that each child is an individual with as many rights as an adult, while those who seek the "best interests" of the child assert that a child is not developmentally capable of

making decisions in his/her own best interests, thus an adult (or an institution functioning as an adult) must act on behalf of the child. There is validity to both perspectives and, with significant variation, most parents, teachers, and societies fall somewhere on this continuum, moving the child's rights increasingly toward "free will" as the child's development allows her/him to make increasingly more responsible decisions. For both individual children and for whole developmental stages of children, errors can be made in either direction. On one hand, children given free will at breakfast time will choose chocolate cake over fruit, so adults make choices until children can understand and act on their best interests. Most societies gradually add rights such as the ability to drive or buy tobacco and alcohol in an effort to delay potentially unsafe or unhealthy activities until young people have developed executive cognitive function and accrued life experience. On the other hand, children whose decisions are always made by overly paternalistic or controlling adults are rendered voiceless in society, vulnerable to exploitation, and unpracticed in the skills of making decisions and taking responsibility. Although there is significant variation in its implementation around the world, with rights conferred or denied depending on age, gender, race, culture, or social status, key provisions of the UNCRC provide a useful structure for examining media exposure in relation to a widely accepted ideal of the rights of children.

The long-running debate about media and their effects on children has historically taken a values-based approach to the best interests of the child—what children should and should not be allowed to see, hear, or do. Although there has likely been public concern about the influence of media on children from the time of the first stories, music, and images, this concern ramped up in the early 20th century with the advent of mass media in the form of motion pictures and radio. It increased further in the middle of the century with the proliferation of television, and rose to a fever pitch with the explosion of interactive media and the World Wide Web at the dawn of the 21st century. Concern among parents and child advocates about specific content like sex or violence has given rise to public policy debates. Media producers have avoided government restrictions by developing self-imposed ratings. Such reactive responses have served to appease society's immediate concerns without developing either consistent solutions for individual issues or a global approach to media effects. The core issue of media effects on

children has not been effectively addressed because value-based criteria for assessing media influence are inherently flawed. In a heterogeneous, democratic society, there is not and cannot be consensus on what is right and what is wrong for children to see or hear. Each individual has the right to be guided by his or her own moral, cultural, and practical beliefs, beliefs that are held dearly and difficult, if not impossible, to change. Such beliefs are most deeply ingrained when it comes to raising and guiding children. These differing opinions, no matter how powerfully held and self-righteously stated, will always be just that, opinions. Censoring or restricting one person's opinions because others, even the majority of others, disagree violates our right to self-expression.

The heat generated by powerfully opposing opinions about the effects of media on children needed the light of a reference standard, valid and reproducibly measurable outcomes of concern presented in a neutral, unbiased format, in order to bring clarity, reason, and, hopefully, consensus to the discourse. The Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH), based at Children's Hospital Boston, Harvard Medical School's pediatric teaching institution, was founded to collect, develop, and disseminate research to support a paradigm shift from judging the values media impart to assessing the quantifiable effects they have on children's physical, mental, and social health. The CMCH Database of Research is an open source online library of over 10,000 scientific papers from more than a dozen academic disciplines addressing media influences on the health and development of children. To consider media effects in the context of the rights of children, key provisions of the UNCRC can be examined in light of evidence from this comprehensive library of the research that has investigated how media affect children.

*The best interests of children must be the priority of parents and leaders making decisions that affect them. The family's rights and responsibilities to raise and guide their children must be respected and supported.* In the long-running argument between child advocates who wish to institute legislation to protect children from harmful media content and media producers who regard any government restrictions on media to be an infringement on their freedom of speech, the argument offered by producers is that it is the parents' responsibility to monitor and regulate their children's media use (Motion Picture Association of America, 2009). This position is squarely in agreement

with the UNCRC recognition of the family's rights to raise and guide their children. What it glosses over, however, is the linked provision that the family's responsibilities in raising and guiding their children must be supported. While concern about children's media use is widespread, parents are largely unaware of the substantial evidence linking media exposure with negative health outcomes (Center on Media and Child Health, n.d.). In addition, a study that asked parents to rate movies, television programs, and video games for their own children found that they disagreed with the industry ratings by as much as 50%, all in the direction of being more restrictive than the ratings (Walsh & Gentile, 2001). Media producers who stand up for parents' rights to raise their own children have framed the issue, both with their ratings and their public statements, as a disagreement in values, a skirmish in the culture wars. The media industry has brilliantly positioned themselves as the defenders of parents' rights to raise their children in their own ways, but no effort has been made to inform parents about known effects of exposure to violence, substance use, sex, or other risk behaviors on young viewers. The rating systems were put in place to avoid government interference in media production and distribution, not to empower families or protect children. They are doing an excellent job of the former, but, in order to be fully responsive to the rights of children, they must do the latter. To protect the rights of the children, both parents and children must be made aware of the risks and benefits of media use and provided with strategies for preserving and promoting their health and safety.

*Children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic, and other recreational activities.* There is no question that media have children's attention. Increasing numbers of children of younger and younger ages are using media for more and more of their waking hours, often multitasking with two or more media simultaneously (Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartella, 2003; Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). Many movies, video games, interactive Web sites, and television programs are engaging, and some have been shown to have educational benefits (Rice, Huston, Truglio, & Wright, 1990; Vandewater & Bickham, 2004; Lacasa, Méndez, & Martínez, 2008; Chuang & Chen 2009). Children with a computer in the home have better grades and standardized test scores than those without, but those who have a television in their bedroom have poorer academic performance than those without (Borzekowski & Robinson, 2005). High

school seniors who watched *Sesame Street* during their preschool years have better grades, show greater creativity, display less aggressive behavior, read more books, and place more value on achievement than those who watched entertainment television (Huston, Anderson, Wright, Linebarger, & Schmitt, 2001). Despite this, many child developmental experts are concerned that the predigested content of entertainment media and the "right/wrong" structure of interactive "edutainment" are inhibiting creativity and problem-solving, even while increasing rote knowledge with "skills and drills" (Singer & Singer, 1998; Singer & Singer, 2008). Media can provide excellent teaching and opportunities to test a child's fund of knowledge, but cannot approach the broad and deep opportunities provided by open-ended problem-solving and unstructured play to establish and improve connections with and understanding of others, of culture, and of the natural world (Ginsburg, 2007).

*Children have a right to education that should develop each child's talents and abilities to the fullest, teaching them to respect others and live in peace. Children have special rights to access information important to their health and well-being, which includes the availability of children's books and materials in the languages of minority and indigenous children. Children have the right to connect, meet, and join groups as long as this respects and does not infringe on the rights of others.* Educational television that is well-designed and thoroughly evaluated has been demonstrated to improve language acquisition and school readiness among preschool age children (Linebarger & Walker, 2005). Interactive media from video games to Web sites that offer the opportunity for children and adolescents to master a virtual environment, rehearse behavioral scripts over and over again, and be rewarded for successful accomplishment, promise to be among the most effective teaching technologies to date (Chuang & Chen, 2009). The globally available, open access Internet allows children and all users to seek out information and activities at their own levels that has relevance to them and their lives. Where materials such as children's literature or indigenous music were once accessible only to the educated and economically secure, the World Wide Web makes them increasingly available to and used by even the most remote communities, and all but the most impoverished individuals. Programs such as One Laptop Per Child, which provides inexpensive, rugged, wireless-capable, and fun computers to children around the world, seek to

empower traditionally disadvantaged individuals and groups by giving them easy access to information. The technological revolution and innovative applications of Media Age technology have already provided opportunities to disenfranchised cultural, ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities to understand themselves better, to break out of their isolation and connect with each other, and to reach across chasms of ignorance to reveal themselves to the world.

*Children have the right to be protected from the use of harmful drugs.* Media are good teaching tools, and all media are educational. What varies is only what they teach and how well they teach it. Media can teach substance abuse as effectively as they can teach reading. In countries such as the U.S. where advertising of tobacco is restricted, especially to children and youth, research has shown that the strongest single influence on young people starting to smoke is now seeing their favorite movie stars light up (Tickle, Sargent, Dalton, Beach, & Heatherton, 2001; Distefan, Pierce, & Gilpin, 2004; Charlesworth & Glantz, 2005). Study after study have shown the relationship, with recent findings indicating that youth who watched movies with the most smoking were 2.6 times more likely to start smoking than those who watched movies with the least smoking (Sargent, Beach, Adachi-Mejia, Gibson, Titus-Ernstoff, Carusi, Swain, Heatherton, & Dalton, 2005). Similarly, the odds of youth who watched movies with the most alcohol consumption were nearly 3 times that of those who watched the fewest alcohol portrayals to drink without parental knowledge and greater than 2.5 times more likely to engage in binge drinking (Hanewinkel & Sargent, 2009). While there are no studies of direct media influences on illegal drug use (and far fewer portrayals of such use), there is a strong body of evidence supporting the clustering of health risk factors, with those youth who smoke tobacco and/or drink alcohol at significantly increased risk of using illegal drugs. Direct media advertising of pharmaceuticals gives the public the impression that there is a medication for everything, provides incomplete information on both benefits and risks, and can confound health education and the therapeutic rapport of patients with their clinicians. Many prescription medications, from erectile dysfunction aids to tranquilizers and stimulants, are readily accessible on the Internet, along with a legitimate prescription from an online doctor who never examines the patient. While media can and have been used to educate and inform children about their health, many efforts to entertain or to sell products have carried powerful and potentially

dangerous messages about the use and effects of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.

*Children have the right to be protected from being physically or mentally mistreated or hurt, and from taking part in hostilities.* While virtual violence in media pales in comparison to the physical and psychological horrors endured by child soldiers or child victims of war, there is a robust and large body of research that has demonstrated nearly unanimously that exposure to media violence affects its viewers in one or more of three ways: elevations in fear and anxiety (Cantor, 2001), increased likelihood of aggressive thoughts and behaviors among some viewers (Anderson & Bushman, 2002, Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003; Bushman & Huesmann, 2006), and desensitization to the suffering of others (Cline, Croft, & Courier, 1973). Younger and more vulnerable children can be terrified by frightening or threatening media portrayals, suffering from anxiety, sleep disorders, and nightmares that often persist for years (Cantor, 2001). Although public fears escalate when a known video gamer or horror film fan commits a violent crime, “copycat” violence that imitates an act portrayed in a movie or television show is uncommon. Who is at greatest risk for becoming violent, and whether their violent tendencies or their focus on violent media comes first, remain unknown. School shootings are rare, and retrospective analysis has shown that their perpetrators often have multiple influences, including media, that lead to their violence. As a matter of public health and the rights of children, it is not the violent extremes of the bell curve that we should focus on, but the shifting of the center. As adaptable organisms, when we witness portrayals of interpersonal violence, especially in a pleasurable context where it is linked with comedy or romance, or where the hero prevails over the villains, we learn to accept violence as the way things are, as a viable means of resolving conflicts, as a sign of strength, and as entertainment. The growing epidemic of school bullying requires three components which map with eerie precision onto the three outcomes of exposure to media violence: an aggressive bully, an anxious victim, and desensitized, accepting bystanders. Children have a right to avoid being “entertained” to become bullies, victims, or onlookers who do not intervene.

*Children should be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, and from performing any work that is likely to be harmful to the child's health, or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social*

*development.* A growing body of research has examined the influence of media on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of youth. Sexual references, innuendoes, story lines, and portrayals have steadily increased on television over the past decade (Kunkel, Eyal, Donnerstein, Farrar, Biely, & Rideout, 2007). Since all media are educational, it is not surprising that sexual portrayals influence young viewers. Researchers have shown that those who watched television shows with the most frequent portrayals of sex were twice as likely to become sexually active in the next year as those who watched the least sex on television (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter, & Miu, 2004). This relationship was supported by a study that added movies, music, and magazines to television and found nearly identical results (Brown, L'Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy, & Jackson, 2006). A longitudinal study showed that children who watched adult-themed television shows like *Friends* between the ages of 6 and 8 were significantly more likely than their peers to become sexually active between 12 and 14 (Delgado, Austin, Rich, & Bickham, 2009). More concerning is research finding that adolescents of both genders who listened to music with sexually degrading lyrics became sexually active at younger ages than those who listened to music that was not misogynistic (Martino, Collins, Elliott, Strachman, Kanouse, & Berry, 2006). While many are suspicious of the Internet as a tool for sexual predators, a recent case review by Harvard Law School revealed that sexual predation is far less common than the press and prosecutors have led the public to believe (Internet Safety Technical Task Force, 2008). Of greater importance to the rights and well-being of children is the easy availability of explicit pornography on the Internet that turns sex into a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than a special expression of intimacy, trust, and love between two people in a relationship (Rich, 2009).

