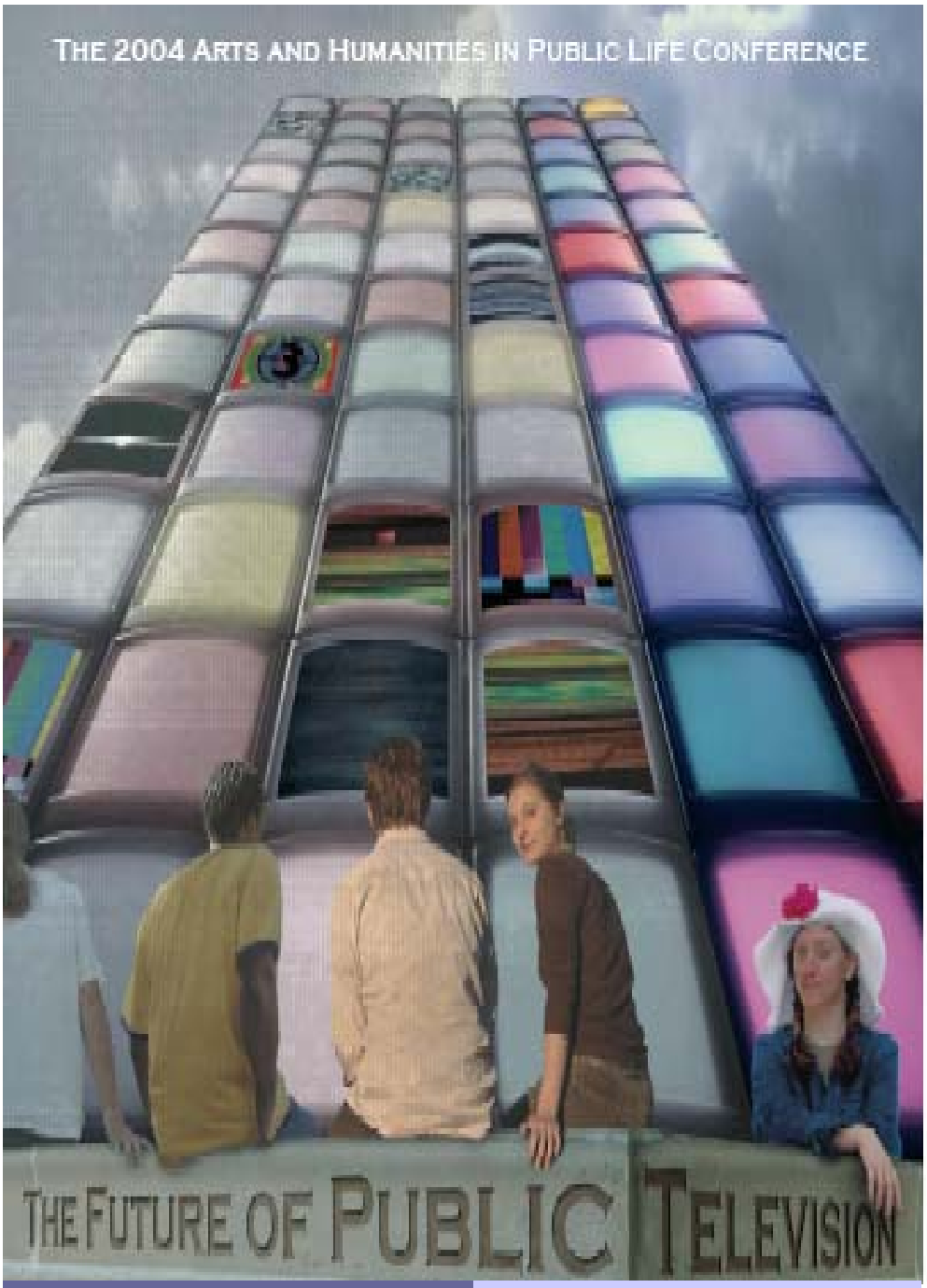

The Future of Public Television

Presented by:
Cultural Policy Center
The Harris School of Public Policy
The University of Chicago

Transcript
Day Two, Session Three:
Public Television for Kids: Views from the Academy
December 3, 2004

Carroll Joynes We're going to go ahead, and I need to introduce the chair of our next panel on children's television.

Cybele Raver is a colleague of mine at the Harris School of Public Policy Studies. She is, one, a huge pleasure to work with. She is a kind of model colleague, but she's more pertinent to this particular session. She's ideally suited for this panel, being a developmental child psychologist with a doctoral degree from Yale. She taught at Cornell, then came to the University of Chicago, where we were very lucky to have her join the faculty at the Harris School.

When I talked to Cybele earlier about this panel as part of the future of public television conference, I asked her to suggest the people who are doing the most exciting and important research on the impact of television on children. She immediately responded, "I know those people." There are, I'm sure, a number of people working on this subject across the country and around the world, but we've got some of the very best people here.

Sadly, Monique Ward, who we have been in close correspondence with, at the University of Michigan, had a very terrible personal tragedy, and she had to cancel at the last moment. So we are deeply sad for her and what she's going through right now, and we're going to miss her presentation. So we are sadly down to two, but I am told that we will try to make up some of the comments that she would have made in the other two presentations, that her point of view will be represented here today.

So just a couple of words about Cybele's specific work, and it related very much to Irving Harris and his ongoing influence. Irving set up the Center for Human Potential and Public Policy at the Harris School of Public Policy Studies. So Irving just doesn't stop. This is a wonderful director for this program. She has hit the ground running. She has been able to get numerous grants and one particularly large one, so when I see her, she almost always seems to be flying through the halls, her feet not touching the floor, because she's moving so fast, with an army of research assistants. But she never doesn't smile, and she's a pleasure to listen to and work with, and I've already learned a great deal from her.

