

THE FOURTH ANNUAL ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND TELEVISION: A SUMMARY

Report prepared by Kimberly Duyck Woolf

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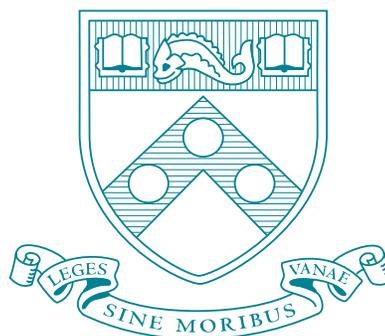


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FOREWORD

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

Kathleen Hall Jamieson
Director

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ABSTRACT

The Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania hosted its fourth annual Conference on Children and Television on June 28, 1999, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Conference participants included members of the television industry, advertisers, producers of children's programming, advocates, researchers, and policy makers of children's television.

The conference reported the findings of four APPC reports: 1) the 4th annual national survey of media in the home; 2) the 4th annual rating of the quality of programming available for children; 3) an analysis of the educational strength of children's programs identified as "educational and informational" by broadcast networks; and, 4) in-depth interviews with key players in the children's television industry to assess the impact of the "Three-Hour Rule." APPC presented three television programs, *The Magic School Bus*, *Nick News*, and *Bill Nye, The Science Guy*, with the first annual APPC Awards for Outstanding Educational Program on a Commercial Broadcast Station.

The conference was organized around three panels addressing the changing economics of children's television, the creation of educational television for school-age children, and the role of the contemporary media environment in children's lives. Congressman Edward J. Markey (D-MA), author of the Children's Television Act of 1990 and a leading advocate of the V-Chip, gave the conference's keynote address. At a luncheon ceremony, LeVar Burton, host and co-executive producer of *Reading Rainbow*, was presented with the 1999 APPC Award for Distinguished Contribution to Children and Television. The award was presented on the Annenberg Public Policy Center's behalf by Peggy Charren, founder of Action for Children's Television and member of the APPC Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television.

INTRODUCTION

On June 28, 1999, the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania convened its fourth annual Conference on Children and Television at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The conference is part of APPC's ongoing commitment to monitor the state of children's programming and recognize noteworthy efforts and achievements in the development and distribution of quality children's programming. This year's conference explored the changing economics of children's television, the creation of educational television for school-age children, and the role of today's changing media environment in children's lives. Furthermore, APPC issued the first annual APPC Award for Outstanding Educational Program on a Commercial Broadcast Station to three children's programs aired on commercial broadcast stations during the 1998/1999 television season.

Four research reports were released and presented at this year's conference, including: 1) an annual national survey of parents and children to assess parents' and children's use of and attitudes toward media in the home; 2) an annual content analysis of children's television programs to assess the availability and quality of that programming; 3) a content analysis of children's programs receiving the E/I label to assess how well such programs are meeting the standard and spirit of the FCC's "Three-Hour Rule"; and, 4) in-depth interviews with key players in the children's television industry to assess the impact of the "Three-Hour Rule" on the industry and the types of children's shows aired on commercial broadcast stations.

THE ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE

The conference opened with a press briefing hosted by Amy Jordan, Senior Research Investigator and director of the children's television project at the Annenberg Public Policy Center. Jordan provided an overview of research released at the conference and introduced the authors of each of the four reports.

THE RESEARCH REPORTS ON CHILDREN AND TELEVISION

Media in the Home 1999: The Fourth Annual Survey of Parents and Children
(Stanger and Gridina)

Jeffrey Stanger, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center's Washington, D.C. office, presented the major findings of the fourth annual national survey of 1,269 parents and 303 of their children. The survey, conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide, measured children's use of a variety of media, as well as both parents' and children's: 1) opinions of children's programming;



Jeffrey Stanger, speaking with a reporter about APPC's fourth annual survey.

2) awareness of the television rating system and educational offerings on broadcast television; and 3) knowledge of public figures and television personalities.

The findings suggest that the American child's home is an increasingly diverse media environment, prompting the APPC to change the name of its annual report from "Television in the Home" to "Media in the Home." The survey indicates that the homes of children between the ages of two and seventeen contain a variety of media. Briefly,

- VCR ownership is now nearly universal (98 percent).
- More than two thirds of homes with children have personal computers; forty one percent of homes with computers have an Internet connection.
- Two thirds of all homes have video game equipment.
- Nearly one-half of all homes have a VCR, video game equipment, and a personal computer, as well as a television set.

Even as the use of non-TV electronic media is increasing, television has remained the dominant medium in the home. Eighty seven percent of homes with children now have two or more television sets available for viewing, while nearly one half (48 percent) of children have a television set in their bedroom. Furthermore, daily television use since 1996 has remained stable, suggesting that the increase in time spent with other media is in addition to, rather than in place of, time children spend with television. Overall, children are spending an average of nearly four and a half hours each day in front of a screen, whether it is a television screen or a computer screen.