*Children have the right to receive, generate, and share information, as long as the information does not damage them or others. Children have the right to have their perspectives, ideas, and opinions heard, respected, and taken into account.* Current media technologies offer children an unprecedented opportunity to find and express their voices. Since 1994, researchers have loaned video camcorders to chronically ill children with the assignment to “teach the grown-ups what they need to know” about their illness experiences, their thoughts, feelings, and needs. The visual illness narratives that untrained children

create of the worlds they live in are both profound as human insight and transformational as clinical research (Rich & Chalfen, 1999; Rich, Lamola, Amory, & Schneider, 2000). More recently, educators have equipped adolescents with the ability to view media critically and with the production skills to respond to what they perceive to be media misrepresentation and manipulation. The “counter-ads” they created to address their concerns about the influence of media consolidation (Memefilms) or the effects of marketing on young women’s self-image (Memefilms) are as powerful as anything produced on Madison Avenue. The World Wide Web offers an unprecedented opportunity for children and youth to investigate and learn about the world beyond their immediate location and community. While children’s easy access to and facility with the Internet are recent enough that long term effects are not yet known, short term findings are that young people’s knowledge, language and research skills, and cultural sensitivity are improved with Internet use (Lenhart & Project, 2008). Even though many of the online activities of adolescents appear to be solely social or entertainment-oriented, these activities often have aspects that empower the young person to seek out information that might be difficult or uncomfortable to explore in other venues and to give voice to ideas, observations, and perspectives that they would otherwise feel inhibited from voicing. The “leveling” effect of the Internet, where a child has the same voice as a millionaire, has already contributed to a greater sense of hope and more participation by youth in the democratic process, as evidenced by the U.S. presidential election of 2008. However, the aspects of accessibility, affordability and (perceived) anonymity that make the Internet a more democratic environment can also make it an unsafe environment in which young people can either hurt or be hurt by others. When children reveal private information about themselves, they open themselves up to unethical marketing practices, identity theft, ridicule, cyberbullying, even sexual predation. When children (or adults masquerading as children) hide behind the apparent anonymity of the Internet to harass, deceive, steal, or hurt, they are denying basic rights to others.

*Children have a right to live in safety and develop healthily, to information that helps them stay healthy, and to a clean and safe environment.* At a time in our history when children are actively using media for an average of nearly 6½ hours each day, often mul-

titasking so that they are exposed to more than 8½ hours of media content (Roberts, Foehr, et al., 2005), we must rethink the relationship between children's media exposure, their well-being, and their rights. The media children consume are as ubiquitous as the air they breathe and the water they drink. Media are arguably the most pervasive and universal environmental health influence of today. They are used by and affect children of all nations, genders, and races; unlike many health influences, neither education nor wealth are protective against the negative effects of media. Children spend more time with and give more attention to media than to school, parents, or any other influence. Children's rights to live in safety and to develop healthily are directly affected by media, often in negative ways. On the other hand, media are powerful tools with which children can access information to help them stay healthy and which they can use to learn, create, and express themselves.

The persuasiveness and power of media, now and in the future, require us to move beyond the

failed, values-based paradigms of the past. Current media rating systems and public discourse have little relationship to what scientific research has revealed to be the effects of media on young people. Given children's near-total immersion in one or more media during their waking hours, it can be argued that we should understand and respond to media as an environmental health influence that is powerful, but neutral in valence. Like the natural environment, there are some elements that can help and other elements that can harm the developing child. It is how media are understood and used that determine the effects of media on a given child. To respect and protect the rights of children, we must bring a compassionate awareness to the effects of the media tools and content that we produce and to which we expose society's youngest members. Ultimately, children have a right to their childhoods—to live in safety, to grow healthily, and to learn, create, and play their way to an understanding of what it means to be human.

## **A Rationale for Positive Online Content for Children**

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### *A. Maximizing online opportunities is a matter of children's rights*

The child/media relationship is an entry point into the wide and multifaceted world of children and their rights—to education, freedom of expression, play, identity, health, dignity and self-respect, protection . . . in every aspect of child rights, in every element of the life of a child, the relationship between children and the media plays a role.

Issued on the 10th anniversary of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), this statement from UNICEF's Oslo Challenge indeed challenged nations to take forward the media and communication element of the Convention, now ratified by nearly all countries. These elements include children's rights to express their views freely in all matters affecting them (Art. 12), freedom of expression (i.e. to seek, receive, and impart information of all kinds) through any medium of the child's choice (Art. 13), freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Art. 15), protection of privacy (Art. 16), and to mass media that disseminate information and material of social and cultural

benefit to the child, with particular regard to the linguistic needs of minority/indigenous groups and to protection from material injurious to the child's well-being (Art. 17).

Within the broader framework of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Hamelink (2008) collects under the heading of "communication rights" all those rights (participation and freedom of expression, the egalitarian exchange of ideas, inclusion, and diversity) that relate to information and communication, significantly including children in this communication rights framework. Thus a communication rights framework deliberately counters the assumption that media and communications remain somehow incidental, rather than increasingly central to the infrastructure of a networked, global information society. Even if the mass media were, historically, just an optional part of the leisure sphere, this could not be argued of today's mediated communication, for without this, many forms of political, social, cultural, and educational participation are now all but impossible.

For children, as for adults, a rights framework can point the way ahead without pitting adult (or com-

mercial) freedoms against child protection. Instead, it is more productive to balance children's freedoms against children's protection, for both are encompassed by a children's rights framework. Moreover, as Berlin (1969) argued, freedoms should be understood positively as well as negatively, for "empowerment" is not just free access to any information, but rather means enabling children to do what they can do best—a matter of positive regulation as well as limiting restrictions. So, how can this framework be applied to the Internet, and what could it offer children?

### *B. A Children's Internet Charter?*

The internationally-endorsed though rarely enacted Children's Television Charter, formulated in 1995 (Livingstone, 2007a), proposes a series of principles for television that can, by substitution of terms, be readily extended to the Internet, indeed to media generally. Rephrasing these principles instead as a Children's Internet Charter reads as follows:

(1) Children should have online contents and services of high quality, which are made specifically for them, and which do not exploit them. In addition to entertaining them, these should allow children to develop physically, mentally, and socially to their fullest potential;

(2) Children should hear, see, and express themselves, their culture, their languages, and their life experiences, through online contents and services that affirm their sense of self, community, and place;

(3) Children's online contents and services should promote an awareness and appreciation of other cultures in parallel with the child's own cultural background;

(4) Children's online contents and services should be wide-ranging in genre and content, but should not include gratuitous scenes of violence and sex;

(5) Children's online contents and services should be accessible when and where children are available to engage, and/or distributed via other widely accessible media or technologies;

(6) Sufficient funds must be made available to make these online contents and services to the highest possible standards;

(7) Governments, production, distribution, and funding organizations should recognise both the importance and vulnerability of indigenous online contents and services, and take steps to support and protect it.

In short, a Children's Internet Charter would assert, in advancement of children's communication rights, as part of their human rights, the seven principles of quality, affirmation, diversity, protection, inclusion, support, and cultural heritage.

### *C. European support—Council of Europe, European Commission*

Addressing the whole population, not just children, the Council of Europe (2007) made just such a call in November 2007:

The Council of Europe advances the concept of public service value of the Internet, understood as people's significant reliance on the Internet as an essential tool for their everyday activities (communication, information, knowledge, commercial transactions) and the resulting legitimate expectation that Internet services are accessible and affordable, secure, reliable, and ongoing.

More recently, the EC's Safer Internet Plus Programme also calls for positive online provision for children, a most welcome call (European Commission, 2009).

### *D. Classifying online opportunities*

The EU Kids Online network proposed a classification of online opportunities for children, equivalent to its classification of online risks (Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon, & Olafsson, 2009). Table 1 on page 14 distinguishes among content opportunities which position the child as recipient, contact opportunities which position the child as participant, and conduct opportunities which position the child as actor. Crossing this with the values or motivations of online providers produces 12 cells, which scope the array of online opportunities for children, with examples of provision in each cell.

With this as a tool, it becomes possible to audit current provision to determine the extent to which it meets children's needs, interests, and desires. Such an audit poses no easy task, however.

### *E. Judging online content*

How can one tell what online content is positive? Many different contents and services online, whether or not designed specifically for children, may meet these expectations. Children, like adults, are difficult to predict in what may benefit them, for much depends on the interpretative contexts of use, and these are as heterogeneous for children as for any other population. Thus we may place few *a priori* limits on just what online contents present opportunities for young people.

|                                     | Learning                                  | Participation                        | Creativity                             | Identity                               |
|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Content—Child as Recipient</b>   | In/formal e-learning resources            | Civic global or local resources      | Diverse arts/leisure resources         | Lifestyle resources, health advice     |
| <b>Contact—Child as Participant</b> | Online tutoring, educational games/ tests | Invited interaction with civic sites | Multiplayer games, creative production | Social networking, personal advice     |
| <b>Conduct—Child as Actor</b>       | Self-initiated/ collaborative Learning    | Concrete forms of civic engagement   | User-generated content creation        | Peer forums for expression of identity |

**Table 1.** The child and online activities.

At the same time, much online content is, one can easily recognize, uninspiring, banal, superficial, or worse—misleading, hostile, or exploitative.

We can agree in highly abstract terms: the Internet can be used to facilitate children’s education, participation, communication, and expression. We might also agree on “good” sites—Children’s BBC Online is a fantastic resource; Google Earth has excited adults and children alike with its accessible vision of everywhere and anywhere; YouTube has enabled amateur youthful creativity like nothing we’ve seen before.

But between the abstractions and the examples, everything remains contested. Having asked many people—experts, policy makers, and parents—to identify some great online resources for children, it is notable that many scratch their heads in puzzlement. One problem is that much depends on the child—children can and often do make much of apparently uninspiring content, just as they can fail to get any benefit from great content. Another problem is that much of what children enjoy occasions a certain degree of adult ambivalence or even disapproval. This includes such sites as Neopets, Habbo Hotel, Club Penguin, YouTube, MySpace, LiveJournal, Limewire, Wikipedia, multiplayer games (e.g. Simtropolis, World of Warcraft), sports-related sites, television/film-related sites, and so forth, all of which may or may not offer genuine benefit (Livingstone, 2008).

This is not to say that people cannot make some excellent suggestions, although not everyone will agree on “good” (or “bad”) examples.<sup>1</sup> These include, somewhat *ad hoc*, a French children’s search engine,

*Takatrouver*, designed for 7-12 year olds with pre-moderated content ([www.takatrouver.net](http://www.takatrouver.net); see also German and Dutch children’s search engines at [www.blindkuh.de](http://www.blindkuh.de) and [www.davindi.nl](http://www.davindi.nl)); a Greek portal for children by the Hellenic World Foundation, a privately funded, not for profit foundation founded in 1993 by an act of Parliament ([www.fhw.gr/imeakia](http://www.fhw.gr/imeakia)), which provides virtual reality projects (e.g., the life and history of the olive tree, the chronicle of an excavation, the ancient Agora); a Slovenian storytelling site for young children that mixes educational content with games and entertaining activities, including a publicly funded children’s portal ([www.prazniki.net/default.aspx](http://www.prazniki.net/default.aspx); also, [www.otroci.org/](http://www.otroci.org/) and the children’s portal, [www.zupca.net/](http://www.zupca.net/)). The main responsibility for online content for children lies with the Ministry of Education, though the Ministry of Culture also funds some projects, especially those supporting the Slovenian language. There is little available for Slovenian teenagers, however, apart from social networking sites.); an Australian resource for indigenous populations, *Digital Songlines*, to support “the collection, education, and sharing of indigenous cultural heritage knowledge” in forms accessible to children and others (<http://songlines.interactiondesign.com.au/>; see also the Australian Government’s Indigenous Portal at <http://www.indigenous.gov.au/>); and a California project, *Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth*, which supports local communities and educators in children’s creation of digital stories to express and explore their identities using multimedia tools (<http://gse.berkeley.edu/research/dusty.html>). One might also point to the often substantial sites produced by European and U.S. public service broadcasters (for example, VRT in Belgium, ZDF in Germany, NRK in Norway, RTE in Ireland, and CBBC/BBC Education in UK, [www.hetklokhuis.nl/sketchstudio](http://www.hetklokhuis.nl/sketchstudio) in The Netherlands, [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org) and [pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org) in the USA, and National

<sup>1</sup> I thank colleagues in the EU Kids Online network (see [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net)) for these and other suggestions, and also Alain Bossard (Takatrouver), Jo Bryce (UCLAN), Andrew Burn (Institute of Education, London), Stephen Carrick-Davies (Childnet International), Joshua Fincher, Lelia Green (Edith Cowan University), Karl Hopwood (Semley Primary School), Mimi Ito (USC), Dale Kunkel (University of Arizona), Ben Livingstone, Rodney Livingstone, Rachel Lunt, and Rebecca Shallcross (CBBC).

