

2009

Kid's Community Corner : a project to demonstrate how educational television can be made better

Jennifer Flores
California State University, Monterey Bay

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**Kid's Community Corner: A Project to
Demonstrate How Educational Television Can be Made Better**

Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

California State University at Monterey Bay

May 2009

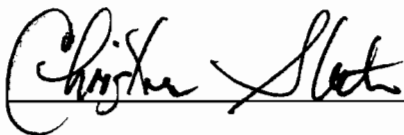
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Kid's Community Corner: A Project to
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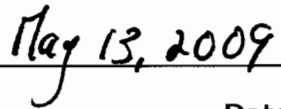
Jennifer L. Flores

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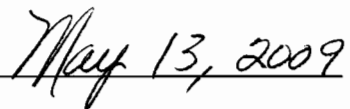
Dr. Christine Sleeter, Action Thesis Advisor



Date



Dr. Dorothy Lloyd, Thesis Advisor



Date

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Abstract

Educational television, by law, is offered to all children. After studying the history and current practices of educational television I found this not to be true. As a result I decided to produce a quality, educational children's television show. Eight children created segments reporting on various historical aspects of their community. By using reporting skills they had learned in school and with support and guidance from me, each child developed a short segment of their choice. The result was a completed pilot of the television show *Kid's Community Corner*. This pilot will be used as an example while applying to grants for further production.

Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, RATIONAL, AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of my action research and thesis was to develop and field test a children's television program that would be both educational and entertaining. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the background and research that led to this project.

It is widely accepted that television has become part of our western culture. From *Oprah* to reality television to *American Idol*, television has become embedded in the average Americans life. More people voted for contestants on *American Idol* than in the 2004 presidential election but this did not hold true in 2008. Why do media draw us in so? Part of the reason is that the entertainment value allows people to escape, similar to what the movie industry did for us in the late 1940's. Television, in particular, has become such a major part of our culture that the federal government has mandated that quality television must be provided for younger children on a daily basis, via the Children's Television Act, passed in 1990. I ask the question; are children really getting educational and informational television on a daily basis? My own experience has been that many broadcasters follow the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law; i.e., they actually provide children with very little quality educational television. For example my local station, KSBW, provides a show, *Kenny the Shark*, which is

deemed educational in that it allows children to learn about real shark behavior. Yet the premise of this show is there is a shark that lives on land with a family, plays drums, and has a selfish aspect to his personality. Although the broadcasters also say this show is educational by helping the children understand how to work together and problem solve in a peaceful way, all the shows I have seen, which is eight episodes, have Kenny getting into mischief with few consequences, or consequences that are readily forgiven, only to return next week with the same or nearly the same scenario. How can shows of this caliber pass as educational and informational? What would a good, entertaining children's show consist of?

As a result of my research, I have chosen to create and produce an entertaining, educational television program for children ages 9-13 because I have found limited viewing options for them. As mentioned above, researching and investigating current educational television, which is free to the viewer, provided me with insight into many things lacking in programming. I found that many shows deemed educational are only marginally educational, as illustrated in the example of *Kenny the Shark* mentioned above. In addition, most of these shows do little to promote community awareness. The purpose of my program would be to provide an entertaining educational program for the children whose families do not pay for alternative broadcasting. It could also become an outlet for children to demonstrate their knowledge of the world and their communities. Ideally, I would be able to inspire children to research and explore knowledge they already have and assist in communicating the interesting landmarks, history and uniqueness of each local environment.

More specifically, I planned to use children to develop television segments focusing on their experience of the neighborhood community, including its history, economics, industry and points of interest. As this would be a community-based program, the children involved would be required to investigate these aspects of their community. I planned to be working with 6 to 8 children in all. Originally, I had intended each team to fill out a four-page research paper on their topic. I estimated this taking the children 2 to 6 hours to complete. I suggested the teams work 2 hours a day for four days. When I met with the group of children though, we decided that creating a written report, which later would be turned into cue cards would be better.

Upon receiving the children's completed reports, I visited the sites to be included in the filming, including Colton Hall, California's First Theater, The Steinbeck Center, and the Steinbeck House. I met with the children to plan the location of the segment, and then I discussed the information they researched and wrote. Together, we wrote note cards using the words the children chose to present the information. I used that information to map out a story board for the children to follow, and then met again with the children to finalize the segment. The children made cue cards for their segment to refer to during the shoot. Each day was a one day shoot and took about 2 hours for a 15 minute segment. After the shoot, the final episode was edited by a production company which gave me a DVD disk to be able to present.

There were many limitations I faced during this process. One major one was that some community landmarks that interested the children would not let us film on their premises, such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium. This forced these children to not

participate as well as creating negative feelings for this establishment. Other state landmarks such as the Monterey Customs House required filming to be done at a certain time as well as having me provide proof of insurance. Since I could not afford the insurance, this segment was scratched also. Another main obstacle was my own limitations regarding filming and editing. I had to teach myself to edit using the program *Nero*. This took time and was very tedious work for me. I am not a videographer so my first attempts were boring and not very entertaining. A fourth limitation related to parental involvement. I had asked for no parental involvement with the initial reports from the children. Upon the day of filming, two parents were upset at how they felt their children were unprepared. This made me realize that while producing a project like this, keeping it done by children for children will be difficult.

This project ultimately will provide quality education television to the non-paying viewer. I plan to share the procedure and production of my show with fellow educators by submitting a proposal for presentation, based on my experience, to educational conferences such as The American Montessori regional and international conferences. I also plan to submit the final show to the local television station KCET in San Jose, California. Hopefully, the program will air within a year from now. Once this program is aired, I will invite other children to write in with segment ideas to provide a forum for others to teach us what they know about their community.