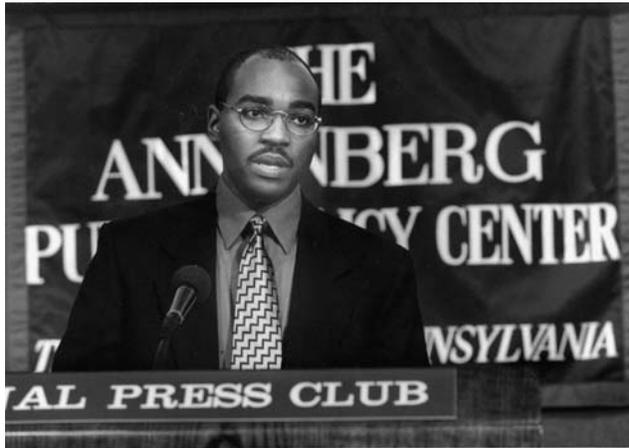
Although overall television viewing hours remain unchanged, both parents and children continue to have a poor opinion of the programming available to children. Moreover, awareness of the television rating system and the E/I designation for educational/informational shows has declined over the past two years. While 64 percent of parents and 72 percent of children are aware of the existence of a TV rating system, only 35 percent and 44 percent of parents and children, respectively, know that an E/I designation is available on screen. Furthermore, knowledge of what the E/I designation represents and use of the designation by parents to direct children's viewing are quite low, as six percent of parents could indicate the meaning of the symbol and two percent actually use the E/I designation.

Finally, in assessing parents' responses to the impending July 1, 1999 roll-out of the V-Chip, a device designed to allow parents to block shows with specific ratings, the survey found that the V-Chip is widely supported by parents. Eighty four percent indicated that they strongly or somewhat favored the V-Chip technology and just over one-half (51 percent) said that if they had it they would use it often. Only one in ten parents indicated that they would never use the technology, even if it were in their TV set.

The 1999 State of Children's Television Report: Programming for Children over Broadcast and Cable Television (Woodard)

The fourth annual content analysis of programming for children was presented by Emory H. Woodard, IV, research fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center. The content analysis examined randomly selected television shows specifically designed for children that aired over the course of a fifteen week

period in Philadelphia, the fourth largest media market in the United States. One program per title was selected and weighted to form a one-week composite of the children's programming available.



Dr. Emory Woodard, Research Fellow, APPC

Each television program was assessed according to the APPC Quality Index, a measure developed in consultation with the APPC's advisory groups and the literature available on the effects of television on children. The quality index was based on the number and types of quality contributors (e.g., educational content, character diversity) and quality detractors (e.g., violence, bad language, sexual innuendo) as well as a general assessment of the program's quality by the researchers.

Overall, the quality of children's programming has shown some improvement, although the prime time hours continue to lag in terms of the offerings available to children and violence continues to be problematic. The percentage of all children's shows that are high quality in the 1998/1999 season remained unchanged from previous seasons. Because the number of shows available to children has increased by 12 percent, this means that the number of high quality shows has increased proportionately. Moreover, the number of low quality shows — those with no problematic material and/or no enriching content — has declined from 46 percent last year to 25 percent of the total this year. PBS continues to be the venue with the most high quality programs for children.

Despite the overall increases in programming for children, only three high quality shows for children, *The Journey of Allen Strange* (Nickelodeon), *Nick News* (Nickelodeon) and *Omba Mokomba* (Disney) are aired during prime-time hours when large numbers of children are in the audience. Furthermore, over one fourth (28 percent) of children's shows contain four or more instances of violence, yet three quarters of these shows do not receive the FV (fantasy violence) rating. Thus, parents will not be able to reliably use the V-Chip technology to block out those shows containing a lot of violence.

The Three-Hour Rule: Is it Living up to Expectations? (Schmitt)

Kelly L. Schmitt, research fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center, presented the research conducted on the educational and informational offerings of broadcast networks. Three episodes of each E/I program were submitted by the networks, syndicators, programmers, and local producers of 135 programs. Programs were evaluated to assess whether or not they were, in fact, educationally enriching and in compliance with the FCC's "Three-Hour Rule." In measuring the educational strength of each program, evaluators judged the extent to which E/I programs had a clear lesson that was woven throughout the program, was age appropriate, and was relevant to children's lives.

The content analysis of these shows indicates that one in five of the E/I programs had little or no educational value. In addition, confusion appears to exist at the station level regarding what constitutes an educational program. For example, shows such as *Duck Tales* and *Hercules* were offered as educational

programming, although, when contacted, syndicators and networks said these programs were not intended to be educational.

Almost all of the 1200 local stations provide at least three hours of educational programs each week. The majority of these programs is provided by the networks. The number of locally produced educational shows has declined by 27 percent in the past year, yielding only 65 locally produced shows for the 1998/1999 television season.

Importantly, between two-fifths and three-quarters of the shows identified as educational/informational met the letter and sometimes the spirit of the “Three-Hour Rule.” In fact, one-fourth of the offerings were considered highly educational, including shows such as *Bill Nye*, *The Science Guy*, *Nick News*, *The Magic School Bus*, and *Popular Mechanics for Kids*.

Furthermore, the educational offerings contain almost no violence, in contrast to many of the other shows designed for children. This finding is important, as previous research has demonstrated that young children attend to the action, movement, and loud noises associated with violence on television to the detriment of any educational lesson. By excluding violence from these programs, we have a greater assurance that children might learn the lesson.