Her own work is on the well-being of children and families, and she has placed particular emphasis on predicting the success and the difficulties that children living in poverty experience, and she has worked on models measuring poverty, effectiveness of parenting and school readiness for white as well as ethnic minority children.

Cybele Raver.

Cybele Raver Thank you very much. It's really a pleasure to be here. Last night I was really struck by something Ken Auletta said, that the journalist's role is to quote, parse false claims from the truth. I thought wow. I don't know the psychologists take on quite that mantel. I think we take on a slightly different job. Generally I think research psychologists are really committed to figuring out whether a particular claim has any evidence to support it. And when we talk about children, people often make claims that something is bad or good for children and that we should support something because it's good for children, and we should condemn something else because it's bad for children.

I'm really pleased to introduce two speakers who will have a lot to say, I think, wonderful things to say, about how we can evaluate that evidence, what the evidence has to say on those claims, particularly because television and because public television is often spoken about in terms of its benefits for children or its costs to children.

With that, I'll go ahead and introduce Dale Kunkel. He's currently a professor of communication at the University of Arizona. Interestingly, he received his Ph.D. from the Annenberg School of Communication, and that's actually where Deb Linebarger is currently a professor, so that's a nice connection there.

Kunkel is considered an expert on children's media policy and has delivered invited testimony at hearings before the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, and Federal Communications Commission. I think what is really important to know is that Kunkel just

recently spent five years conducting the national television violence study, which is widely known as one of the largest systematically clear studies on 10,000 television programs that really has weighed in on the impact of television on children. He will be speaking first.

Deborah Linebarger is assistant professor currently at the Annenberg School, as I mentioned earlier. I recently became aware of her work when I was teaching courses on children's school readiness and was particularly moved by her work on, specifically, how television could be used to support young children's literacy and learning.

Her work is focused on describing the effects of early and concurrent television viewing on adolescent academic and social outcomes, not just for young children. She has won a number of different contracts to evaluate new television programs, including *Between the Lions* and *Dora the Explorer*.

So I think we have a lot to learn from both speakers. I'd like to welcome you both.

Dale Kunkel Thank you. I didn't really watch the 10,000 television programs. If I did, I probably couldn't speak to you today.

What I'm going to do today is try to provide some background that is drawn largely from some very applied perspectives in terms of commercial competition that public broadcasting faces as well as the policy environment that shapes both the commercial broadcast as well as the noncommercial broadcast programs available for children. But before getting to those comments that hopefully will help us think about the future of public broadcasting for kids, what I'd like to do is start out by just giving a little foundation in terms of some recent evidence on children's media use.

It's not quite a full-time job, but nearly that, the amount of time that children spend interacting with media. You can see across all age groups, it's an average of about five and a half hours per day that is spent with media. You can also see from this figure that there are some very

interesting age differences, a little bit of gender differences, and also some ethnic differences.

Those ethnic differences are grounded in socioeconomic status differences that are correlated here. More specifically, children from more affluent families tend to watch less television, and then children from lower SES families tend to watch more. That has important implications for educational programming because of the needs of those children in those lower SES homes.

I think good news for public television is that even though we're in a media environment where there is so much competition from the Internet and new technologies, this pie figure shows very clearly that television still dominates children's media use. In fact, by the time a first-grader begins school, that first-grader has spent the same amount of time watching television as they would spend in three full school years.

So that underscores just the time and the impact that television is making on young people, particularly at young ages, because until the early school years, you don't have access to text quite so readily, and therefore the young children are relying upon audiovisual media for much of their learning through media.

This is a slide that I just find fascinating. There is one data point that I want you to focus on here, and it's in the very middle. This shows how media are migrating to the child's bedroom. And the data point that I'm most interested in, it's not a surprise that most children have a radio or a tape player in their bedroom. But it is, I think, very compelling that over half of all children now have a television set in the bedroom. That figure is about one in four at age 7, so that makes clear that media use is not something that a parent is always going to be there supervising. The parent can't be with the child in the bedroom at all times.

Then this final slide that I'll share with this as background shows that TV dominates home life so much so that in over half of the homes in the U.S., TV is on during meals, TV is on most of the time, and not surprising, there aren't a lot of set rules in most homes for TV viewing.

Now, with that as background or context, it shouldn't surprise you that policymakers are very interested in trying to maximize television's potential to help educate and inform young children.

I want to give a little bit of a background here because public television has an exemplary track record in providing educational programming for children, but commercial broadcasters have a much different track record. In fact, in the absence of much economic incentive to provide educational programming for children, there hasn't been much, and what there has been has not been very effective, very worthwhile.

So very quickly then, the next slide that I have here allows me just to give you a quick overview of the way in which policymakers have tried to encourage commercial broadcasters to air educational programming for children. In 1974 the FCC adopted a policy statement that had great rhetoric. When I teach it in my class, the students' eyes all get so big and wide because they say, gee, they asked for all of the right things.

They said we need more age-specific programming. The commission actually recognized the principle that just like you can't teach all children to read from one book, you must have grade-specific textbooks that they learn from. They said they recognize that television is actually the same. To use television as an effective educational tool, you have to target narrow segments of the audience because these different ages of children have different needs, different information processing capabilities and so on.

All this was called for in 1974, but they were not formal rules that required this type of programming. They just implored the broadcasting industry to do this. They never enforced these rules. In fact, in 1984, in the midst of the Reagan Administration, the FCC abandoned these policies. This new policy framework has huge implications for public television because in 1984 when the FCC deregulated these early policies, they said we don't need to ask every commercial broadcast station to air educational programming for children because there's no shortage in the marketplace of this type of material if you consider public television, if you consider videotapes sales and video cassette rentals and satellite programming and cable

programming, which was starting to become more prominent.