Danish Television, [www.dr.dk/boern/?oversigt](http://www.dr.dk/boern/?oversigt)), or other public bodies (e.g. NASA), to civic sites for youth participation (in the USA, [www.rockthevote.com](http://www.rockthevote.com), [www.kidsvotingusa.org](http://www.kidsvotingusa.org), and [www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org); in the UK, [www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk](http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk)), to children's helplines and advice services (for example, in Spain, [www.portaldelmenor.es](http://www.portaldelmenor.es) [bullying, other problems]; in the UK, [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com) [drugs] and [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) [child abuse]), and to online fanzines (for example, [Mugglenet.com](http://Mugglenet.com), the unofficial site for Harry Potter fans; <http://community.livejournal.com/insanebuffyfans>, Buffy the Vampire Slayer fan site; and <http://www.beavisandbutthead.net/>, Beavis and Butthead fans).

Unfortunately, as yet there are few publicly reported evaluations of even public sector sites and resources, so we know little about whether, why, and which children use them, or whether they prefer them to other online or, indeed, offline resources. Moreover, many initiatives fail. One such was the attempt to establish a Dot Kids domain (under the US domain—i.e. [.kids.us](http://.kids.us)). In 2002, this children's "walled garden" appeared successful, when President Bush signed the Dot-Kids Implementation and Efficiency Act in the USA, saying, "This bill is a wise and necessary step to safeguard our children while they use computers and discover the great possibilities of the Internet. Every site designated [.kids](http://.kids) will be a safe zone for children" (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2002). However, since [dot.kids](http://dot.kids) sites could not connect to any sites outside the domain (NeuStar Inc., 2003), this was so restrictive that few organizations invested in populating the domain and the initiative is effectively inactive.

Wartella and Jennings (2000, p. 40, Box 1) propose a set of evaluation criteria, which usefully echo several of the seven principles of children's communication rights noted earlier. They frame these in terms of questions "to consider when creating new media content for children," as paraphrased below:

- Diversity (and affirmation)—is the content relevant to diverse social groups, by ethnicity, gender, or class, and does it either reinforce stereotypes or provide positive role models of marginalized groups?
- Accessibility (or inclusion and support)—is the technology and content accessible to children with different resources and needs, so as to be universally available?
- Interactivity—does the content use the interactive potential of the medium to best effect, enabling children to be creative, including creating a com-

munity of young people, and providing real choices with real consequences?

- Education—does the content offer age-appropriate, context-appropriate educational, informational, or cultural opportunities? (cf. cultural heritage also)
- Value (or quality)—is it fun, engaging to children, so they will want to explore further? "Does the content have something to tell, instead of just something to sell?"
- Artistry—is the content of high quality, with excellence in design elements, and an understandable, easily navigable interface?
- Safety (or protection)—are the links carefully chosen, the requirements for disclosing personal information appropriately managed, and does the content exclude inappropriate violent or sexual content?

An audit of online opportunities for children and young people would surely be timely, evaluating them using criteria such as these in order systematically to map current provision and, taking into account the needs of children by country, gender, age, and so forth, to identify key gaps and prioritize the development of future online resources.

As the principles of inclusion and support require, such an audit should include a determination of which bodies are, and should be, tasked with the responsibility for providing and funding children's online resources; a promotional strategy for ensuring that children, parents, and teachers become aware of positive provision for children online, both current and future; and a network for providers, with a forum in which to meet/communicate, to ensure that experiences are shared, lessons learned, and best practices disseminated.

#### *F. Online provision may aid risk reduction*

It appears increasingly likely that one good way of avoiding the negative dimensions of Internet use is to direct children towards the positive, thereby avoiding harm and empowering children in terms of learning, participation, creativity, and identity. Indeed, a recent qualitative comparative analysis from EU Kids Online showed exactly this: in some European countries where factors point towards the likelihood of a relatively high degree of online risk for children, such risk levels appear reduced if there is sufficient positive online content for children; the converse also applies—the absence of such content, typical especially of small language communities, appears associated with higher levels of online risk experienced by children in those countries (Bauwens, Lobe, Segers, Tsaliki, forthcoming).

Thus, positive online provision may also be expected to aid the strategy for online risk reduction. But opportunities and risks must be balanced. If children and young people are to engage freely and creatively with the online environment, issues of trust, legibility, safety, and accountability must also be addressed. These are partly a matter of Internet literacy (searching, navigation, evaluation) and partly a matter of design (ensuring that indicators of reliability and quality are clearly marked). Also crucial are answers to such questions as, if youth has its say online, who will reply, who will take action, and will youth be informed of the consequences? Only if the Internet appears a trustworthy and accountable route to participation, embodying principles of respect and connecting structures of decision making—for which the Internet could be admirably suited if only it were so used—might it contribute to the great expectations held out for children.

Trust and accountability also depend on effectively balancing opportunities and risks. To give a simple but telling example, in the *UK Children Go Online* civic participation interviews (Livingstone, 2007b), two teenage girls were observed to respond to the invitation of Mykindaplace, a site for teenage girls, containing celebrity, music, fashion and entertainment news, and chat (<http://www.mykindaplace.com/hi.aspx>), which announced, “we want your real life stories.” Mia noted, “you can send a photo as well,” but Natasha’s rejection of this opportunity was immediate—“why would you send in a photo, that’s just stupid. . . . I’d give out my name, I wouldn’t give out my phone number or my address or anything like that.” In short, if it is not reasonably safe, it will not be perceived as trustworthy, and children will not participate.

### *G. Practical challenges*

Online resources for children vary considerably in scale and scope, and they are far more plentiful in some countries (or languages) than others. Small scale projects are often dependent on one or a handful of enthusiastic individuals, reliant on temporary project funding, and so difficult to sustain and update. They often struggle to reach a wide audience, for both promotion and navigation are difficult to achieve in an age of information abundance. Those sites adequately resourced by government organizations must meet official objectives and so may be seen by children as irrelevant and dull.

The best resourced are the commercial sites, able to employ high production values, sophisticated games, updated content, desirable freebies, and expensive

downloads. Yet even these must decide between targeting a general population (e.g. Google Images, Wikipedia) or, if specifically dedicated to (and safe for) children, they must employ a commercial strategy equally specifically directed towards children, with advertising/sponsorship prominent in the online offer and with little reason to reach out to the digitally or socially disadvantaged. As safety considerations make interactivity particularly expensive (e.g., requiring pre-moderated content and age-tailored interactive services), sites for younger children especially are often non-interactive or, to pay their way, highly commercialized.

The difficulty of ensuring that children and young people find positive online content and so have even the opportunity of engaging with it is a significant one. Helen McQuillan, EU Kids Online network member for Ireland, emphasizes the importance of linking online content to offline community or school level provision, reporting on her direct involvement in a “buddy” mentoring project

where third level students mentor 12 and 13 year olds in an after school club in movie making, digital photography, and film sound recordings. The emphasis is on encouraging young people to seek out open source software, and on working in teams. Although the team work in a community ICT setting, they are brought to the university production facilities also to encourage them to consider third level study in new media. All the media produced by the different groups in the Digihub is showcased to parents at the end of the year. Linked into this are family learning sessions where young people bring their parents to teach them how to use the Internet, or teach them more creative applications. (personal communication)

Livingstone & Helpser (2007) analyzed the range of activities undertaken online by children aged 9–19 in the *UK Children Go Online* project, finding that the breadth and sophistication of such activities varies considerably. Based on the specific patterning of usage identified, they proposed that each child climbs a “ladder of online opportunities,” typically beginning with information-seeking (of any kind), progressing through games and communication, taking on more interactive forms of communication and culminating in creative and civic activities. One implication is that communication and games playing may not be “time-wasting” but, instead, can provide a moti-

vational step on the way to “approved” activities. Another is that online resources should be designed so as to encourage children to progress from simpler to more complex and diverse activities. The evidence is that while many children communicate, search, and

play online, not so very many are, in practice, creative, productive, critical, or civically engaged. In sum, ensuring that all children get the opportunity to advance from simple to more complex activities needs encouragement, resources and support.

## Television as a “Safe Space” for Children: The Views of Producers around the World<sup>1</sup>

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The study of children, young people, and the media can be viewed as a microcosm of our entire field of media studies, as it is occupied with concerns for the three main realms of research: audiences, texts, and institutions. Childhood is understood to be socially constructed and culturally and historically situated, and children are perceived as a special, evolving, and dynamic group of people—characterized by unique developmental stages, who are gradually accumulating life experiences and developing knowledge as well as critical skills. All these processes characterize children and young people as different from adult audiences and more vulnerable to the influences of media. Hence the concern that some form of protection and supervision be required in guarding young people’s most basic of human rights—for healthy social, physical, and mental development and well being.

For two decades now, I have been researching the ideology embedded in media texts (most specifically gender stereotyping), teaching critical analysis skills, and working at consciousness-raising in students, media producers, and the public at large. I have learned that much of what children are watching on television around the world does not necessarily have their best interest in mind: A lot of it is violent; imbalanced in terms of gender and human diversity (class, religion, ethnicity, race, disability); commercialized; hyper-sexualized; and just plain uninspiring. At the same time, I found out that some television fare does offer better alternatives for children and is sensitive to their needs and well being. It has been my experience that such content is mostly produced in educational, public, and small specializing organizations around the world, but also occasionally, in some of the big commercial corporations (Lemish, 2007).

Furthermore, through the years I have come to the conclusion that we cannot remain content to study

only questions of privilege, as interesting and important as they are to us (e.g., whether baby-videos may or may not accelerate language development; or whether exposure to the hit trilogy of Disney’s *High School Musical* contributes to the construction of romantic love among tween girls). My recent work with producers of children’s TV around the globe and experiences encountered through organizations such as the *Prix Jeunesse*<sup>2</sup> and UNICEF<sup>3</sup> brought home to me the existential issues that media for children are recruited to address: promoting schooling for girls; educating for sexual safety and rape-prevention in HIV/AIDS-struck regions of the globe; providing alternative masculine role models in societies driven by domestic and general violence; reaffirming the value and self-image of diverse appearances in the face of the Anglo-European “Beauty Myth”; involving young generations in participatory democracy—the list is as long as the issues facing children growing up in the world today. In a global society in which children’s basic survival is still a major issue for humanity, I felt that privileged researchers of media, like me, need to roll up their sleeves and pitch in to link their research to social change efforts. Indeed, I submit that in the spirit of action research, the study of children and media needs a renewed commitment to obtaining, disseminating, and integrating knowledge; as well as to creating the conditions that assist in liberating and empowering children and young people through media, particularly

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Lemish, D. (forthcoming 2010). I am grateful to Dr. Maya Götz, Head of IZI for providing support for this research, and to the many producers who took the time and effort to talk to me and share their opinions, experiences, and dreams.

<sup>2</sup> *Prix Jeunesse International Festival* takes place every two years in Munich, Germany and is dedicated to quality television programming for children. See [www.prixjeunesse.de](http://www.prixjeunesse.de)

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) provides long-term humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries..

those from underprivileged segments of global and national societies.