Finally, the E/I symbols used to identify a station’s educational programs exist, but are often brief and idiosyncratic. They vary dramatically across networks and stations, making it difficult for parents to recognize and acknowledge them as identifiers of educational programming. Given the idiosyncrasies of the labels, it is not surprising that the *Media in the Home* survey found that parents were largely unaware of these labels.

The Three-Hour Rule: Insiders’ Reactions (Jordan)

Amy Jordan presented the final report issued at the conference, based on 31 telephone interviews with individuals involved in children’s television. Respondents included network executives, local broadcasters, local and national producers, children’s television advocates and scholars, and an FCC regulator. The study provides an insider’s perspective on how the new economic and regulatory environment has affected children’s television.

Overall, insiders believe that the “Three-Hour Rule” has led broadcasters to include more enriching and educational programs and to include educational consultants in the development of these shows. Also, the new environment is seen as discouraging some of the more violence-laden, educationally-devoid shows. However, many also feel that while the current trajectory of children’s television is a positive one, today’s educational offerings are overwhelmingly mediocre. Advocates, scholars and consultants argue that prosocial programs, which address some aspect of social or emotional development, are in oversupply and that academic, curriculum-based shows, such as those based on science or literature, are being



Dr. Kelly Schmitt, Research Fellow, APCC

crowded out. Nearly all of the shows in the “Big-Three” networks’ line-ups are prosocial or offer information about softer emotional issues, such as dating or honesty. This perception is corroborated by Dr. Schmitt’s content analysis of the educational shows, which found that three-fourths of the network’s offerings to their affiliates are prosocial in content.

One striking finding of this research is the lack of awareness of the educational efforts on behalf of children among those most likely to be knowledgeable. When asked to name educational programs on commercial broadcast stations, few could name a show. The shows that were mentioned often included those that the respondent had worked on, shows that had previously aired on PBS stations (e.g., *The Magic School Bus*), or programs that had, in fact, been cancelled (e.g., *Beakman’s World*). While some of the respondents may disagree with broadcasters’ claims that prosocial shows are educational, many simply are not aware of what is available to children. The low awareness among these individuals may also stem from the fact that these shows are not promoted well enough to stand out from the 1300 programs available to children. In response to a question from Peggy Charren, founder of Action for Children’s Television, Jordan indicated that promo-



Peggy Charren, Founder, Action for Children’s Television with Dr. Amy Jordan, Senior Researcher, APPC

tion is needed to help educational television programs garner more attention. She added that “we see a lot of promotional effort going behind programs like *Pokémon* and *Beast Wars*, and we don’t see the same kind of effort going into the kinds of shows that possibly deserve more attention.”

In response to a reporter’s question about the value of prosocial educational programs, Jordan emphasized that the APPC acknowledges the need for and value of such programming. However, she added that, “I think the area in which we have a problem is that the overwhelming majority of those shows offered by the networks are prosocial in nature. We, as a nation, could really benefit from having more diversity in the kinds of shows that kids see and more programs that resonate with the kinds of things children learn in school.”

APPC AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM ON A COMMERCIAL BROADCAST STATION

The APPC Award for Outstanding Educational Program on a Commercial Broadcast Station is designed to recognize educational programs that the APPC hopes parents will seek out for their children. At the conclusion of the Press Conference, Amy Jordan presented this award to three shows, *The Magic School Bus*, *Nick News*, and *Bill Nye the Science Guy*.

Award recipients were selected based on a two-step process. First, researchers at APPC evaluated episodes of each of the 135 programs identified as E/I programs and included in Dr. Schmitt’s content analysis of educational programs. Nine programs that were scored as highly educational were selected based on the clarity and

salience of the lesson, as well as the extent to which the material offered is appropriate for the target age group and is applicable to these children's lives. Second, two episodes of each of the nine programs were reviewed by the members of the APPC's Advisory Panel on Educational Television, which includes educators and experts in child development and research on television's effects. Panel members include Daniel Anderson, Sandra Calvert, Ann McGillicuddy-DeLisi, Eliot Larson, Valeria Lovelace and John Zimmerman. These panel members selected three of these nine shows as meeting the spirit as well as the letter of the FCC's "Three-Hour Rule."

The *Magic School Bus*, airing on FOX affiliate stations nationwide, was selected for its portrayal of children uncovering information through a process of discovery, rather than simply accepting the facts as given. The award was accepted by Deborah Forte, Executive Vice President of Scholastic Productions, the producer of the show. Ms. Forte thanked the child viewers of the show. "They have told us through our research... that one of the reasons why they like the show is because it helps them figure stuff out. I'm very privileged to be associated with a project that helps kids figure things out."

The Advisory Panel selected *Nick News* as a recipient of this award for being "a genuinely informative and engaging program that addresses social issues that are of consequence to young viewers." The program airs on the cable station Nickelodeon, as well as on commercial broadcast stations through syndication. The Executive Producer of *Nick News*, Mark Lyons, accepted the award. In his remarks, Mr. Lyons emphasized that "there are a lot of good shows out there; we just have to find them." He added that at *Nick News* they have learned that "kids are genuinely interested in real stories about the real world and we're happy about that and we learn from them every day."