It is my hope that this type of programming will have a positive impact on the local community. Further, the collaboration with local businesses, the natural environment, and the people from the local community should promote a stronger

community base, as many contacts needed to be made and relationships formed. Luckily, on the central coast most people contacted were supportive of our community and were willing to help.

The children involved are awaiting a final pilot episode; I anticipate having a viewing of the episode, with all involved, in Late April 2009. Each child will receive a DVD copy of the final project. Hopefully they are not disappointed. Although this project was more time consuming and involved than I originally thought, it was also a great learning experience. I felt frustrated that the changes I wanted to happen were so difficult and slow to come. Isn't change slow and difficult, though? During the creation of this project, I kept looking back to Peggy Charren, who was an inspiration for my undertaking this action research and thesis. It is my hope that this project will inspire children to treasure their community.

Chapter2

Literature Review

Introduction

Educational television is an issue of importance not only to educators but to the individual family unit as well. At one time it was hoped that television could provide an opportunity to eliminate illiteracy and become a teaching tool for the masses as expressed by Philo T. Farnsworth, one of the creators of television (Foundation, , 2004). Scholars and activists have been grappling with this matter since the late 1960s; children's television has been studied, debated and lobbied for decades. Through the years many perspectives of educational children's television have developed.

While exploring the literature I found that articles and studies focus on several main issues which include: the history of educational television and how it has led to where we are now; how television supports the education of children; the societal lessons our children are learning from television; how marketing educates children to become consumers and the education of violence and aggression in children. Through reviewing this literature, my own definition of educational television has broadened and changed to include the social aspects reflected in the literature. In the remainder of this chapter, I will review some of the key studies related to my research. The review is organized according to the following major topics: History of educational television; How does television support the education of children?; and What societal lessons are children learning from television?

History of educational television

Educational television has gone through a lot of changes over the years, from early television which was completely unregulated, through growing pains, to government mandating of educational and informational children's programming. The interesting thing about educational television is that many of the laws passed are overlooked or provide loop holes to support programming that is not so educational. Through exploring the history of educational television, I gained a greater understanding to where we are now.

According to Luke (FCC), early television, including the years up to the late sixties, was not regulated nor managed for the general public. Commercial television did not use television as an educational tool. "As Newsweek saw it in 1959, for children who are 'too old for *Captain Kangaroo* and too young for *Dick Clark*, quality programming . . . is in a virtual vacuum'." (Luke, 1990, p. 135).

Throughout the late sixties and early seventies, public television was offering the adult viewer alternatives to mainstream commercial television. PBS programming was funded by the government and was often innovative and sometimes controversial. One example is the *Public Broadcasting Library*, a show which was created in 1966. This show reflected the turmoil of the sixties society. It went against the establishment of that time and made statements on the ongoing war, among other topics. Then, in 1967, the United States Congress passed the Public Broadcasting Act.

This piece of legislation was responsible for creating the Corporation for Public Broadcasting or CPB. The CPB was a Washington based corporation, funded by Congress (Linder & Kellner, 1999). For the first time the government took a step to mandate the quality of television. One of the first tasks of this corporation was to develop the Public Broadcasting Service or what we still know as PBS. CPB provides funding for PBS; PBS actually produces and assists the acquirement of programming. This would have a lasting effect on children's educational television. Linder and Kellner expressed that in 1970, more than one hundred public broadcasting member stations throughout the country became a network. By 1972, this number had grown to 233. This national network gave PBS the potential for reaching a broad audience with noncommercial programs" (Linder & Kellner, 1999, p. 2). But as CPB was funding the programming of the seventies, the power that came with this national network was vulnerable to being undermined by the Federal Government.

Then President Richard Nixon, Vice-president Spiro Agnew and others on Capitol Hill pressured public television to produce less controversial programming.

[This] brought new problems for the fledgling public television system. From Nixon's perspective, particularly as the Vietnam War continued to drag on, public television was a home for liberal journalists who produced biased news and public affairs programs with the help of federal funds. (Hoynes, 1994, p. 3)

When PBS aired a 1970 documentary *Banks and the Poor* divulging banking practices

that were harmful to the underprivileged living in inner-city areas, Capitol Hill and the president were infuriated due to many politicians being on the board of various banks, or having bank holdings. "In 1972, Nixon vetoed CPB's authorization bill, after which the chair, president, and director of PBS resigned; then Nixon signed it. The consequences of Nixon's veto still cripple public broadcasting today." (Bennett, 1997, p. 177).

For activists, television was not only a product but also a tool which could be used for providing information to the general public. Because of its increasing need to appeal to a broad cross section of the population and its financial ties to the government, later public programming proved to be less daring (Linder & Kellner, 1999).

CPB provides funding for PBS; PBS actually produces and assists the acquirement of programming. By the late sixties to early seventies programs such as *Sesame Street* fulfilled the government's request for non-controversial subject matter. *Sesame Street*, which aired in 1967, would be destined to become the one program to set the standards for educational television. More than 30 years after its premiere, no educational television series has had a greater impact, either on the research literature, on the production of educational television, or on children than *Sesame Street* (Fisch, 2004, p. 15).

The next year, 1968, the organization Action for Children's Television ,(Baram-Tasabari & Yarden, 2005) was established by Peggy Charren and a group of concerned

housewives and mothers, and would grow to become advocates and activists for children's programming (Hays, 1982).

Commercial television, on the other hand, was not concerned with education or quality. The 1960's provided mainly inexpensive cartoons for children's television. This era also institutionalized Saturday morning cartoons. The 1970's were no better, with 60 to 90 minute shows which incorporated a number of segments. Because the audience changes quickly and children watch reruns, the programs are shown as many as four times a year, a factor that reduces production costs without reduction in program availability or profitability (Hays, 1982).