Perhaps, I speculated, insights into these issues can be obtained by speaking directly with those media professionals involved in producing quality television for children. Critical studies of television production for children are few and far between: We know very little about what media professionals assume and expect of their child audience, and what role they assign themselves (Buckingham, 2008). However, these are the people whose professional lives are dedicated to fostering their audiences' well being by helping them to understand their societies and themselves, by offering them a vision of a better world, and by helping them to make the most out of their lives. I decided to seek the advice and to draw upon the accumulated knowledge and expertise of these professionals. If anybody, I thought, they might have answers to my questions. So this social action research is the result of such an effort—seeking the advice and learning from the experience of media production professionals. Once launched, this project became more ambitious and demanding than originally envisioned, but also much more exciting and inspiring. Over the course of four years, I talked to 135 media professionals from 65 countries in all continents, whom I met in various international events for children's media, including: *Prix Jeunesse International Festivals* of 2004, 2006, and 2008 in Munich; the *Japan Prize* in Tokyo in 2006; *Basel-Karlsruhe Forum* in Basel in 2007; and *The 5th World Summit on Media for Children* in Johannesburg in 2007.

Interviews included questions about the producers' own personal career development; their current work; their perceptions of social issues in their culture and in television for children in their country; their impressions of social representations in their own and others' work that they have viewed in the festivals; their suggestions and aspirations for change, and the like. Almost all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim and, since most interviewees were not native English speakers, were also lightly edited for English, trying to preserve the style and flavor of the original conversation. The transcripts were later submitted to a grounded thematic analysis of the main issues that surfaced in the interviews. I took their dreams, advice, frustrations, and questions with me to the libraries in an attempt to integrate grounded professional knowledge with academic analytical and theoretical frames. Thus, the book that evolved now also

illuminates potential benefits of integrating professional and academic ways of knowing about the media and social world. The presentation of this project here in a very brief form mobilizes the expertise of professional producers of quality television, allows their voices to be heard, and in doing so enables them to contribute to debates within the community of critical approaches to media studies. (For a detailed methodological account, see Lemish, forthcoming 2010, Chapter 2).

## Visions for a “safe space” for children

### A. *Courage*

One central aspect that emerged in the interviews was the vision for television to serve as a safe space for children in which to grow and experiment in the world. As Abby's (USA) reflection about the particular global circumstances in which American children are raised today and on what she would like to see television provide children suggests:

I'd like children to feel comfortable in their world. . . . There are so many fears in children's lives now, all over the world, that television has a responsibility to children to try and make them feel safe and to feel good about themselves, and good about their world. Now their world might be their back yard, but also to understand different cultures and to embrace other cultures. . . . The key for me to children's television is to make children feel safe and protected and excited about the world and I think that children are terrified of the world, terrified of traveling, and I know younger children who don't want to go anywhere, they want to stay at home. And I think that that makes very insular adults and I think that television has to expand the mind but it also has to give children courage.

Children, so the argument goes, are facing similar global issues of personal safety, anxiety over the future of the world and their place in it. Television has a responsibility for all children to help them become courageous citizens of this world. Offering girls and boys images of children who are not afraid to divert from traditional gender and cultural norms, who break away from them in making the world a better place for themselves and for others may be just what this “safe space” can symbolically do. As Mike (USA) expressed passionately:

Television can be forward thinking, it can show people different ways of living and accepting. I don't want to reflect reality the way it is, but reflect reality the way I think it should be . . . as

we grow up we forget about love. We get busy, we get smart, we become greedy—all these things happen to us. . . . I don't mind modeling a utopian world, I would rather have people who say. "I have learned something from that show," "that's what I want to do," "I want to make a positive change, even small, rather than validate the problems."

### *B. Inclusion*

Part of the effort to provide children with a "safe space" included a desire to present to children a society of inclusion. Elaine (Brazil), for example, suggested: "When we talk about inclusion we are talking about the blacks, and the poor, the disabled, the Indians, so in this moment in Brazil we are much more concerned about inclusion as a whole, and that's what my television is trying to do, for example, a show about disabled people." Similarly, Svein (Norway), described diversity issues related to recent immigration waves from around the world, a concern expressed by many north European interviewees:

We try to raise the status of children coming from other countries . . . as there are a lot of immigrant children. . . . We have to reflect that in all of our programs. . . . We have to show children from Turkey and Pakistan, and also from Asia—Korea, Vietnam. A lot of the children have been born here and they are mixed in the Norwegian society more than their parents, and that's where some of the conflicts are. And we have to deal with it on television.

A diverse screen provides more realistic, humane portrayals of current societies around the world and is also central to the well-being of the children growing within them. It celebrates girls and boys as children who share the same challenges, aspirations, morality, dreams, and hopes; children who need love and friendships, have adventures, and overcome difficulties; children who are curious and eager to explore their surroundings, and who struggle with their multiple identities; children who try to carve their place in the world. Children's television, the interviewees advocated, needs to present children who are self-willed, positive, and share their problems and accomplishments. Good programming, so the interviewees told me, brings children closer to each other and at the same time closer to themselves. With so much in common, sticking to gender and racial stereotypes "is just plain lazy," they often said; while developing fun and smart characters who are true to themselves but also do unexpected things is

difficult to create. As many of the conversations unfolded, it became clear that breaking stereotypes and opening up the screen to blurring gender and racial differences and to offering children real choice that cuts across divides is seen by interviewees as a way to foster a safer and more healthy environment for children's growth and development.

The need for children's television to open children's horizons and introduce them to other cultures and societies was an associated, central theme. However, in non-Western countries it followed a concern, first and foremost, to love and take pride in one's own culture. As Sumita (Bangladesh) put it, "Good television for children means that you teach them that they should love their country, they should love their culture, and also they should gain knowledge of other cultures."

### *C. Family*

The centrality of family in children's programming was a major theme in interviewees' practice. Regardless of the kind of family structure accepted as desirable (or even moral), there was agreement that children need to be seen growing up in nurturing and healthy family environments. Harsh criticism was expressed against the trend in many American situation comedies and films to present dysfunctional families, generally represented by incompetent parents, or to just ignore families altogether, as part of the "home alone" trend (Kapur, 2005; Lemish, 2009).

The centrality of parents to children's healthy development and as models of parenthood, albeit one that is changing, is expressed by Hanne (Norway):

But I must say that parents are very important; parents are always behind the relationships and stories. . . . I think that we need also to be very careful in showing very traditional stereotypes of parents, especially because the people making the shows are basically my generation [in their 40s-50s], a little younger, and we are thinking about our parents. But parents today are really different from our generation . . . there are also grandparents and I like to put them in roles of passing on traditions but highlighting more the ones that are more gender fair in their roles. And, there is something to be said about our commitment to promote our own local culture and to highlight certain aspects of it.

Locating stories within an inter-generational context is thus a way to encourage connectivity to a collective

culture and heritage as well as to specific family arrangements that foster healthier childhoods.

Many interviewees spoke specifically also about offering children parental role models that will open up their visions about motherhood and fatherhood. Such, for example, was the following quote by Meghan (Canada):

I would like to present moms that work outside the home and are great moms, and I would like to present women who are great business people and have chosen not to have kids. I think, what I love to present is, the fact that girls should realize that, as they get older . . . they can make any one of those choices. And that they should make it wholeheartedly and try to be all that they can be whichever path they decide to take. And with men I would like to do the same things. I would like to show strong fathers, especially fathers that stay with children.

Similarly, Kristine (USA) said:

I want to see grown-up models. I want to see mothers whose authority is respected. I want to see mothers and fathers working together. I want to see men who cook. I want to really see men in kitchens. I want to see the focus on the jobs at home that need to get done and the work picked up by whoever is there to get it done.

The discussion of families was often translated more specifically to a discussion of fathers and new forms of masculinities. The desire to see positive role models of men who are neither dictators in their families nor stupid buffoons came up in many of the interviews, from all parts of the world.

The presentation of children growing up while being supported and cared for by responsible and loving adults is claimed, by many, to be one of the major contributions that television can make for “self-care” children: These may be street children in huge urban centers whose life circumstances left them to fend for themselves or children of affluent families caught in the pressures of a competitive capitalist world who pamper their children with leisure technologies and accessories as replacement for real meaningful presence in their lives.

#### *D. True to Life*

Producers also called for programs that present a social world that seems “true to life” and that have the potential to foster identification and attachment. They wanted children to see credible characters, as Tina (USA) suggested in discussing characters’ appearance:

They are real kids and so, you know, they’ve got pimples, their hair looks bad some days, and they are not perfect looking. And, I actually think that this is just right, something as simple as that is very empowering to see. Just to see yourself reflected back on screen, particularly girls, because I think that it’s been the standard and the ideal for young girls in the US—skinny, being pretty, being perfect; in all the magazines they read nobody is real. I think this is really groundbreaking to present really just genuine authentic looking kids.

#### *E. Children’s voices*

Interviewees’ call to “give voice” to children themselves provides the final item in the attempt to advance change in children’s television. The notion of empowering under-represented and mis-represented groups by giving them a voice in the media has been discussed extensively by scholars with diverse interests from a variety of theoretical approaches. Children, in particular, lack space, a voice, and, hence, agency in both the theorizing of childhood as well as in its representation, in all cultural and media forms. The extremely limited presentation of children’s voices in research has led some scholars to question our ability to make sense of “girls’ voices” (and, for that matter, “boys’ voices” as well, although they have received less attention until more recently) and of what can be concluded about their inner worlds.

One form of “giving voice” is the development of children- and youth-made media (e.g., independent blogging, posting photos and art work, and producing home videos and biographical documentaries, as well as guided school projects, aided productions in training workshops and specialty classes, and involvement in social movements and activism via the use of media and the production of messages). The value of these activities in the development of literacy skills, civic engagement, and personal growth has been widely discussed (e.g., Bosch, 2007; Chalfen, 2008; Kearney, 2006). Among the consequences of such activities is that, first, they enable adults to obtain an “insider” view into the world of young people, to be more attuned to their needs and well-being, and thus to help bridge barriers between teen and adult worlds. In addition, the creative process of expression has been found to have therapeutic and empowering benefits to the youngsters themselves, providing them with opportunities to engage in collaborative team-work, to bridge differences, and to engage in productive negotiations.

In addition, experience producing media messages is perceived to be a necessary means—as well as goal—of media literacy. While currently understood to be a complicated and multi-layered term, media literacy generally is understood to refer to the ability to analyze and evaluate messages, as well as the ability to communicate in a variety of ways. It is perceived to be a form of literacy necessary for participation in civic and cultural life that requires informed, critical, and creative citizenry.

However, in our context, “giving voice” has quite a different (albeit related) meaning as it refers, essentially, to enabling children’s perspectives to be expressed in adult-produced media. Interviewees felt that creators of children’s programs often talk about children rather than letting children talk for themselves. This was also expressed in the form of a distinction between programs that are *about* children versus those *for* children. This distinction suggests a program featuring children does not necessarily have children’s well being and needs as its goal. Casting children as program characters may be a necessary but certainly not a sufficient condition for it to become a quality program for children. Several examples illustrate this argument: Emma (Bolivia) said: “We made a series with the title *With Our Own Voices* where children talk about their lives, about their rights. They can speak, they can talk with their point of view; and I think it’s very important that they do so in their language . . .”

Margaret (Kenya) shared: “We were watching a program from Asia about a girl who wants to go to school and it is very interesting because it was a story from a girl’s point of view . . . so the issues are still the same as they were back but from a different point of view.” And Mpule (Botswana) recommended: “I give them all the voices so that they share how they feel; they share their success stories, their fears, their disappointments together. Let them have a face.”

### *Conclusion*

Children’s television, so argue my interviewees from around the world, offers a unique space for an alternative discourse of deeply entrenched social, gender, and cultural inequalities and an opportunity to explore different worlds. It can present children with a range of possibilities relevant to their own lives and can challenge the way they are brought up to think of their own identities. Through incorporating concerns for children’s well being and healthy development, television can be enriching and inspiring. It can offer a diverse range of possibilities for children and complex characters that are not bound by stereotypes and it can give a voice to their multiple experiences and perspectives. It may constitute a safe environment in which to explore the full range of roles children might wish for themselves, a vision for a different reality, and aspiration for a better world.

## **Youth Media around the World: Implications for Communication and Media Studies**

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### *A. Introduction*

Whether in academia or more mainstream circles, it is a cliché to talk about how children and adolescents (and all of us) today are surrounded by an array of media and communication technologies that are part and parcel of everyday life. And while not all young people have direct access to all media on a daily basis—especially several newer media—many young people encounter television, movies, music, computer/video games, magazines, billboards, posters, comics, advertisements, e-mail, websites, and instant and text-messaging as users and/or consumers in a variety of con-

texts. All of these media are made available through various software and hardware that quite often blur the boundaries of these media as distinct forms, as well as challenge traditions of literacy, aesthetics, identity, culture, and all of their interrelationships.