The final award was given to the program *Bill Nye, The Science Guy*, which airs on PBS and on commercial broadcast stations through syndication. The program was lauded by APPC's Advisory Panel for "the infectious enthusiasm shown for science and the effective techniques used to get complicated and sophisticated concepts across to the target audience." The award was accepted by Erren Gottlieb and Jim McKenna, executive producers, and Bill Nye, host and writer of the program. In accepting the award, Bill Nye emphasized that "the potential of television is huge because you can go to so many places in the world so quickly. You can go to outer space instantly. With so many people watching so much of it, I think there is a lot of potential to do a lot of good work."

In response to a question from the audience about how to improve the quality of "more mediocre-quality shows," Nye emphasized making a show that you are passionate about and asking the audience what they like and want. Forte agreed, adding that asking parents and teachers also helped *The Magic School Bus* in their decision-making. Lyons recommended finding a way to make the education exciting. He also found having a supportive network or station that is not "looking for the big buck right out of the box" is helpful in making a high quality educational show.



Erren Gottlieb, Bill Nye, Jim McKenna, Creators of *Bill Nye, the Science Guy*, with Amy Jordan, APPC

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: CONGRESSMAN EDWARD J. MARKEY (D-MA)

Amy Jordan introduced the Conference's Keynote Speaker, Congressman Edward J. Markey (D-MA), author of the Children's Television Act of 1990 and a leading advocate of the V-Chip.

With his address, Congressman Markey reviewed the progress of his "Five for Kids" agenda which addresses the role of popular culture and telecommunications in the lives of children. This agenda includes five key initiatives: 1) to provide American schools and libraries with Internet access and technology; 2) to secure children's privacy online; 3) to enable parents to block television violence; 4) to save public television; and 5) to broadcast more educational television.

Congressman Markey argued that providing Internet access to schools and libraries is critical to ensuring that children from all backgrounds can have access to the same technology as more affluent children. He pointed out that the 1996 Telecommunications Act stipulates that every school and library in the United States should receive telecommunication services at a discounted rate. During the question and answer session, he added that Congress has recognized the need to provide better technical training for teachers to ensure that schools can use this new technology, noting that money will be in the federal budget to provide funding for teacher training. While acknowledging that the federal government should do more, he suggested that state governments use their financial surpluses to fund such training, as well.



Congressman Edward Markey, Keynote Speaker

Congressman Markey further stated that as we increase children's access to new technology, we must address the negative consequence of electronic communication for children's privacy. He expressed concern about companies' use of online games to obtain children's personal information for use in selling new products. To begin addressing the problem, Congressman Markey worked with U.S. Senator Richard Bryan (D-NV) to obtain the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act in 1997. As a result, the Federal Trade Commission is in the process of writing rules to protect child users of the Internet and to ensure the rights of parents to know what information is being collected about their child, understand how that information will be used, and reduce the use of their child's information. These rules will only apply to children ages twelve and younger.

Consistent with his third initiative, as of July 1, 1999, the V-Chip will be available in one-half of all television sets sold in the United States. As of January 1, 2000, all television sets must be equipped with this technology. This technology will enable

parents to block programming they consider unsuitable for their children. The Kaiser Family Foundation and the Center for Media Education have kicked off nationwide educational campaigns to assist parents in accessing and applying the V-Chip. Furthermore, in light of the fact that a number of newspapers do

not print the television ratings in their television listings, the Congressman spoke of his plans to send letters to the most influential newspapers in the country to inquire about their failure to include these ratings and to encourage the papers to list them. He emphasized the importance of both the ratings and the V-Chip in assisting parents in their efforts to deal with the overwhelming number of programs available and to monitor what their children view. He argued that “we don’t live in the era of *Leave it to Beaver* any longer; we live in the era of *Beavis and Butthead*. It’s important, as a consequence, to give parents the capacity to be able to block out that programming which they believe is inappropriate for their children when they’re not home or when they’re not in the room.”

Congressman Markey lauded public television as the one place “where parents don’t have to worry about finding high quality educational programming for their children.” Given that funding of public broadcasting has been limited, he plans to attend a hearing on funding for public broadcasting to explore ways to increase funding, safeguard the system’s long term financial health, and minimize the commercialism that has been creeping into the public broadcasting system.

In reviewing progress on the fifth initiative of his “Five for Kids” agenda, Congressman Markey remarked that the Children’s Television Act of 1990 reversed the 1980’s trend of eliminating regulations of children’s television. He asserted his belief that “The Three-Hour Rule” is needed to ensure that more high quality children’s programming becomes available and urged commercial broadcasters to experiment with educational programming and invest more effort into marketing these shows. He stated, “Commercial television has proven many times that high standards and high viewership are not incompatible concepts.”

Congressman Markey concluded by saying that he is optimistic about the future of children’s television. “We have come a long way since...the product pitchman who managed to hook kids with cartoons while seducing skeptical parents with a bold and brassy tie-in with patriotism, the flag, and the leader of the free world,” he said. “Educational television for children is starting to grow. Let us work to keep it growing.”