Television was solely for entertainment value, although many may argue programs like *Leave it to Beaver* or *The Andy Griffith Show* could teach moral values and citizenship. The commercial television of this time was not concerned with educating the public morally or otherwise. The medical community at this time also felt there was no adverse effect of television on children, in 1972, the Surgeon General commissioned the report *Television and Growing up the Impact of Televised Violence*.

The report's overall message was that TV violence was one of several influences on children's aggressive behaviors and attitudes. TV was essentially absolved of blame as cause for aggression in youth. Despite (Bennett, 1997) evidence to the contrary, the official state-sanctioned version of the research claimed that TV violence did not cause aggression in viewers. At best, it was claimed as one of many contributing factors

within individual circumstances. The industry had acceded early during the study to a reasonable measure of blame, thereby hoping to preclude accusations of whitewashing the report. All subsequent attempts to legislate for a reduction of violent program content failed. (Luke, 1990, p. 170)

The masses accepted the networks' decisions on programming and did little to adjust the programming given to them. Even with the option of PBS the government still controlled what was being broadcast. In, 1972, President Richard the Nixon vetoed a bill to authorize funding for CPB and PBS. It was at this time that CPB turned to corporations for financial support. Grants, endowments and donations became an essential support for the survival of PBS. (Linder & Kellner, 1999)

By the mid-seventies, the funding for public television was pulled; networks had a monopoly on what the public would view. At this time, studies and research on the content and influence of television on children began. Up until now children's television had been limited to Saturday morning series as seen in *Super Friends Hour*, repeated cartoons such as *Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* , or PBS programming such as *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers*. PBS was now developing solid educational programming that not only addressed the three R's but also included cultural and social lessons.

Regulation of children's programming was inconsistent and seemed to be random at times. In 1974 the Federal Communications Commission (Barner, 1999) compiled the first "Children's Television Report and Policy Statement". This provided guidelines for networks to consider. This report addressed advertising during children's programming

as well as improving the quality and educational value of programming. Although the report was from the FCC there was no law in place to mandate quality programming. Networks were including more educational concepts at this time; e.g., "*School House Rock*" used modern rock music as a backdrop for teaching math, history and language. But PBS still maintained the most consistent quality programming for children.

In 1979 the U.S. Surgeon general asked the National Institutes of Health to research the influence of television in general. Using this as a springboard the National Institutes of Health conducted a three year study in which behavioral scientists and other scholars examined the influence of television on children. The study, completed in 1982, "...recognized a convergence of research findings confirming television's impact on child viewers. In a nutshell, it concluded that heavy television viewing can produce adverse effects on children, making them more aggressive and less attentive in school" (Selnow & Gilbert, 1993, p. 99). According to Signorielli, one year later, in October 1983, on the heels of this report Timothy Wirth, introduced H.R. 4097, the Children's Television Education Act. The bill established that each television licensee should provide one hour of children's educational programming each day, during those hours when children are likely to watch television. At the same time, however, the broadcast industry was trying to gain passage of H.R. 2382, a bill designed to loosen restrictions. Although Wirth tried to reach a compromise, both of these bills died at the end of the 98th Congress. (Signorielli, 1991, p. 19)

Signorielli goes on to say despite the public need for regulation, the FCC indicated that it would take no action in this area because there were many new alternatives (cable,

videotape) for children's programming. Again the buck was passed without any law to mandate children's programming.

Another attempt to force the FCC to examine this issue came in 1985 when Congressman Wirth reintroduced a slightly modified version of his 1983 bill, discussed above. Part of this bill would require the FCC to conduct a formal inquiry into program-length commercials. This proposal and a similar bill introduced in the Senate by Frank Lautenberg died at the end of the 99th Congress (Signorielli, 1991, p. 20) The reasoning was that ultimately it is the parents position to monitor children's access to television. The Commission argued that the Government's interests extend beyond facilitating parental supervision to include protecting children from exposure to indecent broadcasts and safeguarding the home from unwanted intrusion by such broadcasts. There were many more options through cable and noncommercial outlets for children to find programming that were suitable. The court seemed to see the industry in a time of transition, assuming that eventually all would have access to these resources.

Several bills to regulate programming geared toward children were submitted to Congress from the late eighties to the early nineties. Most did not pass. One bill for instance, H.R. 3996 would have required the FCC to reinstate restrictions on advertising during children's television (Baram-Tsabari & Yarden) to enforce the obligation of broadcasters "to meet the educational and informational needs of the child audience . . ." was passed in both the House and the Senate but was pocket vetoed in November 1988 by President Ronald Reagan. (Selnow & Gilbert, 1993, p. 100)

Throughout the late eighties and early nineties other bills concerning children's television were submitted to the Congress, many of which sought to mandate as little as one hour of informational and educational programming for children. Finally, after a decade of debating, lobbying and studies, the Children's Television Act was passed in 1990. This law, Public Law 101-437, established guidelines for and limited the time of commercials aired during children's television on both network and cable stations. On weekends, programs were limited to 10.5 commercial minutes and on weekdays the limit was 12 minutes. The bill included a provision for a reexamination of these limits after January 1, 1993, through public notice and comment arranged by the FCC (Selnow & Gilbert, 1993). This law imposes a responsibility on broadcasters to serve "the educational and informational needs of children through the licensee's overall programming"(FCC, 2005). The new ruling lifted the specific hourly regulations of the stations' programming, focusing instead, on the overall quality of programming the station offer to the community. Due to this wording, loopholes were left open to the stations. Now not only the lack of hourly educational programming but also the interpretation of "educational" was up for grabs.