So their idea was if it's in the marketplace, we don't have to have every station air it. If that policy remained the same today, I dare say that you would have more resources from the federal government because it would have fallen squarely and primarily on the shoulders of public broadcasting to deliver educational programming to children. But in fact, that was a policy that was reversed by the Congress in 1990 when they adopted the Children's Television Act.

It makes perfect sense that they did this. When they adopted the Children's Television Act, what they wanted to do was underscore that each commercial broadcast licensee was operating on the publicly owned airwaves and that it was their responsibility to serve their community and their community's children, and the children in that community would be better served by having all broadcasters providing educational programming, not just one source. So that statue is really the basic framework of educational programming requirements on television. The statute, by the way, does apply to public television, although it remains somewhat transparent in a way I'll describe in just a moment.

The Children's Television Act requires that each station provide educational programming, and the current benchmark according to the FCC is that there must be a minimum of three hours per week. Now, that's inconsequential for public broadcasting because your area, most stations are airing more than three hours a day. As you're probably aware, commercial broadcasters are barely meeting that three-hour standard per week.

The issue here isn't so much in quantity, but in quality. You no doubt have heard stories about how commercial stations claim that *The Jetsons* is educational because it teaches about new technologies. *The Flintstones* is educational because it teaches important history lessons. One of the ways that the FCC tried to combat that situation was to require that stations, when they air educational programming, that they label it in much the same way that programs are labeled with V Chip ratings, TV-G, TV-PG, and so forth.

The FCC requires that the programs on commercial stations must be labeled EI for Educational Informational. Now, you may be scratching your head, even though many of you work in the television industry, certainly you all closely follow the television industry. How many of you know about this EI rating? I want to see hands. How many of you are familiar with this?

That's pretty much the same proportion of American parents. About 14 percent, or 1 out of 7, American parents know about this rating. Six out of 7 do not. That has some implications I'm going to get to in just a moment. But this is the current state of law. It was established in the FCC's rules implementing these policies.

One other twist, and unless you're a policy wonk you won't have heard about this, but there was an option in the Children's Television Act. If commercial broadcasters wanted to, they could instead of airing educational programming on their station, they could provide financial resources to another station in their market that would air educational programming for children.

Now, everyone in Washington knew exactly what that meant. That meant that a commercial station could give money to a noncommercial station. They could not do that to support existing children's programming, but they could or indeed still can do that if it would increase the amount of educational programming on the air in that community. That's referred to euphemistically as "pay or play." You either pay the other station or you play by putting on the content.

Nothing has ever come of this. I think there are some interesting reasons why we might discuss, but I'm not going to stop here. I'm going to keep moving forward so we can get to the more important points here. But I think that's an interesting option that has not been pursued. It's on the books in the current policies.

All of this is relatively transparent on public television. One of the reasons that 6 out of 7 parents don't know what EI programs are is because public television does not label its educational programming for children with EI. They don't do that because the FCC did not require them to do that. That's going to change very shortly.

In fact, what I want to focus on next here is a recent FCC ruling -– so recent, although it was adopted in September, the text and the details of the rules were just released about a week ago. You're probably aware that television is moving to this digital format, and this digital format has big implications for the way in which your signals are going to be delivered to the public, and the FCC issued a notice of proposed rulemaking to establish new policies for children's educational programming in this digital environment.

What does it mean if a station multicasts? I don't know how familiar everyone is, but during this transition period, as we're moving to the digital environment, television stations now have the opportunity to multicast when they are not using the expanded bandwidth to deliver either high definition or interactive services.

Of course, the reason they don't do it is it's a chicken-or-egg question. You don't have many people in the audience who have that reception capability, so you say why do I want to go and transmit all the high definition all the time or interactive features all the time if that's not going to reach many people. Conversely, people in the audience say why do I want to buy a TV with all those features when it costs a lot of money if they are not giving me that service all the time. So this is a difficult and complicated issue.

In this transition phase, stations can air up to six analog channels, and many stations will choose to air six analog channels that can be received by those with digital receivers. It also implicates big policy questions in terms of must carry and whether those signals will be retransmitted by your local cable systems. Again, I'm sorry, I don't have time to go into that. But multicasting will become commonplace.

What happens if a station increases its transmission of television signals to the point where they are delivering six times the programming? Do they still only have to do three hours a week for kids or can they do more? I'm sorry, must they do more. The commission has said that they will apply the three-hour requirement in commensurate fashion or proportional fashion. So if your

channel on-air time doubles, you'd have six hours a week. If it triples, you'd have nine hours and so forth.

Now, why that matters is as commercial stations, your competition, begin to multicast, they are going to have more EI obligations. And one of the ways they are likely to try to meet that obligation is to stream an all-kids channel. In fact, a major production company, DIC, a children's production company, DIC is trying to get stations to agree to an all-kids stream or like half a day kids stream on commercial stations. You're going to be facing more competition from commercial broadcasting of the child audience because of that. They are going to be claiming that these are educational shows, just like the educational shows that your public station offers.

Here's a twist that may surprise you. The commission has just issued last week a formal ruling that says that all educational shows, whether they are on commercial or noncommercial stations, must have that EI label. So that means *Sesame Street* now must have an EI label. All of your children's educational programming has to have an EI label. That's going to hopefully accomplish several things.

One of the things is that it may attract more attention to your educational children's programming. Another is, the way I view it, is it's going to put pressure on the commercial broadcasters because as the parents say, "Oh, I get it. EI is *Sesame Street*. EI is *Between the Lions*. EI is *Clifford the Big Red Dog* and all these good shows for kids." But then why isn't *Ace Lightning*, this is a violent videogame, that doesn't seem like EI to me. And that's where the FCC would like to see this go, where parents are the ones who are challenging the quality of some of these questionable educational claims on commercial stations.