Given the ubiquity, power, and appeal of these media, and the roles they play in contemporary economies, politics, and cultures, a variety of youth media production and education projects and programs have been established. Educators, researchers, policy analysts, advocates, activists, artists, and young people are working within different youth media production

and education contexts around the world. This article aims to provide an overview of the tremendous diversity of perspectives, principles, practices, and outcomes of youth media, and to explain, generally, how the particularities of regional, social, economic, and political situations and circumstances inform and shape youth media. In addition, I will suggest how media and communication researchers can contribute to this emergent field.

### *B. Defining Youth Media*

Broadly speaking, youth media involve projects and programs that engage young people as creators of media products, often within non-profit contexts such as schools or community-based organizations. These projects and programs provide young people with the intellectual, aesthetic, social, and technical knowledge and skills they need to use, comprehend, and evaluate media, but especially, to create and circulate media in a critical, appreciative, and pro-active manner. Given how many young people around the world do not have or have not had access to the means of media production and distribution, youth media programs provide media-disadvantaged youth with the means to produce media, and to distribute their creations via various venues. The kinds of media that youth might create within such non-profit contexts can vary considerably, depending on the resources available to the project/program, and the needs and interests of the stakeholders. The resources available, and the particular needs and interests of people located in specific places and times, are rooted in the history, economies, politics, and culture of that location.

Several publications provide some background and overviews of youth media as a field worthy of study. On the worldwide front, *Children and Media: Image, Education, Participation* (von Feilitzen & Carlsson, 1999) was produced to respond to concerns about rapid changes in the world and within/across media, in particular, the processes of globalization that have deregulated, privatized, and consolidated many media across borders of all kinds. Globalization via media has long been and still is considered a threat to many local traditions and sensibilities, spurring public and private debates about the consequences of globalization in specific communities and regions, which sometimes result in various localities enacting policies and practices to regulate global flows. A subset of issues concerning the global circulation of violence via media, and the experiences of violence in people's real lives, has led to studies and programs focused on the

violence that is represented in media that circulate worldwide, and violence that children and adolescents can actually experience in their everyday lives. The many contributions to this book suggest how various constituencies have responded and might respond further to these issues. In this volume, the sections that most pertain to this article are those that describe and sometimes analyze programs and projects that provide young people with the means to analyze, create, and distribute various media, so that young people are being provided with a means to counter their virtual and actual experiences of violence.

Another edited volume that pertains to youth media worldwide is *Empowerment Through Media Education: An Intercultural Dialogue* (Carlsson, Tayie, Jacquinet-Delaunay, & Manuet Perez Tornero, 2008). As described and analyzed by the editors and contributors to this collection, media education, broadly defined, is akin to youth media in that media education varies in terms of its meaning, purpose, and practices, for many of the same reasons that youth media vary: issues of perspective, intent, context, resources, and constituencies. But generally speaking, media education can embody or be related to youth media in that media education examines the power and meaning of media in society and in everyday life on a variety of levels, and considers how youth can benefit from examining the power and meaning of media. Pertinent to my focus is how many (though not all) media educators emphasize that young people should learn to be creators who have acquired critical and appreciative skills and knowledge about the media so that they can participate in production and distribution practices, thus allowing them to be part of the media and communication power structures. Often, but not always, youth media programs help young people challenge the status quo and create change where necessary, and thus help youth to develop as powerful members of society, whether as workers, artists, citizens, activists, and/or leaders. So media education that involves youth in media production is not just about helping youth become part of the media industries and agencies that currently exist, which for the most part are inequitable and exploitative in terms of their work practices, and are quite often creating content that represents stereotypes and biases of all kinds. Thus the inequities and biases of media systems and situations have prompted the development of media education and youth media programs overall.

Nonetheless, we must remember that various groups and cultures want to maintain their cultures and

traditions, and resist or negotiate change in ways that are grounded in their local experiences. Change is often promoted—explicitly and implicitly through processes of globalization—in ways that are inherently Western, imperial, capitalistic, and individualistic. This has particular implications for youth throughout the world (McMillin, 2009 in press), and how they might envision, and enact, their power as youth media consumers, creators, and distributors. At the same time, some young people might be very interested in buying into the mainstream systems of media production and distribution, to reap the economic, political, or cultural benefits of these systems in their regions—a desire I am well-acquainted with through my interactions with many of my undergraduate students at New York University, who mostly want to work in mainstream media and communication agencies, and not necessarily change the world or, for that matter, engage in critical media and communication research.

Indeed, the emergence and spread of online social networks, blogspaces, wikis, and file sharing might suggest that youth with access to these media are part of a self-generated youth media movement, albeit one that is aided and abetted by commercial industries that are harnessing the interests of many young people who want to be successful and powerful as communicators and sometimes entrepreneurs in this new media environment. For recent research on young people and new media, see the collection of edited volumes that MIT Press published in 2008 and that the MacArthur Foundation sponsored as free downloads (see the link in references). Researchers today must figure a way to account for the co-existence of alternative and mainstream youth media content and networks, and the systems and practices that support both, in developing the field of youth media (see, for example, Jenkins, 2006).

### *C. Why and How Is Youth Media Implemented?*

The conflict between mainstream and alternative media leads to a discussion of many different visions that people have for implementing youth media projects and programs. In the United States alone, there is no consensus about the purposes and practices of youth media.

For example, in many regions, infrastructure access can be an issue. There are various parts of the world where it cannot be taken for granted that people have 24-hour access to the Internet or television, or even electrical power and other utilities. In these kinds of circumstances, providing youth (and adults) with low

power media such as radio, helping them create and distribute the written word on paper, and supporting oral storytelling can constitute youth media. This happens in many parts of the so-called developing world, but also in rural and impoverished areas of North America and Australia as well. In addition, many governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are purposefully supportive of particular youth media programs that promote their own vision, and so the systems as well as the contents of youth media can be shaped by these governmental and organizational agendas. For example, several programs have been established for Palestinian youth in the Middle East, hoping to provide youths with a means of expressing their individual and social realities, and to encourage their peaceful civic engagement. In several of the Palestine territories, community centers have been established by NGOs, including some with help from UNICEF, that work with every medium, from newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. These NGOs and centers see themselves as filling many gaps in the lives of these youth and also providing them with a safe environment for coming together and then letting others know about the everyday worlds the youth deal with (Asthana, forthcoming). Furthermore, there is a history of religious, political, and civic groups that have supported young people's artistic and public expressions to support their causes. In Brazil, Christian churches and organizations, both Catholic and Protestant, have been turning to youth media as well as to media created to appeal to youth so as to attract young people to their work and get them involved in Christian thought and practices. By turning to various popular culture forms to create Christian content for youth, youth themselves have become creators of these media as communicators, activists, and even evangelists spreading the word via various digital media (Belloti, forthcoming). And in the USA, for 25 years an organization known as the Educational Video Center (EVC) has been dedicated to teaching economically disadvantaged adolescents and young adults to make social documentaries about social and civic issues that are important to them and their communities. EVC also provides distribution avenues to educational and non-profit groups and agencies via catalogues, and submits entries to film festivals and screenings around the world, where they have garnered many awards and positive recognition (see [www.evc.org](http://www.evc.org)). According to some internal reports and anecdotes from the youth themselves, the youth involved in these programs learn many important lessons about how to make a difference in

their own communities, how to get their voices and messages across, and if they are so inclined, how to get jobs within media organizations (Goodman, 2003).

And so, formal youth media programs support a variety of projects that can result in the following kinds of outcomes, which can inter-relate and overlap: film and video festivals, citizen journalism, aesthetic expression, collective activism, political persuasion, and community representation and outreach.

In the USA, several initiatives herald the emergence of youth media as a field, but also point to the diversity of perspectives and practices, which again are rooted in issues of locale, resources, perspectives, needs, and interests. First, funding for youth media programs in the USA was and has been supported by government agencies and foundations in the last two decades in particular (the list is too long for this publication). These agencies and foundations have been and are variously concerned with youth development, learning, health, safety, and progress toward successful adulthood in an environment where media of all kinds are pervasive and a given. The support of youth media by these agencies has contributed to a proliferation of programs and projects (Tyner, 2009 in press; 2008). Second, a journal dedicated to youth media was born in 2005, named aptly *Youth Media Reporter: The Professional Journal of the Youth Media Field* (see [youthmediareporter.org](http://youthmediareporter.org)). This journal features articles written primarily by youth media practitioners who work in a variety of contexts and regions, and those contexts and regional circumstances have a great deal to do with the kind of work that they do. They work with different media; vary in size and scope; exist in urban, rural, and suburban contexts; and have staff/leaders who hail from multiple disciplines such as youth development, media arts, media education, community activism, and others. In addition, a number of academics across the USA, such as myself, are involved in youth media as researchers, advocates, and when possible, providers. Indeed, the journal featured a slate of academic research into youth media in August of 2008 (Dahl & Fisherkeller, 2008). But the bulk of articles in the journal are routinely dedicated to helping practitioners.

Recently, the *Youth Media Reporter* coordinated several virtual discussions where those of us who are advisors to and reviewers for the journal talked about our goals and objectives, and what we needed to accomplish given our different perspectives and interests, so that we could continue to build the field. One

of the topics of discussion pertained to how different programs and projects frame their youth media work. Kathleen Tyner, a leader in the youth media and media education fields (see Tyner, 2009 in press; 1998), characterized these frames—or as she put it, the aims and objectives—of youth media according to the list below. Note that these are not exclusive categories, but inter-related, depending on the contexts of implementation:

- Social Justice: encouraging collective action to redress issues of inequity via messaging and storytelling;
- Political Action: explicit promotion of agendas to benefit specific groups, especially youth and under-privileged communities;
- Arts: support for individual self-expression, narratives, and non-narrative aesthetics and artistic movements;
- Inter-generational and Cross-Generational Communication: giving youth an explicit means to interact with peers and adults;
- Workforce Development: promoting economic development and career preparation for media and communication industries;
- Academic Support: encouraging drop-out prevention and motivating for achievement, academic advancement, and college preparation;
- Youth Development: support and prevention for health, well-being, and safety;
- Recreation: enjoyment and entertainment;
- Community Development: providing support, opportunities, and pathways; capacity-building. (Tyner, personal communication, June 23, 2009)

As you can see from this list, the field of youth media encompasses many interests, in the USA alone. And the edited volumes mentioned above that report on international programs and projects that include youth media production and education also represent a diversity of goals that can break down according to this list. Media and communication researchers looking into youth media programs and projects must be mindful of this diversity and the interconnections of these categories at the same time. Also, researchers need to make sure that they investigate whether and how youth themselves are served and benefited, since often it is adults who design and implement programs for youth, sometimes without acknowledging what youth themselves would like to gain (Buckingham, 2000).

#### *D. The Need for Research and Advocacy*

A good portion of the chapters and articles in the volumes or journals cited previously are descriptive rather than analytic, and this pertains to a problem many youth media programs and projects face, no matter what the context: resources of time, money, and expertise are scarce if youth media practitioners want to reflect on and write about their programmatic work and its outcomes for various stakeholders (see Goodman, 2003; Tyner, 2008, 1998). Most programs and projects providing youth with production and distribution opportunities have relatively small budgets and are reliant on grants and non-profit funding of various kinds, and thus they are mostly involved in making sure they can implement their programs for youth, and in continuing to seek out funds to provide their services and activities. This funding issue has been exacerbated by the current global economic downturn. So issues of survival and maintenance are extremely high for youth media providers at any time, but very acute right now. Communication and media researchers who are involved in policy and advocacy can help youth media by encouraging the support and maintenance of programs already existent and by envisioning new kinds of creative and strategic partnerships and collaborations among youth media programs and media and communication researchers.

Partnerships and collaborations can have multiple benefits. For example, youth media organizations and higher education institutions can create partnerships and collaborations, giving faculty and students opportunities to be participant observers, evaluators and co-providers of youth media (see for example, Hull & Schultz, 2002; FisherKeller, Butler, & Zaslow, 2002; Tyner, 2008, 1998; Seiter, 2005; Dahl & FisherKeller, 2008). The research emerging from such partnerships

is absolutely vital to building the field of youth media, which can only benefit from publications and presentations that analyze and reflect on the best practices, outcomes, and processes of youth media, given the different goals and contexts of youth media implementation and action. At the same time, faculty and students in higher education can connect with the “real worlds” of youth interacting with media and communication, applying various theoretical and methodological perspectives, and ultimately, contributing to the fields of media and communication research.