The FCC adopted a proposal in August, 1996 which was prepared by the Clinton Administration and the National Association of Broadcasters. Educational programming was further clarified. In order for a broadcaster to renew its FCC license, the broadcaster would have to prove the three hour programming mandated by law. This mandatory three hours of programming must be educational and regularly scheduled. The new programming was defined as "any television programming that furthers the

educational and informational needs of children 16 years of age and under in any respect, including children's intellectual/cognitive and social/emotional needs" (Barner, 1999, p. 551). Broadcasters must provide weekly programs for children that are at least thirty minutes long. These programs must be regularly scheduled airing between 7a.m. and 10 p.m. The broadcaster is also responsible for outlining why a program is educational and informational, although many times the rationale used to meet these guidelines leaves much to be desired.

At the local level, since the late nineties the formative watch dog group that has developed is The Parents Television Council. The Parents Television Council™ (www.parentstv.org) is a non-partisan education organization advocating responsible entertainment. It was founded in 1995 to ensure that children are not constantly assaulted by sex, violence and profanity on television and in other media. This national grassroots organization has more than 1.3 million members across the United States, and works with television producers, broadcasters, networks and sponsors in an effort to stem the flow of harmful and negative messages targeted to children (Price, 1998, p.23). For example, one new mechanism aimed at limiting violence in children's television is the "V-Chip". Legislation authorizing the V-Chip passed in 1996 and requires the installation of blocking technology which parents could use to control what the children watch. This chip works in conjunction with a ratings system. This enables the family to choose the programming their children can access. "Since January 2000, V-chip technology has been installed in every television measuring larger than 13 inches. More than 25 million televisions have a V-chip now" (Kohl, 2001, para.4). Since

2001, broadcasters have included announcements to inform families that this technology exists.

Overall, many legislators and educators now believe that the options for *most* children have been expanded through cable and satellite television. Consequently, it is believed that even families with limited resources have the expanded broadcasting access to children's educational programming. However, the fact that not all children have access to alternative broadcasters is ever truly addressed by legislators. Also, activists for children's television are quickly dissipating. In 1993 the Action for Children's Television retired, satisfied with the legislation that was passed in 1990. The government continued to be somewhat of a "watch dog" for quality, educational programming and the Parents Television Council has heightened awareness, but little action has been taken to provide equity of programming in recent years.

How does television support the education of children?

Although television teaches many social lessons to children who watch it, this section will focus on the scholastic education it provides to viewers. Although recent research has shown that television can be a cognitive, skill developing activity depending on the program content (Angela Theresa Clarke & Kurtz-Costes, 1999), the crisis in children's television is that programming containing cognitive, skill developing activity really does not take place as much as it could. All the literature agrees that PBS offers quality children's programming. The television program considered the educational leader of the pack, of course, is *Sesame Street*. More than 30 years after

its premiere, no educational television series has had a greater impact—either on the research literature, on the production of educational television, or on children—than *Sesame Street* (Fisch, 2004, p. 15). The independent PBS show *Mr. Rogers*, also the longest-running program in the history of public broadcasting, is recognized as quality programming by numerous awards and the Federal Government. "All of his work has been emblematic of the same philosophy and goal: to encourage the healthy emotional growth of children and their families," the White House said (Curl, 2002). Many other shows on PBS have proven the test of time, and educated generations of children.

The choices of children's television on PBS, although more limited, have a greater impact on children gaining educational skills than network television. One significant difference between network television and public television is the attention span each demands on the viewer. Public television tends to have longer segments and fewer settings where as network television has faster paced segments with multiple settings (Geist & Gibson, 2000).

Some literature does support the idea that network television can provide quality educational and informational programs for children. A rich body of research examining young children's attention to and comprehension of various types of television content demonstrates that, contrary to popular opinion, viewing is an active cognitive experience for most children. A literature review conducted by the U.S. Department of Education by two research psychologists, Anderson and Collins in 1988, unequivocally dismiss the myth that television viewing is a passive, cognitive activity that mesmerizes children, shortens their attention spans, or diminishes their inferential or reflective

capabilities (Kunkel, 1991).

The Children's Television Act of 1990 broadly defined "educational/informational programming" as carrying content that will "further the positive development of the child in any respect, including the child's cognitive/intellectual or emotional/social needs" (FCC, 1990). And although the FCC subsequently strengthened the Act by requiring broadcasters to air a specified quota of 3 hours per week of E/I, educational and informational, programming, they decided against narrowing the definition of E/I programs (Fisch, 2004, p. 8). Broadcasters have taken advantage of this wording. The local television station, KSBW, Salinas, California, defines its stance in complying with FCC regulations by describing the educational and informational objectives of a program in the *Children's Television Programming Report* (Hearst-Argyle Stations). Below I have provided an example of one show and the educational and informational objectives of the program listed in the FCC 398 report. I have also included a brief summary of my impressions of the educational value of this program.

Kenny the Shark

Describe the educational and informational objective of the program and how it meets the definition of Core Programming.

When a shark lives among humans, getting along in the world is one tough challenge after another. Kenny the Shark is about a tiger shark that has made the transition from sea to land, but it's very hard to adapt to new conditions. He

lives with Kat, a middle school student, and her family. In the process of watching Kenny deal with his situation we learn real world facts about shark behavior, habits, and biology. We also learn a lot about how to understand multiple perspectives on a problem. In each episode, Kenny and Kat have to solve a problem that requires one of them to be generous, cooperative, hardworking, honest, unselfish, or responsible. The situations they face are comedic and action-packed extensions of the incongruous circumstances of Kenny's life. (FCC, 2005)

As one can see from the description, although the shark lives with a family on land, KSBW deems it educational because it purports to teach real world facts about shark behavior. Since living on land, playing drums and eating chum out of a bowl are not a real world shark behaviors, this is an example of the station loosely complying with the FCC regulations. As with many programs, the two main characters working together allow it to be referenced as socially educational.