So that's the policy environment. I want to say one more thing about the technology environment, which is also made possible by the transition into digital, and that's the move to interactivity. Interactivity means that you can have the audience member respond to the programming in some way that affects the programming.

Or it could mean, in fact, it's literally technically possible now so that if the broadcaster wanted to embed a hot link in a program, and you had a Web connection on your TV set, which many people now have, more soon will have, then you could jump immediately from that hot link that's embedded in the program to learn more about whatever it is the program is addressing. So let's say that it's a National Geographic documentary on dinosaurs, and then you hit the hot link and you go to a Web site that teaches you more about dinosaurs, lets you get more information about it and so forth.

No question that can be an enhancement to the educational value of a program. The biggest worry that it raises, though, is that that technology will be used to commercially exploit children rather than to enhance their education. So that's going to be quite a controversy that's coming up here on the horizon in terms of kids and media policy.

The FCC has issued some preliminary rulings in this recent decision, and one of them is -- and this will take effect very shortly, and it will impact the PBS Web site -- so one of them is that you cannot have a Web site referenced on television. The FCC cannot regulate the Web, but it can regulate broadcasting and the promotion of the Web.

So what this policy says is you cannot have to PBS.kids on your PBS children's show if you have host selling on that Web site. Host selling is using a program character to promote a product, to advertise and promote your commercial services.

So this is going to be implemented, but the bigger issue is can you have hot links from your program to a commercial Web site. There are a lot of child advocacy groups that are pushing to not allow that. There are a lot of broadcast industry and commercial interests pushing to allow that, and they use the argument that, well, we don't want to restrict the educational potential of the medium.

The FCC has issues a very tentative and preliminary decision here that they will not allow these hot links unless parents opt in. It would require the parent to actually convey some sort of

formal consent, and I'm not sure to whom, nor is the FCC, and that's why they are putting this out for public comment. So it will be coming together over the next several months to try to see if they can come up with a framework to implement that.

There's one more thing before I try and bring this all together. The other thing, I assume -- I'm sorry, my travel didn't allow me to get here in time to hear Pat Mitchell's presentation yesterday - but I believe she mentioned that at least briefly the fact that PBS has now committed to a new partnership with Sesame Workshop and Comcast.

Comcast is probably the most significant partner here because they are going to make sure that there is some real audience reach here, but this is a new children's channel that will be launching next fall, and it will be taking a lot of the PBS children stock and getting it out there, and of course that presents a controversy because there will be commercials, although not child-targeted. This would be something similar to what you might see –- Sesame Workshop does not allow ads of their products that are targeted to children.

So if you think about it, you've never seen an Elmo ad on children's programming, but where you do see them, especially at Christmastime, is on the *Tonight Show*, where you know that you're very unlikely to have a young child audience, and they are telling you to buy Elmo dolls for your kids, that's the same type of ad that will be on this channel, at least as it's being publicized currently. Not targeting child audiences, I don't know how that will work because children will be the primary audience.

But the real question here is the political sensitivities, is that some people say this is creating revenue-seeking and will get PBS very important financial foundation. Other people will say that they are worried that Congress will criticize you for being off the mission and that you shouldn't be engaged in putting programs on the air that were funded by PBS, CPB, and so on in a commercial context.

So to bring this all together, it seems very clear that you're already facing competition from

Nick, from Disney, from Noggin, and now you're going to have more competition from commercial broadcasting. You're going to have more competition from a cable channel that's re-airing some of the public broadcasting kids shows. You're going to have to dig in and have a higher profile for children's programming on PBS in order to compete successfully.

The way that I see educational programming for kids on PBS evolving is as a huge strength. There is going to be more attention to educational programming and the quality of educational programming for kids in the next year or two than there has been in a long time because there is going to be a debate and a controversy as the public becomes familiar with this EI label and they begin to question whether it's being applied accurately.

I think PBS needs to step up and say we're the benchmark and to document the value of their programming. Deb Linebarger in just a minute is going to talk about how the educational impact of these programs is documented by research as well as how it's not a coincidence; it's accomplished because of formative research.

Then the final point is I think there is a tremendous opportunity for PBS to take the lead with an interactive children's show that successfully steers clear of the concerns about commercial exploitation. If you do that, you will be the first in the industry to do this, and then that would sort of reestablish PBS as the leader in educational programming for children.

So that's the comments I have in terms of the policy and technology environment, and I look forward to your comments and an opportunity to discuss in a little bit.

Cybele Raver Great, Dale, thank you so much. Now I'm going to turn it over to Deb Linebarger.

Deb Linebarger Thank you.

So to echo Dale's comments, I heard Dale's comments about how important the quality of what

you're putting on air is, and offer a systematic way to do that, to be the leaders in providing quality educational programming for kids. So I want to talk about how some shows have been very successful at this and how you might be able to replicate that.

In terms of my own background, my primary areas of research tend to be in the cognitive domain; attention, comprehension, language and literacy, and I do a couple of different things. I look at things from a microlevel so that I can identify those basic features that attract and sustain attention and subsequently assist in comprehension and learning. The way that I do that is through this really cool equipment I have that tracks kids' eye movements so I can see exactly where they are looking on screen and relate that to what they are learning or what they are missing.

So, for instance, in a show that has a lot of print onscreen, do the kids look at the print or are they looking at the whirling tornado in the background. Nine times out of ten they are looking at the whirling thing in the background. So how can we focus kids' attention to the important stuff.