PANEL ONE: THE CHANGING ECONOMICS OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

Moderator

Joseph Turow, *Professor, The Annenberg School for Communication*

Panelists

Jennifer Pulley, *Producer/Host, Brain Stew*

Tooper Taylor, *President, Nelvana Communications*

Ellen Wartella, *Dean of the College of Communication, University of Texas at Austin*

John Wilson, *Head of Programming Services, PBS*

Cyma Zarghami, *Executive Vice President and General Manager, Nickelodeon*

Producers Get a Smaller Slice of the Financial Pie

Joseph Turow introduced the panelists and began the discussion with individual remarks about the economics of children's television and how they are changing. The panelists agreed that significant changes have occurred and continue to occur in children's television. Most notably, the money available for production has declined, as licensing fees are being reduced and as networks are securing "back-end participation;" that is, profit participation in areas such as merchandising. Tooper Taylor said, "The economics of the children's television business have changed dramatically since I came to Nelvana ten years ago. At that time there were probably three networks in the kids' business. The average half hour license fee paid by a broadcaster to an independent producer was about \$300,000 to \$325,000 per half-hour program. There were straight licensing fee deals with no back-end participation on behalf of the networks. This afforded the independent production company to do quite well internationally.... Today the average licensing fee we are receiving is about \$75,000 per half hour program." He attributes the reduced fees and increased interest in "back-end participation" to the proliferation of television channels airing children's programs and the reduced ratings that shows receive in this competitive marketplace.

According to Ellen Wartella, changing economics have resulted in fewer companies that produce children's shows and vertical integration of the industry: "The fact that Nelvana has an exclusive arrangement with CBS, the fact that Disney produces all the programming for ABC, the fact that Engel produces the programming for NBC, the fact that Nickelodeon controls the production and who they go to. Really what you are finding is that to make it in children's television today, you not only have to be able to produce a show, but you have to own the distribution system." Jennifer Pulley and Tooper Taylor agreed that independent producers are having a difficult time with networks owning their own programming. As a result, independent producers are not afforded an opportunity to even present a new show to a network that has produced its own shows. Taylor argued that perhaps the



John Wilson, PBS; Dr. Ellen Wartella, University of Texas-Austin, Dr. Joseph Turow, University of Pennsylvania

United States should consider government subsidies, as Canadian-based companies receive, to help independent producers compete.

The Role of International Distribution and Other Media Platforms

Both John Wilson and Ellen Wartella pointed out the growing importance of international distribution and the relationship between television production and the production costs of other media distribution systems, such as the Internet, as major factors in the current shape of children's television programming. While the economics of public broadcasting differ dramatically from commercial television, PBS director of children's television, John Wilson stated, "The show has to be fundable, it has to be make-able, and it has to be economically sustainable." As a result, PBS seeks out partners that can produce the show as well as provide international distribution capabilities to help distribute the costs.

International distribution may, to some extent, also influence program content and format. Live action programs, although less expensive to produce than animation, are more difficult to sell around the world. In response to a question from David Walsh, executive director of the National Institute on Media, Toper Taylor indicated that academic/cognitive programs are often more difficult to sell internationally. However, if the shows have entertainment value, the panelists agreed, children will come to programs with academic lessons.

John Wilson indicated that at PBS they also make sure new program productions can extend to other distribution platforms, such as the Internet or digital television. Online costs add to production expenses, but this kind of extension of programming is needed in order to increase the value of the show for children and parents. Likewise, Cyma Zarghami indicated that Nickelodeon anticipates greater compatibility between television and their online content. She added that launching a pilot program online may, in fact, be less costly than it would be on television. Ellen Wartella sees the economics of children's television as moving from a strong relationship between toy licensing and children's television production to "a model that is going to involve many other ways of licensing and relating content production with distribution, including the Internet and interactive toys."

The Impact of the Three-Hour Rule

Jennifer Pulley attributes the development and availability of her program, Brain Stew, directly to the "Three-Hour Rule." Her show is the result of a specific request from the station WTKR for a children's show that would meet these regulations. According to Toper Taylor, Nelvana Communications has also benefited from the FCC's mandate for educational programming, as Nelvana provides all of the children's programming for CBS. In fact, he noted that, given the competition from numerous channels offering children's shows and declining ratings, "if CBS did not have the mandate from the FCC to air three hours of educational kids' programming, they would not be airing any children's programming today. That is very clear."



Toper Taylor, Nelvana; Cyma Zarghami, Nickelodeon

PANEL TWO: TEACHING THROUGH TELEVISION: BEYOND THE PRESCHOOL YEARS

Moderator

Michael Cohen, *Founding Partner, Applied Research and Consulting*

Panelists

Aimee Dorr, *Professor of Education, University of California, Los Angeles*

Karen Hill-Scott, *President, Karen Hill-Scott and Company*

Linda Rath, *Content Director, Between the Lions, WGBH*

John Zimmerman, *Assistant Professor of Educational History, New York University*

Michael Cohen introduced the structure and content of the panel, emphasizing that it would focus on educational television for children ages six through twelve. He initiated the discussion by asking the panelists to address children's needs for quality educational programming and what educational programming for this age group currently does or should look like.