Currently, I am working on an edited volume, *International Perspectives on Youth Media: Cultures of Production and Education* (forthcoming from Peter Lang), that will feature research on youth media projects hailing from every continent of the world, from the regions of Africa, Australia, East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North and South America. Contributors from these regions will present research on the kinds of programs they are involved with, and the abstracts they submitted suggest that the aims and objectives, practices, and the outcomes of youth media categorized by Kathleen Tyner in the previous section can apply to the variety of programs the contributors described. Let me close by urging media and communication researchers to seek out youth media programs in their region, and help them by examining what, why, and how they do their work, supporting their work in whatever way they can, and spreading the word about them in appropriate venues. In addition, media and communication researchers can also contribute to the field of youth media by collaborating with and supporting others who are conducting research in this emerging field as well. On that note, if you are or get involved in youth media in any way, please contact me at [jf4@nyu.edu](mailto:jf4@nyu.edu).

### **Creating Global Citizens: The *Panwapa* Project<sup>1</sup>**

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Children today are growing up in an increasingly globally-connected society. While globalization is bringing individuals across the world closer together, offering tremendous opportunities and change, it is also requiring children to develop skills, perspectives,

and competencies to understand and navigate this interconnected world. However, there are few resources or international efforts that provide young

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the text in this document has been based on an unpublished brochure written by the authors summarizing the goals and achievements of the *Panwapa* project.

children the basis for these lifelong perspectives and competencies that will help them to meet the demands of the world of tomorrow, today.

To help prepare a new generation of children for life in our increasingly global and interdependent world, Sesame Workshop and the Merrill Lynch Foundation formed a partnership to create *Panwapa* (a word from the Tshiluba language that means “here on this earth”), an international, multi-media project aimed at fostering the foundation for global citizenship skills and community activism in young children. This article builds on Cole (2008), who first wrote about the *Panwapa* initiative, and provides a summary of findings from an evaluation of the program. The *Panwapa* initiative engenders global awareness by nurturing and modeling basic civic values, such as fairness, mutual respect and understanding, justice, appreciation of diversity, accountability for one’s actions, and a general desire to work for the common good. Just as learning to count and familiarity with the alphabet provide fundamentals for math and literacy learning, *Panwapa* offers the building blocks of good global citizenship.

#### A. Our Approach

For over three decades, Sesame Workshop has successfully produced educational media to promote positive social interaction and mutual respect and understanding—a cornerstone of global citizenship. Many of our projects throughout the world explicitly and implicitly touch upon these issues, such as the *Rehov Sumsum/Shara’a Simsim* series in Israel and Palestine, *Rruga Sesam/Ulica Sezam* in Kosovo and the *Nashe Maalo* production in Macedonia (Najchevska & Cole, 2000), which were designed to speak directly to cross-cultural understanding. All have made a significant mark on our understanding of these issues. The curricula from these projects, which include age-appropriate ways to present messages on respect, understanding, and diversity, have influenced the educational objectives we have developed for *Panwapa*. From the work on these projects and the study of their impact (e.g., Cole, Arafat, Tidhar, Tafesh, Fox, Killen, et al. 2003; Fluent Public Opinion and Market Research, 2007), we gleaned a great deal on the latest theories and the best practices associated with promoting relevant curricular goals. The wide array of information we have accessed has led us to develop a theoretical approach to the subject which is based on the belief that knowledge and attitudes presented and modeled are best promoted through an incremental

process in which self-awareness serves as the foundation for building other social skills.

Drawn from an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), our theoretical model involves a step-wise orientation that can be visualized as spheres of influence that affect a child’s development (Sesame Workshop International Education and Research, 2006c). At the core is the child’s understanding of *self*. This understanding moves sequentially outward toward knowledge of one’s own family, social environment, and culture. Beyond this inner sphere is one oriented to the child’s awareness of *others*. Finally, we address the child’s understanding of the *inter-relationship* between the self and others. Practical application of this theoretical approach involves an orientation to the Self (e.g., promoting an understanding of self, an awareness of one’s own identity and culture, and critical thinking skills), Other (e.g., cultivating an awareness of others, appreciating similarities and differences, knowing languages and forms of communication), and Interdependence (e.g., inspiring children to actively participate in their communities, help them understand that a single person can make a difference).

Informed by the theoretical approach and prior experience in our international co-productions, and armed with expertise from a team of international advisors, Sesame Workshop created an educational framework for developing content to help children gain the values, attitudes, and skills they need to learn and grow in today’s world. The framework has at its core five basic competencies that international educators have identified as the cornerstone to the development of good global citizenship (Sesame Workshop International Education and Research, 2006a): (a) awareness of the wider world, (b) appreciating similarities and differences, (c) taking responsibility for one’s behavior, (d) community participation and willingness to take action, and (e) understanding of and responsiveness to economic disparity.

#### B. Components of Panwapa

*Panwapa* is a multi-platform world that immerses children in a unique and novel exploration of self, community, and cultures from around the world. It aims to use multiple entry points to reach its target audience and comprises three components: a web site, videos, and print materials. All components are available in five languages: Arabic, English, Japanese, Mandarin, and Spanish.

**The web site.** The centerpiece of the initiative is the web site ([www.panwapa.com](http://www.panwapa.com)), where children enter a virtual community of kids hosted by Muppet characters. Children can explore other languages and play interactive games. In *Panwapa* World, users create an avatar (called a *Panwapa* Kid), a home setting, and a *Panwapa* flag that showcases their favorite food, animal, sport, activity, and musical instrument. From there, users navigate the globe, visit other *Panwapa* kids, go on global treasure hunts, and complete a variety of card collections.

**Videos.** The videos tell the stories of six Muppet characters who build a community on *Panwapa*, a floating island that travels the oceans of the world. Using song, humor, and energetic zeal, the four stories are supplemented by live action films from locations such as Tanzania, France, and Guatemala about children and their awakening to the cultures and languages around them. The videos can be viewed either online or on DVDs that are distributed with a print kit.

**Print materials.** The print kit targets parents, caregivers, mentors, and volunteers, and includes (a) game board in which the players are encouraged to create their own challenge game cards; (b) a two-sided, participatory poster that contains a map of the world—geopolitical and topographical—with all five languages; and (c) a *Panwapa* Magazine that contains a range of unique activities that allow the caregiver and child to explore the self, family, and community in playful and inventive ways.

**Using the affordances of media.** *Panwapa* was not only envisioned as a multi-media initiative, it was designed to make use of specific affordances of different media to address its educational objectives. For instance, online activities are well suited for addressing the curricular goals of Awareness of the Wider World and Appreciating Similarities and Differences: they offer an interaction with the world from a child's perspective by creating an environment that immerses them in the wonders of exploring their selves, as well as the connections we all share. The user can manipulate visuals, sounds, and movements to investigate the vastness of the world. Videos, on the other hand, are well suited to goals such as Taking Responsibility for One's Own Behavior, and Community Participation and Willingness to Take Action as they lend themselves well to exploration through characters' behavior, decisions, and interactions. Print components offer flexibility to address multiple goals. While all five educational goals are interrelated and all three media platforms

address each goal to some degree, *Panwapa* was designed to maximize educational impact by taking advantage of each medium's strength in conveying these messages.

### C. Formative Research

Formative research is an integral part of Sesame Workshop's production process (Cole, Richman, & McCann Brown, 2001) and was especially critical for a project like *Panwapa*.

Because the project was created for children around the world, formative research had to reflect its international scope and the materials had to be tested with children from multiple countries to ensure its effectiveness. To that end, Sesame Workshop worked with in-country researchers to conduct formative research in China, Mexico, and the United States (Sesame Workshop International Education and Research, 2006b). Because *Panwapa* involved multiple components that were developed in different phases, formative research was conducted in stages.

The studies comprised background research to ascertain children's basic geographical awareness (such as their familiarity with globes and maps, knowing what country they are from, and the languages that they and others speak); parent focus groups to uncover their thoughts on the topic of global citizenship and its relevance to young children, the importance of the educational goals addressed in *Panwapa*, and their feedback on suggested hands-on activities that would help to bring the educational goals to life; testing storyboards for the video component; testing the recognizability and familiarity of icons used in the online component; and testing the usability of the games, interface, and navigation of the web site.

Formative research revealed similarities across countries as well as important cross-cultural differences that helped to enhance *Panwapa* (Sesame Workshop International Education and Research, 2006b). Across the countries, researchers discovered that children varied greatly in their knowledge about the wider world and languages, which signaled a clear need for such a project. In all three countries, researchers found that the storyboards for the DVD component had high appeal and that children were particularly interested in and understood issues dealing with language and communication. This affirmed the team's decision to create a DVD story that centered on these issues, as well as an online hide-and-seek game that exposes children to the sounds of different lan-

guages by challenging them to find hidden objects using clues supplied in a second language.

Testing of the online components also uncovered interesting results. The research led to the improvement of interface elements such as larger icons that are spaced further apart and the redesign of icons that were confusing to children. The team also listened to children’s feedback on the avatar: For instance, a few children in China said that they did not see hairstyles or clothes that looked like theirs; in the United States, children noted that the prototype avatar did not have a bellybutton or fingers and toes. In response, we created more hair and clothing options that reflected a broad range of cultures, and added parts to the avatar that children felt were missing. Researchers also tested icons (especially those representing food, sports, and activities—items that children typically encounter) to ensure they were recognizable. Not surprisingly, they found that children could recognize icons that signified familiar items but could not name icons that denoted unfamiliar items, and that familiarity was in turn linked to cultural context. For example, 98% of children in China could recognize an icon for dumplings, compared with 5% in the United States and 1% in Mexico; 81% of children in the United States correctly identified an icon for ice hockey, versus 46% in Mexico and no child in China. These findings speak to the importance of conducting formative research cross-culturally as it broadens the conclusions that can be drawn and provides important information about relative differences in perception. Had we limited testing to the United States, we might have, for example, mistakenly concluded that the icon for dumplings was unrecognizable and needed to be redesigned.

Focus groups with parents offered important insight on their opinions on global citizenship. Different aspects of global citizenship appealed to parents in different countries. Parents in Mexico, for instance, thought that learning new languages was particularly important, whereas parents in China emphasized learning more information to be able to contribute to the country’s development. These insights were especially helpful in crafting print materials that targeted caregivers.

#### D. Summative Evaluation of *Panwapa*’s Impact

As with formative research, the summative evaluation of *Panwapa*’s impact took place across countries that were diverse in their cultures and languages. With funding from the Merrill Lynch

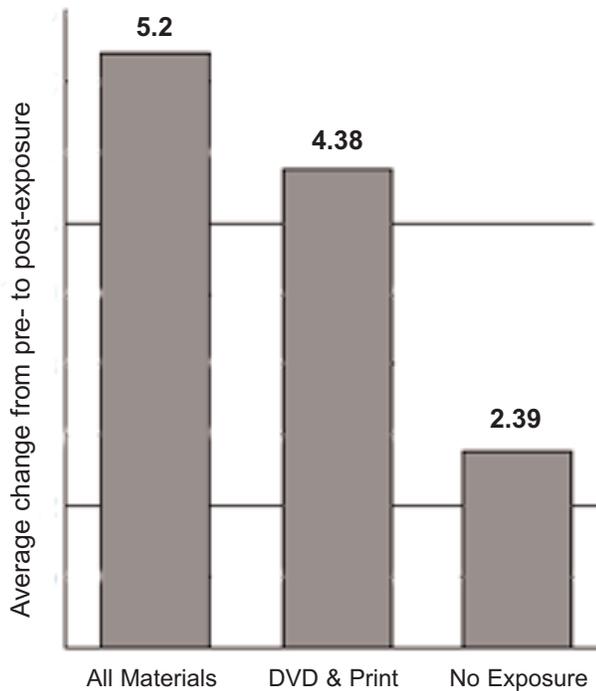
| Locations      | Children | Teachers | Parents |
|----------------|----------|----------|---------|
| Beijing, China | 240      | 10       | 10      |
| Wuhan, China   | 261      | 10       | 10      |
| Egypt          | 257      | 10       | 10      |
| Mexico         | 273      | 10       | 10      |
| United States  | 245      | 10       | 10      |
| <b>Total</b>   | 1,276    | 50       | 50      |

**Table 1.** Breakdown of sample across four countries

Foundation and Boeing, Sesame Workshop commissioned MediaKidz Research and Consulting to carry out a comprehensive, multi-country summative evaluation of the project (Fisch, Yeh, Zhou, Xu, Hamed, Khadr, et al., 2009). Conducted in China, Egypt, Mexico, and the United States, the study included an experimental trial of *Panwapa*’s educational impact among children, observations of children while they engaged with *Panwapa* content, interviews with parents and teachers regarding their opinions about the materials, and examinations of the web site’s reach and use. A total of 1,277 children ages 4 to 7 participated in this study, along with 50 teachers and 50 parents (see Table 1).