The other kinds of things I do are at a more macro level where we look at taking programs out into the field and using them in an intervention context in order to help kids who are at risk for whatever reason, English language learners or socioeconomic disadvantage, to get them this free and universally available technology on PBS. Right now I'm doing a project in New Mexico on 12 different American Indian reservations to improve English language literacy via *Between the Lions*. Based on their successful research models, I'm proposing that if you do want to compete and be the gold standard, this is the way you should go about it.

My primary programmatic goal in all the research I do is to provide immediately useful research rather than the kind you stick up on the shelf that no one ever looks at, and to help inform program development that supports learning and is liked by kids, because it doesn't matter how good your learning goals are if kids don't like it or if they have the perception that PBS is for little kids, they are not going to pay attention to it.

So what kinds of perceptions do people have, especially parents who are probably at least early on going to make choices about what their kids view? Well, parents and educators maintain that the perception on PBS is it's a safe place for kids. So it is a little bit troubling for me to hear that there is going to be a channel that will have advertisements on it. There is some controversy about the little interstitials you have between programs. Juicy Juice is a sponsor of a show, Cheerios is a sponsor of a show, but I can live with that, I think.

Another issue is the selection of the programs that go on PBS; this is absolutely critical. So right now there are programs that air on PBS for kids that don't have research evidence documenting positive outcomes, and you could argue with me that wasn't the goal putting the program on. The goal was to get a viewer audience going, and that sort of thing.

Well, if we believe PBS is the place where kids go because it's a safe environment and it provides quality educational programming, then what we're putting on there should be quality and educational. So there is independent research currently on some of the shows that have been airing that question the ability of those shows to support kids' learning, and I can provide some examples as we go along.

So what can public television do? It can help maintain children's safe place. It can expose them to a wide variety of educational experiences from literacy to language to social programming to science, math, etc. It can serve the needs of those kids, especially who would otherwise lack other opportunities for educational redundancies. So these are the kids who tend to have fewer opportunities for informal literacy experiences in their home, probably because of a lack of financial resources.

When *Sesame Street* was created back in 1969, it was because it was to meet the needs of low-income families who didn't have these kinds of opportunities in order to prepare them to be ready for school. So I think people still have that perception of children's programming.

I'd like to present a model that others in the industry can use or adapt, and I think PBS does that

when creating children's programming. So for instance, *Sesame Street* has a very strong model in creating its product, and Nick, Jr. has taken that model and been very successful with *Blues Clues* and *Dora the Explorer.*

That model encompasses taking developmental experts, creating a curriculum, and trying those things out in the field and seeing if they actually work or not, and then putting the program together, and then evaluating it after the program is put together. So if you're using that kind of model, it's a much stronger way to say yes, we do have quality programming.

Sort of a final plug for making decisions about what programming is put on the air, I know it's done individually at each station, but occasionally or more than occasionally happens programs are put on the air when the most appropriate audience is least likely to see it. So a program like *Between the Lions* airs at 1:00 in the afternoon when kindergarten and first-grade children are in school, and they can't watch it, and they are the audience that benefits the most from it. So that's a really big issue. If the kids aren't there to see it, they are not going to benefit from it. Trying to get schools to show this can be a whole nother issue and problem to deal with.

So how should PBS maintain their reputation as a safe place and a quality place for kids? Well, you need to select or fund or produce shows that have a prespecified curricula, not something where I've had people come to me and say, "Hey, I've got this show. Can you tell me what the curriculum is?" No. That's something that starts before you start to create the show.

You also need to provide research evidence of the product's effectiveness. You need to plan that ahead of time. You need to complete that. I'm going to outline that in a little bit in more detail. You also need to have a combination of educational content, but also it needs to have an interesting or appealing narrative.

So you have to really have both, and they have to be well integrated. Shalom Fisch, a former executive at Sesame Workshop, has a great model of educational television where you actually learn more of the content when the distance between the content and the appeal or the narrative

is much closer because then it's not necessarily apparent to the kids that they are learning and they actually enjoy it more.

There also needs to be plans for outreach programs and materials. I think one of the leaders in this area is WGBH in Boston and the things that they do with their programs like *Arthur* and *Between the Lions* and now *Postcards from Buster*. They really have a substantial, vested interest in producing materials that supplement the programs that they put on air.

So how do you incorporate research into this process? Well, in the development phase, when you're putting together a program, you want to use experts to help you shape developmentally appropriate curricula. What I thought I might do after I go through this stuff is show you some case studies where it's been very successful.

Formative research involves the stuff you're doing while you're producing the show itself. It's not after it's created and on air. It's actually during the production process. You examine pilot episodes or you take each little segment out into the field and you try that with kids and you see if they like it.

For example, from *Sesame Street* they had the letter J and they were trying to get kids to pay attention to the J. Well, all these things were dancing in the background behind the letter J and no one paid attention to the letter J when that was the focus of the episode. So if you actually tested that out beforehand, you would know that, rather than wait until actually goes out in the field and then you find that, you're not meeting your learning outcomes. It makes the production of these shows more expensive, but I think in the long run it makes them much better programs.

Summative research refers to you've done all this formative research, you've had the experts in the development phase, now you want to know, "did my first season meet its specified goals?" So you go out and you do an evaluation of that, and you can use those results to immediately retool the program to meet the goals if it's not or you can keep going on the track that you're

going.

Finally, the outreach phase is how can we scale up the use of this program to help reach a wider audience. A couple of the programs I'm involved with now, we've done outreach and intervention work in Mississippi on the Choctaw Indian reservation in the Delta region, which is a very poor area of Mississippi, as well, as the American Indian project I discussed in New Mexico.

Also, is the program more effective when you do combine outreach with it. Typically yes, but you also want to make sure that those materials that you develop are also done in such a way that with as much emphasis placed on that as the show itself.