Some studies also link television to violence and attention disorders. "While there certainly is no shortage of studies linking television and violence, obesity and poor performance in school, this latest salvo has caught the attention of parents the most(Shangkuan, 2007). These hit programs, such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* and *Rug Rats*, are usually very violent and provide little cognitive interaction. Many may argue that children have a natural tendency to view these types of programs. Other literature supports the view if educational television is entertaining, children will watch. Krcmar and Albada's (Geist & Gibson) study

confirms this:

Recent research suggests that while children do not watch educational programs as often as some of the less-educational children's fiction programs (e.g. *Rug Rats*); some educational shows maintain a strong following. For example, PBS's *Wishbone* and *Beakman's World* are both ranked among the top twenty children's shows in the 1988 season. (Krcmar & Albada, 2000)

Educational television has also been used as a support for academic education in school. Several studies have looked at the effects of television on children's performance in school. The research appears to be saying that high levels of unsupervised mindless television viewing, especially when it is done in lieu of daily reading or other academic stimulation, can have the potential to exert harmful effects on achievement. The utilization of informational television, both in and out of the classroom, can have a positive impact on student achievement if properly channeled. Moderate levels of meaningful and supervised television viewing may be better for children than too much or no viewing at all as stated by Thompson and Austin (Calvert, Kotler, Zehnder, & Shockey).

Other research also agreed that monitored television viewing is the key to supporting educational television. Television has a negative effect on the education of children when left unmonitored. As Clarke and Costes (1999 p.279-281) confirmed:

Correlation analyses with age and IQ co varied revealed that television viewing time was negatively related to school readiness, $r(\text{Signorielli}) = -.329$, indicating that children

who watched more television had poorer academic skills than their peers who watched less television.

Television can also be used to support academics within the classroom. Educational television can be used to enhance reading and language skills. For example, Saint Clair routinely uses the PBS show *Between the Lions*, in both kindergarten and first grade rooms. This show introduces a story in a library setting while other characters interact around the story. Saint Clair watches the show twice a week. After viewing episodes, the class reads books and introduces themes that tie into the program. The show is used as a tool that allows their students to enjoy active viewing but also incorporate themes and follow up activities in class. This program has become part of their classroom vocabulary as they play with words, letters and sounds. (Clair & Schwetz, 2003)

There is also a line of thinking which explores the perspective that television teaches children how to watch television. One program that has been studied in this context is *Blue's Clues*. This program is an interactive show in which the audience is called upon to help Blue, a dog, and Steve, his best friend, to put clues together and solve a mystery. The central question is whether experience with one television series can influence the way in which young children watch another (Crawley, et al., 2002). The study by Crawley and colleagues determined that it does.

In the present research we showed that experience with the whole series is also associated with systematic change in viewing behavior and comprehension. At least one aspect of this change, audience participation, may have transferred from *Blues*

Clues to an entirely different series, *Big Bag*. Experience with one television program, therefore, plausibly affects how children watch other programs. (p. 278.).

This suggests that audience participation is a learned behavior. Then watching television over time becomes an interactive experience. Can this interactive behavior influence children's motivation for learning in general? Baram-Tsabari and Yarden (Baram-Tsabari & Yarden) explored this question as they analyzed science and technology questions submitted by 1,676 Israeli children to a series of television programs. The television show addressed a number of questions submitted by children and answered them on location. The results suggested a distinct interest of the children in biology, astrophysics and technology. As a result the show became heavy in the sciences. This finding gives hope to broaden current television options and supports giving students more voice in curriculum development. When episodes addressed these areas, there was a higher viewing audience. This study also shows that education is not confined to the school walls. Television can offer opportunities for children to learn and broaden their perspectives and relationship with the world around them. The problem is that this rarely happens.

The choices that children have are so limited and filled with violence. The effects of television violence on children have been of particular concern. Many consider children to be more vulnerable than adults to the impact of the images on television and professionals have expressed concern that children are exposed to a great deal of television. (Larson,2003).

What Societal lessons are children learning from Television?

Television teaches children social lessons through plot, character and problem solving. Since children have a difficult time distinguishing fantasy from reality, it is easy to understand how they might be confused when seeing a super hero beating up a criminal is acceptable and yet that same behavior is not acceptable from them. Peters and Blumberg (Crawley, et al.) conclude programs that include these scenes send the message that violence is justified and inconsequential.

In recent years there have been many cartoons that focus on adult themes. Shows such as *South Park*, *The Simpsons*, *Daria* and *Family Guy* are made for an adult audience but many children watch them. Evidence for this comes from recent studies about children's media tastes. There was no single program named as favorite by more than a quarter of their sample of around 1,300 children. Diversity was greater among younger children: 103 different programs were mentioned by 6–8 year olds, with *The Simpsons* (Krcmar & Albada) and *EastEnders* (Krcmar & Albada) being the most frequently mentioned. (Davies, 2001, p. 62)

Most of the themes in these shows, children do not understand. For example shows such as *Family Guy* and *King of the Hill* present dysfunctional families who often belittle and discount each other. These shows are also shown during prime time. Since educational programs are not big money makers, producers tend to schedule them early in the morning or in spots which are not the normal viewing time (Simmons, Stalsworth, & Wentzel, 1999). This once again leads back to lack of quality programs to choose from.