The School-Age Audience

Aimee Dorr reminded the audience that children do not stop developing when they begin school and that school-age children still have a great deal of learning to do, including learning literacy and other academic subjects, thinking skills, and social understanding. She argued that television should be part of that ongoing learning process: "Every television show is an opportunity to help with this kind of learning and development."

While six to twelve-year-old children are continuing to learn, Karen Hill-Scott added that this audience is very different from the preschool audience. She remarked, "This audience has a very different expectation about what is going to be on TV than the preschool [audience], and despite the fact that they are very young and have a whole lifetime of learning ahead of them, as television viewers they have become already sophisticated consumers." Due to school experience, they do not respond to didactic educational programs the way preschoolers do. For this age group, content must continue to be developmentally appropriate, as well as provide information that children regard as important to know. Finally, Dr. Hill-Scott emphasized that programs should demonstrate a change in knowledge on the part of the characters and that the message of the program must be woven into the story.



Dr. Aimee Dorr, UCLA



Dr. Karen Hill-Scott, Karen Hill-Scott & Company

Involving Educators and Child Development Experts in Program Content

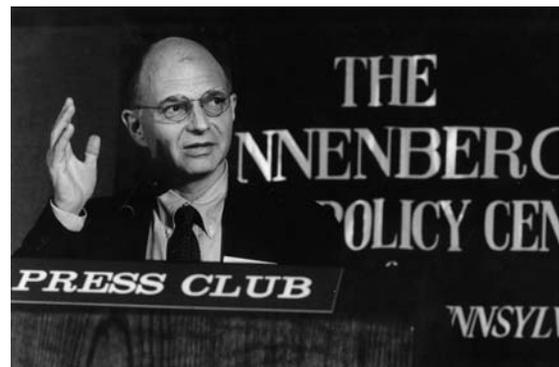
The panelists agreed that involving those with a background in child development or education in the production of programming improves the quality of children's programs. Karen Hill-Scott feels that the E/I requirements have increased the number of shows that have this kind of involvement: "The main benefit is that for the first time, across the board, children's developmental needs are actively on the table for discussion in the creation of content for children." In response to a question from audience member Jerome Singer, of Yale University, Aimee Dorr warned that the production process is often too fast-paced to incorporate educational material: "The writers themselves don't [have] the knowledge or have the content and there's no mechanism that's slotted in and no time left to provide the content that they could actually work with if they knew it."

Demonstrating the involvement of child development and education experts in program development, Linda Rath discussed the process of developing a new series called *Between the Lions*, a co-production of WGBH and Sirius Thinking, Ltd. The program, developed for four to seven-year-olds, focuses on literacy and involved experts on literacy education whose recommendations were applied to each script, which Rath, herself a former teacher, reviews.

What Should Educational Content Look Like?

John Zimmerman argued that prosocial lessons, which center on social and emotional development, are spread equitably across the population. In contrast, however, academic knowledge is not equitably distributed across the American population. Given this discrepancy, he feels that we "should try as best we can to use this medium and all the others to emphasize traditional academic knowledge because it's only through that emphasis that we will begin... to address the real inequality of America's kids." He also notes that shows such as *The Magic School Bus* have effectively covered both academic lessons and social and emotional ones.

Michael Cohen asked panelists whether we are asking television to teach academic curricula because our schools are failing to do so. Aimee Dorr replied that she would not suggest that television should do what schools should be doing, but rather that "we are asking television to do a reasonable job part of the time for kids." Similarly, Karen Hill-Scott suggested that while television is not the only domain in which to teach an academic curriculum, "television could be doing more of it as a responsible entity in the public spirit." She disagrees with the idea that educational television programs should emphasize only academic curriculum. "There is a lot of prosocial content left to do. And there is a lot of complexity in that content that we could express in a much more age-appropriate manner."



Dr. Michael Cohen, Applied Research & Consulting

From the audience, Daniel Anderson, of the University of Massachusetts, expressed concern that globalization of children's television would lead to a "dumbing down of our efforts in educational informative television" based on his experience with a show for older children developed around the subtleties of language. The international organization to which the program was pitched wanted to eliminate the jokes and puns because that type of language does not travel well. Due to the simple language used in preschool programs, this is not an issue for educational shows targeted to younger children.

PANEL THREE: CHILDREN IN THE CONTEMPORARY MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Moderator

Charles Ogeltree, *Professor of Law, Harvard University*

Panelists

Deborah Forte, *Executive Vice President, Scholastic Productions, The Magic School Bus*

Eleo Hensleigh, *Senior Vice President, Marketing, Disney Channel & Disney/ABC Cable Networks*

Kate Taylor, *Director of Children's Programming, WGBH, ZOOM*

Rosemarie Truglio, *Director of Research for Sesame Street, Children's Television Workshop*

Alice Wilder, *Director of Research for Blue's Clues, Nickelodeon*

Charles Ogeltree opened the session by stating that the panel hoped to address how the new entertainment environment affects the quality and quantity of children's time with television.