So here's the case study with *Sesame Street*. I think we would all agree that that's probably the gold standard for educational television. Their development phase, they have a comprehensive curriculum. It covers a wide variety of areas, but initially each year there tends to be a focus or like a multiyear focus. So, the most recent one is the thinking child, and that's been going on for a couple of years.

Each year they bring in experts to talk about and meet with their writers and producers to help them craft these messages. They have a formative phase where they actually go out and test out these segments with the kids, make sure they work, make sure the kids understand them. There has been a ton of summative research both commissioned by the workshop and just done independently to say whether or not *Sesame Street* works. For the most part, pretty much everything says yes, it is a successful problem.

Within that summative and formative research, they have done a new lead design of the show that began airing in the 2001 season. Usually shows don't stay on the air this long. *Sesame Street* debuted on the year I was born, and it's still going strong, so I think that's a wonderful model of a successful program, and other shows have adopted that.

They have an extensive outreach department as well. They have a preschool educational program where they go in and train educational childcare providers. They also do multiple other outreach efforts where they license their characters and shows out. For instance, the Anti-Defamation League has an antibias curriculum that they've done using the *Sesame Street* characters. They also do extensive coproductions around the world. In South Africa there is a curriculum based on the high rate of HIV infection. They have a Muppet who is HIV-positive.

The next case study is *Between the Lions*. It's a show produced by WGBH and Serious Thinking. This show is targeted toward literacy skills, early literacy skills, primarily preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. They brought in national experts who were diametrically opposed in their approach to reading instruction, phonics versus whole language. They managed to get them to talk together, and they came back with this great big wonderful curriculum that incorporates both features.

In their formative phase, they did two pilot episodes, tested those out, found that they worked, sent me those tapes to take a look at. They wanted me to do their summative evaluation of the first season. I must say, I was mildly hesitant. They do a lot of word morphs, which means they show the root word like truck, and then the TR drops off, and an M falls down that says muck, and then the M goes away and it's duck.

My son happened to be the appropriate age to watch the show, and he leaned over and substituted an expletive. I thought, do I say you've got the concept or do I worry that they are teaching inappropriate content, but I went with the "That's great, you understand phonics. That's wonderful." Until he went to kindergarten and spelled it for his friends. I got a call from the teacher.

Nevertheless, I did do the evaluation and found that it dramatically increases scores of kids who are at risk for reading failure. From that summative phase, they've gone out and created ancillary materials in terms of outreach things. They've done a project in Mississippi that was successful with Choctaw Indian children and with African American children on the delta, and

we are currently in the field finishing up our Wave 1 data collection on 12 different Indian reservations in New Mexico. So that's a very exciting project, and that's a wonderful example of what can be done when you use research in the process.

Our season 1 results show that first-graders didn't really benefit too much from the show, so they beefed up the curriculum for first-graders. So that's why research is absolutely vitally important in this process.

There's a new show that's going to take advantage of digital technology that is being rolled out that is being done by Kansas City Public Television called *Bark Park Place*. The idea is that it's going to have all these digital enhancements along with the traditional show. In the development phase they, too, use this model of bringing in an advisory board and forming the curriculum. And as we speak, my graduate students are out in the field testing this right now. I've had many frantic calls because we just started data collection yesterday. So I don't know yet how this is going to do. But so far the kids seem to like it.

The final two shows I want to talk about are actually *Blues Clues* and *Dora the Explorer*. They air on Nick Jr.'s preschool lineup. The reason I want to talk about them is because they use the *Sesame Street* model and have been incredibly successful commercially. Kids absolutely love these two shows. It really revolutionized the way kids watch television.

In terms of the amount -- I don't know how many of you have actually seen this program, but the onscreen characters actively solicit audience participation. So kids talk back to the television. In terms of static television, not digital television, but static television, this is probably the most interactive that you can get with kids.

They have an in-house research staff for both programs. They are Ph.D.-level researchers that work on these shows. Every single segment is tested at least three times in the field. Their educational consultant is a well-respected developmental psychologist in this area. He really helped formulate what was going on. They've done formative work, extensive formative work.

They've done summative evaluation, several of them. Their outreach is a little left to be desired. They do have a lot of products that go with these two shows. There is a little bit of commercial exploitation, but they are wonderful programs that use the *Sesame Street* model.

So lessons learned: expert involvement in the development process is absolutely vital. It can strengthen the program's effectiveness. Research should be included at every phase of the project. However, when you have to cut the budget, the first place that is cut is research. I think that's a huge mistake, not just because I'm a researcher, but because it can make your program so much better if you have research involved. You really need to plan for outreach materials to strengthen the overall impact of the program. Again, research is absolutely vital.

Programs that are presented here support this.

And when I've talked about programs that don't do well and don't have a research base yet are airing on PBS, there's an example: *Teletubbies*. That's why I think research is important is because parents think what's on PBS is good, and here's an example of something that may not be all that good.

Thank you.

Cybele Raver Thank you to both of you. That was just great. I think we can now open it up to questions. I'm sure people in the audience have some, and if not, I've got a couple of my own.

Karen Bond Karen Bond. Media activist, management consultant.

It goes back to what we talked about in several of the sessions yesterday and today. As you know, I have issues with using children as consumers. There are other countries that by law prohibit it. I think that the level -– no, I don't think this. It is said that the level of civilization in a society is measured by how you treat your elderly and your children. So I do think that the

commercialization issue is very important. I think that you did express some concern, and I think that, Dale, you appear to feel that it is not as onerous as someone like me may feel that it is.