Children also learn stereotypical behavior from television. Although there has been progress in recent years by adding female characters in dominant roles, many times these characters are submissive or hiding behind males to be creditable. Although research supports that character behavior is more important than gender. As Calvert, Kotler, Zehnder and Shockey (Calvert, et al.) concluded, girl characters such as Eliza Thornberry are well received by boys and girls when they are non-traditional in their actions. The implication is what characters do may be more important than their gender as a gauge of audience interest.

Summary

Educational television has been an issue for over four decades. Laws have been passed, regulations mandated and still there is little quality programming, especially for the children who do not have access to cable or satellite. The local station the central coast California, KSBW, is doing a mediocre job of fulfilling the FCC regulations. These regulations are so poorly worded that any program may be classified as educational as compared to *Kenny the Shark*. Certain educational shows have stood the test of time and have been airing for years. While exploring shows like *Bill Nye the Science Guy* and *Mr. Rogers* we can see that children respond to quality, educational programming if it is accessible to them. Educational television has the potential to support and educate children but repeatedly falls short. In the 21st century, television is here to stay. We have all grown up with it and it has become part of our daily culture.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The inspiration

Researching educational television for children has been a changing experience for me. The knowledge and information I gained was very inspiring and at the same time disturbing. As a result I was inspired to try to create my own television program. When I originally moved to the central coast I was enamored with all that it had to offer, natural beauty, the history as well as the unique communities that I grew to love. I felt that others would also like to learn about the diverse activities and places of interest here. This was the catalyst for asking the children to seek out local interests of their own community. I decided that I wanted it to be by children for children. While working this way I found out that it is more successful for children to have an adult to guide them along. There were high hopes for the children developing their own segments but I soon learned that they need support creating the program and putting together their segment. Unfortunately this was brought to my attention during the editing process.

I originally was filled with excitement and inspiration of how the final product would look and turn out. I did not realize at the time, all the steps that needed to be followed to be able to produce an episode like this. Although my final product is not the quality that I had envisioned, it is an accurate representation of what I think an

excellent, educational television program would look like. In this chapter, I describe what those steps were and what I learned along the way.

What would an educational and informational program look like?

The primary goal of this program is to provide children who do not have access to alternative broadcasting with a quality, educational program that they could participate in. I reflected upon the policies and rules of children's television and what the words "educational and informational programming" mean. The initial step in this process was to reflect on what I thought an interesting, educational television program would have. I came up with several ideas. I wanted the program to have only children on camera. I wanted to feature local places of interest for children to become knowledgeable about. My vision also included children traveling to these places and interacting with guides or docents who are working at the site chosen.

Participants of project

The participants of this project are children from the Montessori Learning Center, Spreckles, CA. Montessori Learning Center is a small, private school nestled in the Salinas Valley. I have a personal connection with these children and they seem to be comfortable with me. I did invite others to join in and encouraged the children to work with friends outside of school. In June at the end of the 2005/2006 school year, I

asked children to sign up for this project and to give me their phone numbers or e-mails. The list was surprisingly long. There were 14 children signed up. Three siblings attended other schools and expressed interest at the time but never returned any contact. Of the three children outside the school two returned contact but were unable to participate. No child outside of the school was able to participate in this project due to a number of factors including sports, school and family planned outings.

The interests of what they wanted to study were of great variety at this time. It ranged from rock groups to Alcatraz Island. All the children were confident and outgoing. Many had already preplanned to work together as a group. Out of the original fourteen, eight students participated. They ranged from 4th to 6th grade. All but one was in good academic standing and considered good students. The one child who was not in good academic standing, needed support when he was my student so I was familiar with his capabilities. Since I was a former teacher and a family friend this was not a concern of mine. I was confident that he could complete this project with support from his report partner who is a very strong student.

The demographics of the group varied. Some were from affluent families but two were on full scholarships at our school. One was from a single parent home. Their races were Anglo, Asian, Latino and African American. It was interesting to me that the children did not choose to research anything associated with their heritage and ties to the central coast. One child had a history of her grandfather being essential to reuniting families after the internment camps. One boy's family had been cattle ranchers since the mid 1800's. I was aware that they had knowledge of events such as

the internment camps or seasonal pickers through school studies. Their interests varied and I was pleased that since there was little adult involvement, the personality of each child came through.

Settings and locations filmed

The participants of this pilot are from the central west coast of California. They come from an area of farm country, seeped in history. The central Coast has several communities that are very diverse. Salinas is farm country. Home to the famous author, John Steinbeck and nicknamed named The Salad Bowl Capital of the World. Monterey, just west of Salinas, is a small fishing town. This city has many historical ties to early Californian government as well as to John Steinbeck from neighboring city, Salinas.

As I was researching the initial interests of the group I found that many places that I thought would be supportive were not as compliable as I had hoped. The Monterey Bay Aquarium did not allow any filming at all. I was informed that even the footage on the news was stock footage taken by their production company. Other places, that were historical buildings, informed me that I needed some sort of insurance to continue my project. Even the Del Monte Golf Course required insurance. When I inquired about the insurance I was surprised that it was \$2200.00 for four days. This took time to save for but in the end I decided to not include these buildings.

After I received word my proposal was approved, I gave Mr. Divine, the Jr. High teacher, a packet to give to all interested students in both Ms. Leyden's class, which is 4th, 5th and 6th graders, and his class of 7th and 8th graders. I contacted him a week later telling him I would like to meet with the children the following week. In the packet was a brief synopsis of the show and what would be expected of them. The packet contained samples of historical Monterey buildings to research and some thought questions to connect their significance to the community. I found out the day before I was to meet with the children that only the Jr. High students received the guides. When I arrived at lunch, I learned that the teachers were calling parents from school to arrange the children meeting with me to go over this project that same day. Since I have a relationship with these teachers as well as the families, several told me that when they found out that the letters did not get sent home, they felt that they needed to find a way that would allow me to film that weekend. I explained to them that one goal of this program is that children learn to like researching things they are interested in. I did not want the children to feel rushed in any way. I told the teachers and the children that we could meet after school to go over the packet and make sure that they understood the consent forms. I was very disappointed that this happened but it allotted me the time to have an overview meeting and briefly discuss the project with them. We arranged to meet in two weeks for the information meeting. All the children were very excited about participating. Several came to the meeting with research in hand and brought with them many great ideas. I stressed to both the

children and the teachers that it is important that the children do this project independently of adults unless they seek out the adults themselves.