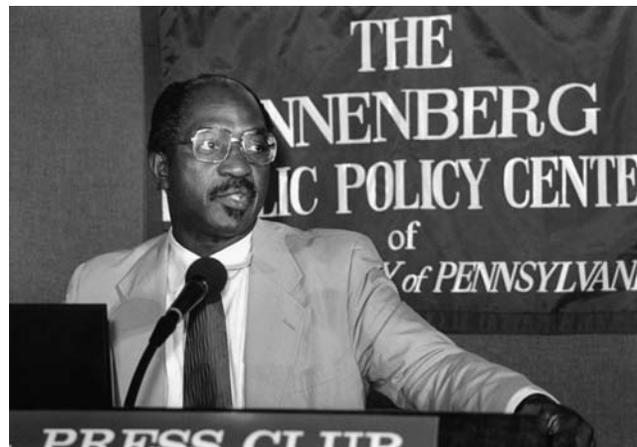
Reinforcing Content across Media

Panelists' responses to the new media available to children were quite positive. As Deborah Forte said, "I think the future is very bright, largely because of the large and new variety of media that are available to children. And I think this variety, which is what we're all talking about today, is going to greatly enhance the educational, as well as entertainment, opportunities for children."

More importantly, the panelists agreed that they do not see new media as competing with television, but rather as a supplement. The new media environment possesses the ability to provide

reinforcement of and additional depth to the curriculum educational television may be trying to teach. Rosemarie Truglio indicated that *Sesame Street* begins with a comprehensive curriculum that is developed through all media materials, including the television shows, parent and child magazines, and online sources. "When the same message or lesson appears in multiple media, these messages are extended and reinforced across media and the impact of that message then deepens." Alice Wilder agreed, saying, "In addition, the books and our multimedia products offer *Blue's Clues* an opportunity to extend the learning. By putting in additional elements that we don't have time for on the show, we can really reinforce the learning that's presented in the show." In fact, Deborah Forte believes "that to be relevant to kids we need to live in a variety of different media formats."

Kate Taylor also agrees that children's programming should have educational extensions, such as books, teachers' guides, and student materials. After showing a clip of the show, *ZOOM*, Taylor explained how



Professor Charles Ogeltree, Harvard University

the website and television show are related to one another. Topics discussed on the show are now reviewed and updated on the website and children can respond to the show via e-mail or regular mail. She finds that children are spending the same amount of time on the website as they are watching the show, which “allows for a depth of education, a depth of learning, and allows kids to be able to focus in on what they’re most interested in a way they were never able to do on analog television.”

Eleo Hensleigh discussed “ZOOG Disney,” a blend of television and online computing to allow for complete interactivity. The program is shown over a two hour block on a Sunday, where the show prompts children to go online to participate in activities and message boards. The following Saturday the show is rebroadcast with the addition of the results of their online participation. After showing a video clip of the show, she remarked that older children seemed to like the ability to express themselves, to participate, and see the results of this on television. “We did start something quite experimental at the time, which was to try to bring the content of television, what we knew was appealing to kids in terms of characters and stories, and the participation that was appealing to them about online or video games or computers.”



Dr. Alice Wilder, Nickelodeon; Eleo Hensleigh, Disney; Deborah Forte, Scholastic

Charles Ogeltree asked if any of the panelists worried about the entertainment aspect of the new media having an adverse affect. The panelists, in response, concurred that education can and should be fun. Wherein educational programming such as *Sesame Street* and *Blue’s Clues* curriculum continues to drive the program, the shows and related magazines and websites are intended to be enjoyable. As Deborah Forte added, “Without the entertainment, it’s nearly impossible to get the kids engaged. So, your educational message is not going to be nearly as powerful without the entertainment element attached and integral to that concept.”

Involvement by Parents and Teachers

The panelists see an important role for the parent as educational shows move to online activities and other media. In discussing the magazines and website affiliated with *Sesame Street*, Rosemarie Truglio emphasized the role of the parents in both educational television and the new media environment. *Sesame Street’s* magazine for parents provides information and advice for parents and activities that parents and children can do together. Additionally, as she showed in an overhead display, the magazine explains to parents what children are learning from each activity. Similarly, the website also offers activities the parent and child can do together. All of their materials are designed to be appealing to children and parents. Deborah Forte agreed, saying, “We really believe that parents have to be involved. If they are not involved and they are not aware, it’s very difficult for the show to have a real impact on children.” Eleo Hensleigh also concurred, noting that online and television interactivity can allow parents and children to discover and learn together.

Many of the Internet websites and other media outlets utilized by the panelists' programs reach out to teachers as well. Charles Ogeltree asked the panelists what the role of the teacher might be, particularly with the Internet. Rosemarie Truglio responded that Children's Television Workshop has a division called "Community Education Services" that provides materials and workshops for child care providers so that they have "a better understanding of how to use the television show and other media in their classrooms or in their homes to educate kids." Scholastic book publishers, the producers of *The Magic School Bus*, have "Scholastic Network," an online service for teachers. The *Blue's Clues* website also offers a teacher section.