Where do you feel the line is crossed? I mean, I feel that children should not be marketed to period. They are not old enough to make those decisions. They shouldn't be prevailed upon to make them. But where do you feel that the line is?

Dale Kunkel There is existing law in this country that says in order for advertising to be fair -– and if it's not fair it can be regulated by the Federal Trade Commission - in order for advertising to be fair, that the audience must be able to clearly identify the source of the message. So that applies to you, an adult consumer, if you can't identify the course of a message, then that ad would be considered unfair and could be restricted by the FTC.

Why does that policy exist? It exists because there is a presumption that if you know the source of the message, you can take into account their motives, their intentions, their biases in evaluation that message. There is elaborate evidence that says before the age of seven to eight years, children lack the role-taking and perspective-taking skills to take into account the persuasive intent that necessarily underlies all television advertising. So that's where I would draw the line in terms of fairness.

Many countries do, as you noted, say that it's unfair to target audiences of young children who can't take into account the bias, the exaggeration of advertising claims and appeals. They tend to accept it as pretty fair and accurate and truthful. That again is going to be a policy issue that will receive greater attention, not because of anything I've said right now.

In fact, we've already been down that road. If you know your media policy history well, you know that in the late 1970s the Federal Trade Commission tried to do exactly what I've suggested here, and that is to restrict all advertising to young children. They failed, and they failed largely because the major corporate conglomerates in this country rose up and went to Congress and succeeded in getting Congress to rescind part of the Federal Trade Commission's

authority in this area in the euphemistically termed "FTC Improvements Act of 1980," where they took away their ability to regulate advertising to children in this way.

Obesity is now going to shortly become the number one threat to the nation's public health. That's going to supersede smoking. One of the reasons that we have an obesity problem in adults and the whole population is that childhood obesity has, depending upon the age that you look at, has doubled or tripled in the last decade.

One of the factors that almost certainly contributes to that is advertising of junk foods to kids on television. In fact, over half of all advertising to children is for unhealthy food products; fast foods, sugared cereal products and so forth. But it's a complex issue because those are the same corporations that you need to underwrite some of your programming and your children's programming, and they want to maintain a relationship with the audience.

I don't have the answers as to how you deal with that complex relationship, but my personal opinion, and I've said this in congressional testimony, is that it's unfair to advertise to young children. The last thing I'll say here, if you implement that policy, they are just going to integrate the advertising in the programming, and that's an issue that's not only there before commercial stations, but it's going to come to PBS eventually and it has come to PBS in the past in terms of questions about the nature of the program productions that are being pursued because of corporate sponsorship.

Cybele Raver Lots of hands. The gentleman with the glasses in the middle.

Joe Bruns Joe Bruns from WETA. We are not a producer of children's programs, but we do program about 12 hours a day of children's programs and have a multicast children's program stream as well. I'm hoping that we're doing the right thing. I wanted to ask Deborah, in addition to or besides *Teletubbies*, are there other examples of programs that while we are thinking that we're doing the right thing, don't have the kind of rigorous research and educational power behind them?

Deb Linebarger In the Ready to Learn grant that PBS distributes the funds from, part of that mission is to produce research on the show. *Teletubbies* was an import from England. It was told to me that it wasn't developed for an educational purpose, that kids just really liked it, and this was an audience that they wanted to bring in. So I can't speak any more about that, other than I'm not the only one who has research on *Teletubbies* and finds similar results.

Most of the other new shows do have formative and summative evaluations going on, like *Dragon Tales*, like *Cyberchase*, running down through my head all of the PBS shows. Most of them do have that as part of their mission, because of the emphasis on putting on evidence-based programming.

You can find research available on the PBS Kids site, usually because they like to put it there. Some of the older shows don't necessarily have that, like *Arthur*; I don't think it has any systematic evaluation. *Reading Rainbow* does. The problem is it's expensive to do research. So these older programs didn't incorporate that into part of their model, although they do have experts that helped with their curriculum. And in some sort of incidental ways I've done evaluations of *Arthur* and *Wishbone* and *Reading Rainbow* for other purposes and found good results. So *Teletubbies* is probably the one that I found on PBS that's problematic.

I did find some problematic, slightly controversial, if you read the *Washington Post* recently, on *Sesame Street* for kids under 2. However, I will qualify that by saying when we redid the analyses and looked at *Sesame Street* the show versus *Sesame Street* the videotapes, there was a clear difference between the two for kids under 2 in that *Sesame Street* the show used to jump around a lot. They redesigned the format in 2001, and it wasn't originally intended for kids under 2, but the program skews very young, because I think my generation grew up watching *Sesame Street*, and so we thought, hey, *Sesame Street* is a great show. I'm going to show it to my kid, and kids watch earlier and earlier.

So if you look at the videotapes which are much more thematic and narrative-based, kids actually did very well on outcomes of language. The show, it was negatively related, but they've redesigned the format. So I want to qualify that *Sesame Street* finding by that, and I think if I was to look again with the redesigned format, it would be a good, positive show.

So when you're selecting shows, especially if you're thinking about that under 2 audience, they need to be shows -– at least this is my working hypothesis, and I'm working on putting in an experimental grant together to test this out -- they need to be very clear linear narratives that are well-paced. Otherwise if they are jumping around, too much of a magazine format, they are really not appropriate for kids under 2.

Cybele Raver I just love evidence answers. Dale, can you speak a little bit to the extent to which the market is saturated in terms of products?

Dale Kunkel I have a comment, and it's a strong comment, and it's slightly tangential to your question, so you'll have to tell me if this is responsive. But what you're getting at is it's impossible for parents or indeed children to escape the commercialization of the program and the program characters and so forth. There is a reason for that, and it's a lack of funding and a lack of economic support for children's programming.