Researchers assigned the children to one of three groups: an “All Materials” group that used all three components of *Panwapa*, a “DVD and Print” group that used the materials from the *Panwapa* kit, and a control group that was not exposed. Children used *Panwapa* over the course of four weeks. Before and after exposure, they were assessed on their knowledge and attitudes in a range of outcomes pertaining to global citizenship, including: (a) knowledge of their own and other countries, (b) understanding similarities and differences between their own and other cultures, (c) knowledge of their own and other languages, (d) understanding of economic disparity, and (e) ability to distinguish between needs and wants.

The researchers used General Linear Modeling (GLM) to analyze the difference between the treatment groups. They examined changes in children’s scores from pre- to post-exposure with treatment group, gender, country, ethnicity, and socio-economic status as predictors.



**Figure 1.** Gains in overall understanding of global citizenship (across all five outcomes)

**Research Results.** The summative evaluation revealed that *Panwapa* had significant positive impact on children’s understanding of global citizenship. In addition, children were engaged actively with *Panwapa*’s content, and parents and teachers valued *Panwapa* for its usefulness and educational value.

**Educational impact.** Across the four countries, children who were exposed to *Panwapa* (“All Materials” and “DVD & Print”) showed significantly greater growth in their understanding of global citizenship than those with no exposure (see Figure 1; for “All Materials” group:  $t_{1,171} = 4.32, p < .001$ ; for “DVD & Print” group:  $t_{1,171} = 2.33, p < .001$ ). Overall, children exposed to all materials also demonstrated greater gains than those who used only DVD and print components ( $t_{1,171} = 1.94, p < .001$ ), suggesting an additive benefit of the online content. These effects did not differ by age, gender, ethnicity, or rural/urban residence.

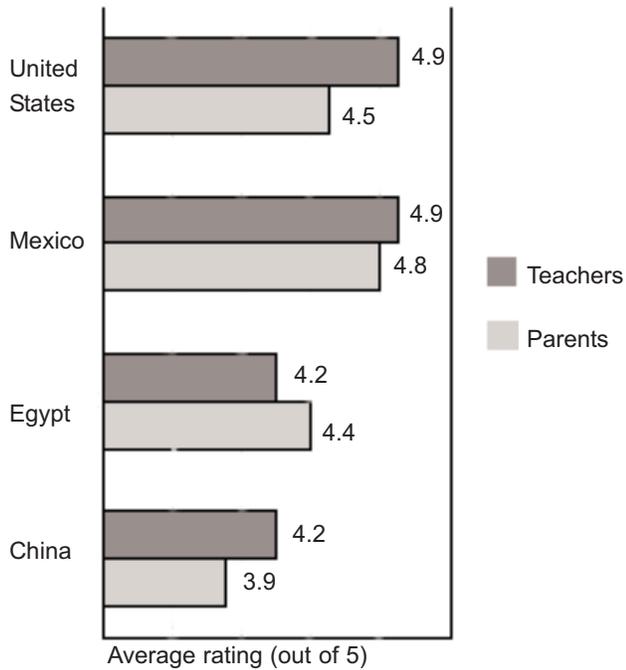
**Learning across cultures.** Given the size of the sample and the fact that it was not representative of the individual countries from which it was drawn, the researchers were cautious about making cross-country comparisons. Nevertheless, there were specific patterns of findings that emerged that are worth mentioning. While children in all four countries who used *Panwapa* made some gains in their knowledge of global citizenship compared to those who did not

use the materials (see Table 2 on page 30), notable cross-country findings included the following: Children in China improved on virtually all outcomes measured, even though the adult respondents in China were more skeptical of computer technologies. In the United States, effects for children’s understanding of economic disparity were most pronounced, perhaps because children in the country enjoy a higher standard of living compared to others in the sample and may have had the least day-to-day exposure to those in need. Conversely, effects did not emerge with regard to economic disparity in Egypt, possibly because the average income in Egypt is fairly low compared to the other three countries in the study. In Mexico, the strongest findings were for the “DVD and Print” group (rather than the “All Materials” group), and children seemed to particularly benefit from exposure to the language elements in *Panwapa*.

**Observations of children’s engagement with *Panwapa*.** Researchers’ observations of children while they engaged with *Panwapa* showed that children thought actively about the educational messages when watching the video content. They commented on on-screen action, responded to Muppet characters’ questions, repeated words in other languages, and spontaneously tied what they saw onscreen to objects and events in their own lives. Importantly, many parents reported that their children were motivated to follow up with conversations at home about the content.

**Teacher and parent perceptions.** In all four countries, parents and teachers gave *Panwapa* high ratings for educational value and usefulness (see, for example, Figure 2 on page 30 for ratings of educational value). Parents and teachers appreciated *Panwapa* because it introduced children to other cultures and because the multiple platforms presented opportunities for them to learn in different ways. Additionally, teachers thought *Panwapa* was very appealing for children: On average, teachers gave the materials a rating of 4.6 (on a scale of 1 to 5) on appeal.

Interestingly, parents in China stressed the importance of hands-on learning and were less likely to see computers as being developmentally appropriate for young children. This may be why Chinese parents gave slightly lower ratings for *Panwapa*. The response from teachers across all four countries was very positive overall; the main challenge that teachers cited about *Panwapa* is simply finding the time to use it in a busy classroom schedule.



**Figure 2.** Parent and teacher ratings of educational value

**Global reach.** *Panwapa* has attained true global reach. In nearly a year since its launch, the *Panwapa* web site attracted over a half-million unique users and had visitors from 180 countries that included speakers of 51 different languages and dialects. The site averages visits from over 100 countries each month. As of March 2009, there are 218,000 *Panwapa* Kids on the site, and an average of over 10,000 *Panwapa* Kids join each month.

### E. Conclusions

Harnessing the strengths of multiple media, *Panwapa* offers content that addresses one of the most topical issues of our time—global citizenship. Importantly, it has succeeded in making such concepts accessible and appealing for early learners, for whom little content of this nature exists. Given a 4-week intervention with minimal adult mediation, *Panwapa*'s educational impact is impressive. It engages children and is highly valued by parents and teachers. More importantly, exposure to portions of *Panwapa* is linked to gains in children's knowledge of their own countries and cultures, foreign languages, economic disparity, and the distinction between needs and wants. The findings from this evaluation are encouraging and suggest that *Panwapa* has the potential to contribute significantly to global citizenship education around the world.

| Measure   | Full Sample                        | Beijing, China                                 | Wuhan, China                                     | Egypt                  | Mexico    | U. S.                   |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--|------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Overall score   | All > No<br>DVDP > No<br>All > TVP | All > No<br>All > DVDP                         | All > No<br>DVDP > No                            | All > No               | DVDP > No | All > DVDP <sup>+</sup> |
| Knowledge of own and other languages                                      | All > No                           | All > DVDP                                     | —  | All > No<br>All > DVDP | DVDP > No | —                       |
| Understanding similarities and differences between own and other cultures | All > No<br>DVDP > No              | —  | All > No<br>DVDP > No<br>All > DVDP <sup>+</sup> | DVDP > No              | —         | —                       |
| Knowledge of own and countries  | All > No <sup>+</sup>              | All > No<br>All > DVDP                         | —  | All > No               | —         | —                       |
| Understanding economic disparity  | All > No                           | All > No<br>DVDP > No                          | All > No <sup>+</sup><br>All > DVDP              | —                      | —         | All > No                |
| Ability to distinguish between needs and wants                            | All > No<br>TVP > No               | All > No<br>TVP > No <sup>+</sup><br>All > TVP | —  | —                      | TVP > No  | —                       |

Note: "All" = "All Materials" group, "DVDP" = "DVD and Print" group, "No" = "No Exposure" group  
All differences shown are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ , except for differences marked with a plus sign (<sup>+</sup>) which are significant at  $p < .10$ .

**Table 2.** Summary of significant group differences in outcome variables

# Convention on Television Broadcasting for Children and Youth: A Case Study of Academic-Professional Collaboration in Israel

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## *A. Background*

The potential benefits of collaboration between academics, who specialize in the study of children and media, and media professionals working in the field can be illustrated in the development of the Convention on Television Broadcasting for Children and Youth in Israel (first published in English in Lemish, 2007). Growing out of the collaboration between the author of this document and the Head of Programming of Israel Educational Television, this process began with convening a brainstorming symposium to discuss the need for a convention of ethical practices. Participants in this discussion included all of the broadcasters for children in Israel (public and commercial, cable and satellite). All agreed at this initial meeting to establish a joint committee of academics and professionals, who met and drafted a document that was circulated for feedback among all the broadcasters. Members included from Tel Aviv University: Dafna Lemish, Chair of the committee, expert on children and media; Zeev Segal, expert on law and ethics; Yehiel Limor, expert on media institutions and professions; and Avinoam Damari, Head of Programming, Israel Educational Television, who initiated this process. Following extensive deliberations and exchanges regarding this document, the Convention document was officially signed in July 2002 by all broadcasters in a festive event hosted by the Chair of the Education Committee of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament). The signed convention was re-produced in the form of posters for display in broadcasters' offices and as leaflets for distribution among media professionals, educators, and the public.

Several years later, following growing dissatisfaction with some of the current practices, the Council for Cable and Satellite Broadcasting in Israel initiated discussions of the ethics of broadcasting for children in Israel. These discussions led to agreement entered into on December 2008 by all broadcasters who target children (public and private, including representatives of international corporations broadcasting in Israel such as Nickelodeon and Jetix), to reaffirm their commit-

ment to the original convention and to also apply it to their supporting Internet sites and interactive-contents. They nominated a supervisory committee whose role it is to follow the implementation of the convention, to bring up issues and concerns to the forum, and to report to it at its annual meetings.

What remains to be seen, of course, is how the convention will be implemented; what peer sanctions might be applied for those who deviate from the agreements; whether the symbolic act of signing will be reinforced with in-service training efforts, etc. Still, this convention exemplifies the hope, underlying these collaborative efforts by academics and broadcasters in Israel, to improve the content offerings of television programming for children and is a statement of good will by those concerned with the well-being of children.

## *B. The Convention*

The convention was framed as the "Ten Commandments of Broadcasting." They specify five principles of "thou shalt do" and five principles of "thou shalt not do."

### **Convention on Television Broadcasting for Children and Youth in Israel**

We are committed to the happiness and welfare of all the children from all social classes and sectors without distinction in regard to gender, ethnicity, or religion, as delineated in the UN Convention Regarding the Rights of Children and Youth ratified by the state of Israel.

In view of our understanding of the important role that the medium of television plays in shaping the spiritual, emotional, and behavioral lives of children and youth; and

In accordance with the basic laws, legislation, regulations, as well as, ethical codes that apply to the different broadcasting authorities; and

In view of our strong sense of responsibility for our roles as creators, producers, and broadcasters of television programs;

We have committed ourselves, collectively, as the representatives of those involved in the production and broadcast of programs for children and youth, in consultation with relevant members of the academic and educational communities, and in recognition of our right to preserve the distinctive uniqueness of each constituent organization, to this convention regarding television broadcasting.

In the spirit of this joint agreement, we proclaim that we shall act:

**1. To promote the presentation of a social world based upon humanitarian principles of human rights, tolerance towards difference, social justice, freedom of religion, conscience, and belief, the dignity and freedom of mankind, the authority of the law and the status of the court of justice, in the spirit of the basic values and laws of the State of Israel**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs and the acquisition of foreign programs that profess this world view and present it as a desirable, conceivable, and positive embodiment of ideas.

We shall act to promote, actively, programs that seek to develop social awareness in the fields of social justice, as well as those that encourage social involvement and responsibility. Programs that deviate from the spirit of this commitment will be presented in a context that conveys a clearly critical message regarding negative projections broadcast to young viewers and society in general.