In the end the groups decided to research The Steinbeck Center in Salinas California, a museum showcasing Steinbeck's life and work as well as the agricultural ties to the community. One group decided to focus on Colton Hall, a historical building in old town, Monterey. The last two groups reported on California's First Theater which still has live performances today and Cannery Row a colorful section of Monterey. I went to visit these locations to see what shots I wanted in were. I scheduled another meeting with the children to complete reports and filming of their sequences.

Expectations of the children

Each child was asked to write a report 's report had to meet guidelines of time and content. Originally, I had planned for the children to fill out a four page fill in the blank research paper and have the children help map out a storyboard. There were several reasons this did not work. One is that if the research paper were to be guided by me, the interests of the children were not represented. Another reason this did not work was, I did not realize how much effort and work goes into making a storyboard. When I attempted it, I found the process challenging. I decided to stick with a four paragraph report because most children are capable of completing a report this size independently. I met with the children after school and they each presented their report. I scanned the report then paired them in groups to read aloud to each other

and the group gave input to clarify anything confusing to those viewers that are not familiar with these places and the group also gave suggestions to the flow of the report. At this time we used the book *More Than Memories* (Reinstedt, 1985) as a back up and the children used it for supplemental information if something was not clear. I led the group and supported them while doing any rewrites. This took about 45 minutes for the group. The groups then made cue cards which were hand written on half of a standard size poster board. Each child copied their report on to these cue cards for each segment. This process took about 1 hour. I met with one student the next morning to help with his rewrites. I left asking the groups to meet and practice the cue cards that they wrote independent of me. Filming was scheduled to progress after I was approved through CSUMB.

While I was waiting to be approved I continued with my process to complete my project. Setting up contacts, writing ideas of what I wanted the show to look like. In the midst of this process I came to the question "Why do so many simple things become struggles with hidden obstacles? Do we create simplicity in order to take the plunge into the unknown?"

I reflected on Peggy Charren and her life's work. Inspired by the changes and developments she made with ground breaking shows like *Sesame Street*. So I went back to my research and followed the same model. First I decided on the curriculum I wanted to teach. I wanted to have the children connect with the community they live in. I decided that the best way to do this was to have them report on the history of the Monterey Bay area. I looked at the choices and soon saw that there were many

choices for the children. It also helped that many of the children were excited and brought information with them to the initial meeting.

I filmed over a two day span. The first day I filmed with the Steinbeck center and Cannery Row. I had hired a student cameraman to film at the Steinbeck Center. The filming at The Steinbeck Center took about 3 hours. That afternoon I filmed on Cannery Row. This filming took about 1 ½ hours. I selected areas that had already been picked out while visiting the location ahead of time. Each child said his or her segment twice. With the exception of the Steinbeck Center, students were shot from the front with a corresponding background. For example, while speaking about Doc Ricketts, the child was filmed in front of his laboratory.

Editing process

After gathering all of the footage I bought the program *Nero* to assist me with the editing. After working on the project for quite some time, I showed it to several people including three children between the ages of 6-10. I was disappointed at the reaction to the viewing. I could see the boredom across their faces creeping into my soul. Yawns spoke to my lack of ability to create a cohesive unit that spoke to the children or anyone. This is when I decided that a professional production company was needed.

I contacted several companies and decided on the least expensive. Atlantic Editing, a video production company. Owned and operated by Suzanne Holmquist, Atlantic Editing uses a Avid high end editing software. This type of software is standard for the industry. This was the best thing I did for my project. We met three times and it took approximately 36 hours for her to complete. Upon editing, I learned that I needed to have an adult narrator or guide to tie the sequences together. So I reshot myself in the gardens for an introduction and then narrated over the segments to link the ideas into a cohesive pilot.

Chapter 4

See *Kid's Community Corner* pilot episode

Chapter 5

Discussion, Action Plan

Upon exploring the history of television I gained a better understanding of how we got to where we are. Grass roots organizations have been fighting for quality, educational television for decades. It was not until the mid 90's that a clear law was passed outlining specific requirements for broadcasters to follow concerning educational television for children. Even with this the overall quality of children's educational television is lacking. Although it is mandated by the law, children are still not getting quality, educational and informational television. Public Law 101-437, the Children's Television Act (CTA), was designed to better inform the public about how broadcasters fulfill their obligation to air programming that will serve the informational and educational needs of children. It also forces broadcasters to show the public how they fulfill this requirement. The term "core programming" was defined and broadcasters were provided better guidelines as to how a program can be "specifically designed" to teach and inform children. This law also gives broadcasters specific support as to how they can comply with the CTA and how to process their license renewal applications.

The commission adopted a process where in order to receive staff level approval of its renewal application, a broadcaster must air "core programming" at least three hours per week or if the broadcaster airs less than three hours of "core programming" a week they must demonstrate a comparable level of dedication to educating children. These hours of educational and informational regularly scheduled programs must be between 7:00am and 10:00 PM. They must also tell why these programs are educational and informational by submitting a report (FCC, 1990).