From the audience, Alison Sherman, of *Blue's Clues*, asked for examples of teachers using information from the programs and activities in the classroom. Deborah Forte indicated that teachers often communicate with *The Magic School Bus* producers through the teachers' section of the website and share stories about how they used the philosophy of the show in their classrooms.

Access to Technology

Charles Ogeltree asked panelists to consider whether we risk creating "two societies with these media, one that is wired and another that isn't wired" and how we can connect larger populations with these new media. At *ZOOM*, Kate Taylor indicates that whenever a web address is mentioned on air, they also suggest that if children don't have access at home that they go to a teacher, a school, a library or community center to look for access. "We're hoping with *ZOOM* to motivate kids to want to find a way to get online."

Added Costs of New Media

From the audience, Michael Shepley, of Shepley Public Relations, asked about the costs of producing the online portion of the production and responding to children's e-mails. Panelists replied that the cost of a website is added to the cost of the project. Responding personally also adds costs. At "ZOOG Disney," the online portion takes some dedicated resources, but Eleo Hensleigh indicated that they have shifted, rather than expanded, their staff. To reduce costs, "ZOOG Disney" makes sure that every e-mail gets a response, but many of the questions can be bundled together and responded to together. "As long as they get something back, they feel that connection and the relationship has been established," Eleo Hensleigh remarked.

LUNCHEON AWARD CEREMONY

The 1999 Annenberg Public Policy Center Award for Distinguished Contribution to Children and Television

LeVar Burton, Host and Co-executive Producer, "Reading Rainbow"

Peggy Charren, founder of Action for Children's Television and member of APPC's Advisory Council on Excellence in Children's Television, introduced LeVar Burton and presented him with the 1999 APPC Award for Distinguished Contribution to Children and Television. After recounting his numerous television and film credits, including his role in the award-winning television miniseries *Roots* and his role as Lieutenant Geordi LaForge in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television series and movies, Charren told the conference attendees and Burton, "I love you because of your delicious role as host and co-executive producer of the PBS children's series *Reading Rainbow*. For 17 seasons this show has used the medium of television to help create, in your words, 'human beings who are passionate about literature.'" In this role, Burton has received more than five Emmy awards. Charren also described his role as a commissioner of the National Commission on Literacy and Information Services, a panel of experts appointed by the President to advise on policy for the storage, retrieval and dissemination of information in the United States. She described him as a "nifty advocate for better children's television at Congressional hearings, at meetings with industry, and in the press."

In accepting the APPC Award, LeVar Burton attributed his love of literature to his mother, Irma Jean Christian, who instilled in him the idea that reading was "an important and integral part of our lives." He noted that *Roots* made him see how truly powerful the medium of television is. "Television is the most powerful tool we possess in this culture, in this civilization, for creating change in society. And it is incumbent upon us, those of us who work in this medium, to be responsible with the choices we make in terms of what it is we provide to children. I believe that all of it is education. The question is: What are we teaching? What are we saying with this powerful medium? [It] is so powerful because it's everywhere — there is nowhere on this planet where you can escape the influence of this all-pervasive technology."

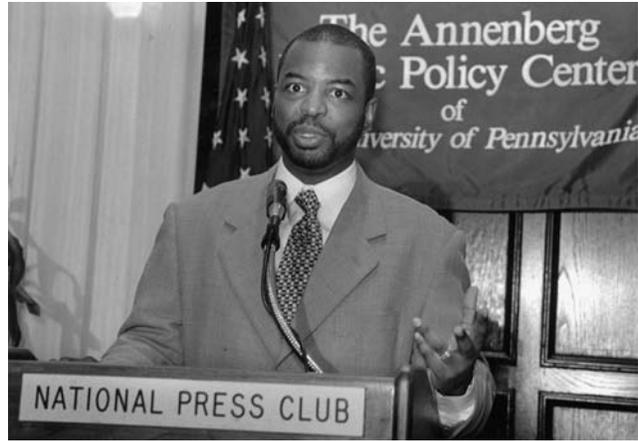
Burton urged the audience to remember that our experiences shape who we are and that television plays a huge part in children's experiences. He noted the changing patterns of childhood in the United States and emphasized the need for parents and nurturers to invest time and energy into children's lives.

In his concluding remarks, Burton encouraged the audience to take a role in ensuring that the powerful medium of television is used in a positive way. He concluded:



Peggy Charren, APPC Advisor presenting award to LeVar Burton, *Reading Rainbow*

“It has always been a part of my goal, my purposeful intent, to use this medium in as powerfully positive a manner as possible. To help this medium become all that it was originally created to be. Which is, as I believe, not just a medium for entertainment, because that is pro-forma, that is part of what we do. But if we can, while serving that need, achieving that outcome, still manage to enlighten and uplift and, on a good day if we are doing our jobs right, ennoble the process of the human journey, then so be it. That is when we are truly doing our jobs fulfilling the mission and using this medium to its highest possible potential. That is the fight that Peggy has been fighting for so long, for 32 years. There are other soldiers in this battle and I count you in this room as allies in this effort. We have such a tremendous opportunity that goes along with this responsibility. None of us should take it lightly....Thank you very much for this award.”



APPC Award Recipient LeVar Burton

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