**2. To promote presentation of a multicultural world in which the distinctive characteristics of local culture are valued along with trends in the creation of a global culture, while observing openness towards diversity and the expression of different opinions**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs and the acquisition of foreign programs that represent a variety of cultural worlds that characterize the different ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds that are present in Israeli society and beyond. We shall act to promote the production of original programs reflective of the society and contemporary affairs of Israel, as well as to advance understanding of the heritage of the Jewish people over the generations and in all countries of the Diaspora.

We shall provide for appropriate expressions of all facets of the Israeli society and the diverse groups that compose it as well as their culture, language, and

heritage. We shall enable children and youth with the opportunity to become acquainted with the diversity of human life in regard to physical properties (such as color of the skin, pronunciation) and cultural attributes (such as clothing, cultural and religious ceremonies, philosophy and art, etc).

**3. To advance addressing the specific needs of children and youth of different ages living under different circumstances**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs and the purchase of foreign programs that appropriately address the needs, abilities, and life experiences of children of different age groups and genders living under different cultural and social circumstances. We will relate to the mental and emotional needs that arise due to contemporary events. We shall devote special attention to populations whose alternatives for leisure activities are the most limited. We shall endeavor to help children and youth who suffer from psychological, cognitive, and physical handicaps.

**4. To assist children and youth to offer their own views and to enable them to present their views of the world on television**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs that enable children and youth from all sectors of the population with opportunities to express themselves, share their world views, and relate to issues of concern to them in the production process as well as during the broadcast. We shall listen to their voices respectfully and shall take note of their wishes, keeping in mind that at every stage of their development they are persons in their own right with their own views.

**5. To promote quality productions for children and youth characterized by investment, audio-visual richness, and by a high level of content that will enrich their aesthetic and creative world**

We shall act to promote the production of television programs and acquisition of foreign programs that are rich in quality in every domain of production and genre: in their linguistic richness; presentation of appropriate and well developed humor; high standards of acting or moderation; quality of musical performances, photography, and editing; as well as the profundity of ideas. We will take into account that, in spite of their young age, all audiences acquire their own cultur-

al tastes and should be honored with programs of high production quality.

And, based upon such agreements, we shall act in order to

**6. Refrain from presenting the world as a place of violence, cruelty, and inhumanity, as well as one where violence is presented positively and as the only way to solve problems.**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs and acquisition of foreign programs that lack violence of any kind—physical, emotional, and verbal—that is directed against people, other living creatures, nature, and property. In the event that acts of violence are present, as an integral part of the description of reality or an essential component in a plot that is deemed to be of value, we shall refrain from glorifying and presenting it humorously, as enjoyable and inconsequential. We shall avoid the presentation of content that encourages destructive behavior and unnecessary physical risks.

**7. Refrain from overemphasizing or presenting sex and sexuality as a means of titillation or as an expression of a power relationship that involves the domination of others.**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs and acquisition of foreign programs that contribute to the equality of the genders and presentation of human sexuality as a natural and worthy aspect of human relations, and not as a means for achieving objectives, domination, exploitation, and oppression. We shall avoid using sexuality as a means of titillating children and youth and attracting their attention. We shall refrain from presenting content that combines violence and sexuality as well as common stereotypes of femininity and masculinity.

**8. Refrain from a stereotypical presentation of groups according to their religious background, ethnicity, gender, as well as physical attributes of age, disability, or appearance.**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs and acquisition of foreign programs that present humanity with all its diversity, without use of stereotypes regarding difference and otherness of any kind whatsoever. We shall be particularly aware of stereotypes that portray central divisions within Israeli socie-

ty. We shall refrain from presenting contents that may encourage physical and mental self-affliction.

**9. Refrain from presenting consumption and materialism as an ultimate value, as a means of self-satisfaction, or solving human problems.**

We shall act to promote the production of TV programs and acquisition of foreign programs that abstain from presenting materialism and persistent consumerism as a way to cope with individual and social hardships, as a means of competition applied to advance personal aims, and as a manifestation for self-esteem. We shall abstain from making a connection between the possession of property and individual self-worth. We shall present the diversity of other resources that exist for use by the individual, such as education, family, friends, positive activity, and so forth.

**10. Refrain from exploitation of children and youth in the process of production and in TV programs proper.**

We shall relate to children and youth who participate in the production of programs or who appear in them in a variety of roles as we relate to mature adults—as persons with rights, their own will, and value. We shall insure appropriate working conditions, rest, food, and beverage. We shall honor the aspirations of employees and not exploit them. We shall not present them in programs in a way that might impair them or their reputation, even if their consent has been obtained. It is our duty to encourage them to consult with persons who fulfill a meaningful role in their lives and not to take advantage of their feelings in situations of weakness.

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- Childline (UK). [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- Children's Television Charter. <http://www.wsmcf.com/charters/charter.htm>
- Digital Songlines. <http://songlines.interactiondesign.com.au/>
- Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth. <http://gse.berkeley.edu/research/dusty.html>
- Dutch children's search engine. [www.davindi.nl](http://www.davindi.nl)
- EU Kids Online network. [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net)
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- Mugglenet (the unofficial site for Harry Potter). <http://www.mugglenet.com/>
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## Book Reviews

**Ehrat, Johannes.** *Cinema & Semiotic: Peirce and Film Aesthetics, Narration and Representation.* University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 682. ISBN 978-0-8020-3912-5 (hbk.) £60, \$100.00.

Johannes Ehrat's work is one that succeeds in explaining the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, regarding his theory of semiotics, and its particular use in the interpretation in cinema. Ehrat is successful in interpreting Peirce's emphasis of truth and discovery in the form of signs and sign systems in cinema.

In the introduction, Ehrat concentrates on semiotics from the standpoint of interpreting meaning and reality. He then concentrates on particular objects in cinema, regarding how the filmed objects are visually represented, and the statement of truth associated with that filmed image. The first part of Ehrat's work focuses on signs, categories and reality in cinema; semiotics and its practical use in cinema; and the definition of cinema itself. He references Wollen's, Deledalle's, and Deleuze's interpretations of Peirce's work and its application to cinema as being of only a theoretical relationship, and not one of theory and application. He also states that there are many film theorists who don't embrace semiotics as a viable way to look at cinema. Here, Ehrat also takes the time to share with us an important historical revelation about Peirce: he had no pupils, yet only those who discovered his work and used it to enhance their own purposes and needs. He emphasizes Peirce's development of the theory of pragmatism. Here is where Ehrat makes the distinction between the use of mere theory and the use of theory as

practice, when discussing Peirce's work as it can be applied to cinema. Ehrat emphasizes that the role of semiotics in cinema is one of discovery.

Throughout this first part, Ehrat emphasizes Peirce's pragmatism and semiotics, and makes a case for its use in cinema. He states that since Peirce, like other pragmatists, stressed thought, then the application of that thought, then the signs and sign systems of semiotics can actually be applied to the understanding of the filmed image. Specifically, he refers to Sergei Eisenstein's writing about and use of editing as a statement of theory in practice regarding the filmed image. In addition, he also refers to the writings of Andre Bazin, and his interpretation of elements such as deep focus and composition in depth, as evidence of the tie between semiotics and pragmatism.

In this first half of the text, Ehrat shows that semiotics explains the visual statement in cinema. He then states that pragmatism, in the form of physically arranging the *mise-en-scene* (the elements in each frame of film) through deep focus, lighting, and the manipulation of several frames of film, then using montage (editing as manipulation of the filmed image) explains cinema's use of semiotics and pragmatism. By reminding the reader of Peirce's definition of a sign, Ehrat convincingly states that cinema itself is a type of sign. There is enough visual material taking place in cinema itself that the visual statements themselves are a series of classifications of signs. He references films such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966) and Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) as examples of the presence of film as a classification of signs. Ehrat also looks at deSaussure's semiology, in which he concentrates on the life of signs within a society. Ehrat comments on Umberto Eco's theoretical interpretation of semiotics, but also comments on the importance of cognitive theory in defining cinema. Here, Ehrat explains that cinema is cognitive, in that it explains the relationship between subject and object from the standpoint of thought, with semiotics and semiology being the sign in which the thought is based. Ehrat states that the meaning one assigns to a subject and an object in cinema (the cognitive process in which one thinks to apply semiotics in cinema) is the very definition of cinema itself.

In the second half of his work, Ehrat centers upon narration in film and film theory and enunciation in cinema. Here he discusses the concept of narrative time as a sign. Ehrat states that Peirce's point is that from the standpoint of semiotics, there is no set standard time that can be interpreted objectively. Time can be inter-

preted subjectively. Ehrat ties this thought to the examples of the discussed films and film makers. For example, he realizes that Eisenstein's sense of timing in film narrative is dictated by his rapid-fire editing style, whereas Carol Reed's low-key lighting with heavy shadows emphasizes his timing, regarding narrative pace. Finally, Ehrat discusses Goddard, who first frequently used jump-cuts, and in various shots actually crossed the 180-degree plane (an imagined line for camera placement, a standard in "classical" film making) making many images look "backward" as a way of expressing narrative pace. Ehrat uses these examples to make the point that all three film makers' senses of timing are vastly different, subjective, and therefore, expressed visually, act as a sign in semiotics.

Ehrat concludes his discussion by explaining what he means by enunciation in cinema. He states that understanding enunciation in cinema is understanding meaning in cinema. He explains that cinematic *auteurs* produce meaning in cinema, and that the signs and sign systems of semiotics are a part of this process. For example, he states that interpreting "vagueness" in cinema is a part of enunciation. He takes a part of dialogue from a scene in Akira Kurosawa's film *Ran* (1985), and uses it as an example. This example is one in which not only one must understand the Japanese period film that depicts the feudal Tokugawa Era to understand what is going on; one must also understand Shakespeare's *King Lear* from which this film is based. Therefore, to work through the "vagueness," one must understand both Japanese and British history and culture, and understand the workings of semiotics in cinema as well. The result is being able to gain more clarity, as to how semiotics is working through *mise-en-scene* in the narrative.

Ehrat's *Cinema & Semiotic: Peirce and Film Aesthetics, Narration and Representation* achieves its goal of demonstrating that Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics can be applied to cinema. His work is an effective argument, in that it suggests a pragmatic approach. The application of semiotics to cinema as a way of explaining meaning, regarding the various aesthetic, narrative, and representational elements in cinema is successfully encouraged.

The volume includes notes, bibliography, and filmography (by director).

—Patrick Stearns

**McCall, Jeffrey.** *Viewer Discretion Advised: Taking Control of Mass Media Influences.* Lanham, MD; Boulder, CO; New York; Toronto; Plymouth, UK:

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. Pp. ix, 161. ISBN 978-0-7425-5520-4 (pb.) \$20.95.

A combination of a plea for media literacy/education and a set of elements for such a course, *Viewer Discretion Advised* presents a good deal of information about the mass media in the United States, but does not give the reader much analysis. Because many of the chapters consist of the author's commentary on programming or broadcast industry policy, the reader does not have the chance to understand why the industry works in the way it does. One gets a sense of the author's perspective when he reports that media figures "whine" about limitations (pp. 22, 33), that colleges invite "far-out" figures to speak (p. 26), and that the National Association of Broadcasters engages in "misdirection" (p. 33). All may well be true, but the repeated use of contentious words has the rhetorical effect of dulling the senses.

The book consists of nine chapters. The first lays out the need for media literacy and identifies what McCall terms "fake-outs," attempts by the National Cable and Telecommunications Association to provide empowerment campaigns that in fact do not empower viewers. The second chapter gives a fairly detailed introduction to the First Amendment, highlighting what it guarantees to Americans and identifying common myths about First Amendment rights (many of which media owners exploit in order to expand their freedoms at the expense of citizens).

Each of Chapters 3 through 7 presents material about a problematic aspect of the mass media in the United States: "sex, skin, and swearing"; news and the move to news as entertainment; the MTV phenomenon as it spreads to all genres of television; the transformation of politics for broadcasting; and children and media. The presentation in these chapters is decidedly popular, with lots of facts and an easy to follow format. The last two chapters approach structural issues: Chapter 8 examining the media industries and the ownership patterns that remove broadcasters more and more from the local communities; and Chapter 9, the opportunities that citizens have to influence the media in America.

The book presents some good material, but often in brief topic-driven sections, with little well argued logic. If one agrees with McCall, the book works quite well. If one does not, the book seldom makes a convincing case for its conclusions.

There is a bibliography and an index.

—Paul A. Soukup, S.J.