I think this audience probably gets it, but I want to make sure that I make this point clearly, because I've had this conversation, in particular, with Alice Cahn, who was previously director of children's programming for PBS. Whenever we would be engaged in conferences with child advocates and researchers and so forth, and whoever I would -– as the first question found out, that I am in fact an advocate against commercialization in children.

Whenever I would raise that, Alice would get incredibly nervous and say, "Well, Dale, be careful, because if you take the commercialization out of children's programming, there isn't going to be any children's programming." The economic models for children's programming do not work anymore. What she meant by that was -– and it doesn't matter whether it's commercial

or noncommercial. For commercial, they don't get the audience size that they need to cover the production costs. For noncommercial, they can't produce with the support that they get from the government or the underwriting without ancillary revenues related to program products.

It's so bad that you have to now, whether it's a commercial or noncommercial production, it would be rare that a program would be in development without very careful consideration of the potential for ancillary revenues. That's too bad. Peggy Charren, sort of the queen of child advocates, foresaw this twenty years ago. It tracks back to the 1980s. In the 1980s the FCC deregulated this area so that it allowed commercial tie-ins with children's programming that had not been allowed in the past. Peggy said, well, okay, I get it. You can't tell a Helen Keller story unless you have a Helen Keller doll, and if the Helen Keller doll won't sell, then that isn't going to be the story they are going to produce. That has huge ramifications for the nature of the programming that's produced.

I don't have an answer to fix it, but I just want to make sure you understand it, because that's where we are at now with children's programming. In the absence of an alternative model to provide revenue to produce children's programming, that's where we are going to stay.

Cybele Raver I guess I have a question for you both, and not to be devil's advocate a bit, which is to say is that necessarily a horrible thing, even though I too would not like my child to come running back to the kitchen to tell me what new toy they want, because I guess one thing that I hear you both saying is that the bar is being raised very quickly on public television for the extent to which we expect it to improve children's performance, lives, health.

I mean, we currently set that yardstick at literacy or reading, but we could say health outcomes like obesity should be decreased or health knowledge, that, you know, civic participation should be increased by watching *Liberty Kids*. There is such a heavy pro war emphasis to that, you can question that. Then suddenly a lot of expectations that this show is supposed to meet that commercial programming absolutely doesn't have to meet, they just are supposed to entertain people, right?

Deb Linebarger We actually, in terms of the evidence-based answer, back in the '80s, while I was still in school, my advisors did a study where they actually administered a measure called TV focus. This measure was all about how into television your kids are. Do they act it out. Do they request products, etc., etc. What we found was the more focused or involved kids were, the more likely they were, if they watched violent programming, to exhibit aggressive behavior when they were teenagers.

So the problem is there is a very different climate now than back in the '80s. I actually administered that measure back in the mid-'90s and didn't find the same sorts of effects, because, I think, we're so saturated with these kinds of things. As Dale was saying, they use these funds, so everything that *Sesame Street* or Sesame Workshop licenses goes back into creating programs like *Dragon Tales* and that sort of thing. So there isn't a better model.

Dale Kunkel Another way of kind of restating Cybele's question is, well, wait a minute. Isn't that the parents' job to just say no and use that as an opportunity to learn, help teach their child, and it's a question of values.

The advertising industry, the television industry wants to put it on the parents, but what you're doing is you're pitting multibillion dollar industries and their ability to influence your children who want to then affect your purchase decisions on their behalf. It's really kind of, I think, a cynical or an insidious model, and especially in light of what we know about age-related limitations and children's ability to recognize and defend against commercial persuasion. Maybe after the age of 8 the kids are a fair partner in the bargain. But before that age for me, I think there really are some fundamental ethical issues.

Deb Linebarger My daughter's latest thing is "Mama, it's a $40 value and it's only 19.95."

Cybele Raver Let's take one more question up at the top. Yes?

Tom Lewis Hi. My name is Tom Lewis. I myself recently created a TV series with students at Kellogg, which is the graduate school of Northwestern. My question really is just about two words that you guys mentioned that I couldn't pick up. One was a company called "DIC." I don't know how to spell DIC.

Male voice D-I-C. And that's people often refer to it as DIC, but the company actually calls itself "Deek" (phonetic). They have a Web site, DIC.com, you can see about their children's programming.

Tom Lewis Okay, thanks. And the second was mentioned of a name I think her name was Ms. Fisch? And she had done research?

Deb Linebarger Mr. Fisch. Shalom Fisch. He goes by Shally (phonetic) Fisch, F-i-s-c-h, and he has actually a new book out called --

Dale Kunkel *G is for Growing*.

Deb Linebarger No, there's a new one. *Learning from Children's Educational Television*. It just came out in like March of 2004. It summarizes all of the summative and formative work across all domains in television. "Children's learning from Educational Television." He was at Sesame Workshop for twenty years. Now he is out on his own, and he does formative and summative evaluations and programs like *Cyberchase* and *Dragon Tales* and that sort of thing, but the book is a really useful reference. I use it in my graduate and undergrad courses of a nice summary of how you go about doing research on kids TV.

Tom Lewis Great, thank you all.

Cybele Raver Thank you both very much, and thanks to the audience for questions. I think we'll go ahead and close. (Applause.)

Carroll Joynes We're entering the home stretch. Don't give up. John Callaway is going to lead a session in about 15 minutes. We're going to set up the tables, and we're going to do the final wrap-up. We are going to have all the panelists and participants that have been here so far up on the stage, and so if those of you who are here will come down. We'll get your names and make sure we have the tables set up properly.

Also, last night at the dinner there was a –- this sounds like a quiz show prize -– but a diamond earring was lost. Or it looks like a diamond. I have it. If somebody is missing one diamond earring, they should come talk to me.