Upon researching, I learned broadcasters buy "package" programming from larger affiliates to meet the federal standards. Although these are great strides in mandating educational television, there still is a chasm of wiggle room left open to interpretation as to what educational and informational means. I have read these reports and what is considered "educational and informational" to the broadcasters is not very educational and informational to me. In reviewing the law I feel that there should be more stringent regulations put on the times and age appropriate shows should be looked into. At this point in time, my local station, KSBW, offers mediocre television to the children.

I do not feel that this law has made a significant difference in the programming of children's television. The broadcasters follow the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law. Many shows are categorized as "educational and informational" by means of social lessons. Yet, when one takes the time to look at the social lessons presented to the children, characters are really rude, mean and choosing unacceptable behavior on a

weekly basis although these social problems are worked out within the half hour program only to arise again the following week.

As a result of exploring this subject I was inspired to reflect on what I would consider an educational and informational television show, and to create an example of an excellent children's television program. I began to look at how I thought television could enhance in a child's life. I came to the conclusion that children often take where they live for granted, forgetting all that their community has to offer. I thought it would be a good idea to allow children to talk about the unique places in their community. I had planned for any student to be able to write me and participate. I looked to what the children were doing in their class and decided to model my segments after what the requirements would be for a five minute oral report. My original vision was to create a show where only children were on camera and the show was created by the children about special things in their community. In reality, this did not work out. Children need guidance and support. For my show I learned that an adult could connect the segments together to create a flow throughout the show.

I also had to contend with the parents while producing this show. One of the main premises of the show was for the children's segments to be done independently of the family. This was because I wanted all children to have access to this program, even those children who do not have a lot of parental support. I believe if a child is interested in what he or she is reporting on he or she will be more likely to finish the report independently, which is one of my goals.

The first step I took was to ask the children's interests and most of them chose historical locations. After making preliminary contacts with these locations, I ran into several obstacles. Some chose locations which could not be used due to insurance or access problems. One of the examples of this is the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Four children were not able to participate due to facility conflicts of money and policy. The aquarium required using in house crew and stock footage to be used and also were hesitant to have children filming on the premises. The second facility, Del Monte Golf Course, required insurance for the children and me to film on the premises. Del Monte was very supportive in helping me get their segment filmed but it didn't work out due to the cost of the insurance. Lastly, Customs House in Monterey not only required insurance but we needed to film when during the hours it was closed and a special liaison was needed to be present. The frustrating part was that the liaison was only available on specific dates which did not coincide with the dates the Customs House was closed. . I had thought the community would be more willing to support this project than it was. It brought to light that in the future, I would need to research the requirements of filming on site before giving the children an answer. This made me think that I might provide a forum for children to express their interest and I could take time to research the places of interest.

Also, it seems that having insurance is a cost I did not plan on and may be an ongoing requirement when I get to a point of producing this show on a regular basis. I would need to include this expense with any grants I am writing. A second hidden cost is the use of period pictures. Pat Hathaway, from California Views Historical Photos on

Pacific Street in Monterey, has given permission to use his photos for my MAE project only. The cost is \$25.00 per photo and if I receive funding for any future broadcasting, the price would be renegotiated.

In light of all this I decided to film in public places where I would not need insurance or permission. When planning for future episodes, I will plan to budget for costs I did not think of. This experience also showed me to seek out the people who will support your project; The Steinbeck Center was so compliant to any request. I also will take the time to contact the location before speaking to the children, so when I meet with the children I have an answer if filming will be possible.

I am submitting this pilot episode to the local television station KSBW, located in Salinas, California. I am hoping they will air all or part of it. I am planning to create a Facebook page to allow children to submit ideas for the show. This would be another challenge since I am not familiar with how to navigate Face book.

In the future I would also like to use this pilot to receive funding through grants. I am currently researching grants and learning how to write a compelling grant to be accepted. Although there is money out there for funding I have found the time constriction to be a factor. I am currently writing a grant for the National Endowment of the Arts. The deadline is June 11, 2009; he project would begin June 2010.

The journey of creating a children's television program has been a great learning experience. I can now better understand why money plays such a huge role in determining what is to broadcast. If someone is inspired to create a show in the future,

I am proof that it can be done with clear vision, a good editor and lots of passion to keep you going. The first thing to do is sit down and clearly map out or storyboard out your vision. Not enough can be said of the hours this would save you in the long run. I would suggest, try to remember that even though this is your vision now, it may change and morph into something else as you proceed with it. The next step for me was to reach out to the participants of your show. In this case it was the children and their families. If you are working with children it is important to know their limits and how they may need support. If you are doing a puppet or animation program, this would entail constructing characters and deciding on not only names but roles these characters would play in the program.

The most difficult part of the process for me was to just do it. I bought a camera and found that filming was not as difficult as I thought. There will always be obstacles in artistic endeavors, but to overcome them is the real work. I have found this is the nature of the beast when creating educational programming. The challenge is to keep the intent of being educational without compromising the program and your vision in the process.

The best advice I have for anyone who is interested in this type of journey, is to believe you will succeed and trudge on. I say this because you will succeed if you continue to grow and change with the problems that will arise. It was inspiring to me to look back on the advocates that inspired me such as Peggy Charren. When I was at the end of my rope, I would look to her story for guidance and inspiration.

The only certain future for children's television shows is that they are here to stay. With choices of digital and cable television children without alternative broadcasting will continue to have limited, quality programming. There are advocate groups who act as the watchdog of children's programming but there has been little legal progress supporting children's educational television. Innovative shows such as *Between the Lions* offer quality programming but these shows are few for the homes without alternative broadcasting. My conclusion to this process is that it is possible to have quality, engaging television programming but it is difficult to produce. I am creating the programming I think will make a difference to children and that is open to all children.

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