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TV PROGRAMMING: SERVING THE YOUNG

Paper presented to the
AMIC-CBA Seminar on
"Media Proliferation: How can Broadcasters Best Serve the Public Interest?"
New Delhi, India

Prepared by RENE O. VILLANUEVA
Creative Director, Philippine Children’s TV Foundation Inc. (PCTVF)
PHILIPPINES

Let me begin by telling you about a most exciting gathering of people who are like you and me, people involved in children’s TV.

We all know the challenges and frustrations of the job: the high supply of adrenalin, imagination, and interest necessary to get the work done; the tremendous amount of understanding needed when dealing with children, more so when we make them work; the monumental patience required by the constant struggle for funds and demands to cut cost; the armor of confidence we must put on in our regular battle for ratings, time slot, and survival.

We all know these through our daily grind. Sometimes we wonder what strange attractions this stuff has which makes us stay on the job and push ourselves to do better next time. But we know. Yes, we all know the small and great rewards we get from this enchanting field called children’s TV.

The event I’d like to talk about is among what I consider the great rewards for those who are like you and me. I’m talking about the Prix Jeunesse Festival (PJF).

PRIX JEUNESSE FESTIVAL (PJF)

The PJF is a gathering of people from more than 50 countries who are so diverse in every aspect imaginable -- from language, educational background, age, fashion sense, hairstyle to favorite spirit to get drunk with -- but who are all passionately committed to a common goal: serving the young through television.

The PJF is held every two years in Munich, Germany. It is regarded as the Olympics of children’s TV.
The PJF is an educational opportunity guaranteed to improve the skills and savvy of children’s TV professionals. More importantly, the PJF experience leads to a renewal of one’s vow -- usually made to oneself -- to exceed the best efforts one has put into making programs for children before attending PJF.

During the seven-day festival in Munich last year, 75 finalists from more than 200 entries were screened and discussed by participants. Unlike in other festivals, Prix Jeunesse winners are not determined by a small, select jury. All participants vote to select the winners, thus making the Prix Jeunesse awards an international vote of confidence by one’s peers -- the best, most experienced, most accomplished children’s TV professionals from around the world.

Viewing the finest selection of international fiction and non-fiction programs for three age-groups (Up to 7, 7-12, 12-17) is like attending the best short-term training course on children’s TV, with the world’s first-rank TV producers as mentors.

Meeting, talking, sharing experiences -- and several rounds of beer, if you have the stamina for it -- with people who share our passions and dreams for children and television will surely leave an indelible mark in one’s mind, an impression which will challenge the way we serve the young through the medium of television.

But Prix Jeunesse activities are not limited to the biannual festival of the world’s best TV programs for children. In between festival years, PJ hosts a round-table discussion to review festival rules and structure, and discuss ways to improve children’s TV and other media.

Prix Jeunesse also sponsors training programs in cooperation with local media organizations. The most popular PJ training programs are: a) Scripting, taught recently in Beijing, China, and Abidjan, Ivory Coast; b) Magazine Program for Small Children; and c) How to Make Items for Magazine Program, which provided the basis for an exchange program among 17 Latin-American countries.

PJ also nurtures new networks for children’s media professionals. It supports the ABU-Item-Exchange for more than 12 countries. Last year, it co-sponsored the 1st Ibero-American meeting of 20 Latin American countries. A similar gathering is being planned for African nations. PJ also organized the World Alliance of Television for Children (WATCH), a global coalition of telecasters, producers, educators and advocates. WATCH publishes WATCH words, a newsletter on international children’s TV.

As can be seen from these activities, serving the best interest of children through television can be achieved more effectively in partnership with others through wide-ranging activities which upgrade production capabilities, facilitate cooperation and co-production, and promote international understanding.
While partnership among local and international groups involved in children’s media improve the ways TV serve young people, the most important partner of children’s TV producers and broadcasters are children themselves.

Children do not only comprise the sector which provides us viewers and ratings. Children’s lives and interests are not mere subjects of programs. Children should also be involved in our programs in many ways.

They have important roles to play, before the cameras as well as off-cam. With preparation and guidance, we can depend on them as hosts, actors, narrators, interviewees, and talents demonstrating their skills and expertise. They can also contribute to program development, if we listen to their views on formats and contents. We can also involve them in actual production of programs or segments. Children’s crafts, interests, their fresh views on any subject, and their novel ways of doing things are rich sources of ideas and materials for children’s TV.

Children must be, at all times, the focus of our best efforts. Their best interest must always be our overriding goal.

UN CRC

Since 1989 when the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child - that legal document we now affectionately call CRC -- TV programming for children has become a legal obligation for 187 countries which ratified CRC (as of February 1996).

Article 17 of CRC states: “State parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being, and physical and mental health.”

Hence, children’s TV, as well as other media for the young, is no longer simply a matter of charity and compassion. States are duty-bound to provide young people with television programs and other mass-media materials.

The duty of the State and mass media to provide information and material to children must be viewed hand in hand with standards of excellence.

Prix Jeunesse has set the highest standard of excellence for children’s TV, in particular, and media programming, in general.

Established in 1964, PJ has contributed to the improvement of world-wide television output for the young. The PJ awards challenge us to provide children with not just any kind of TV program. The PJ standards demand we make excellent TV programs for the young.
The standard of excellence of Prix Jeunesse is best summed up by the first four provisions of the Children's Television Charter. To quote:

• Children should have programs of high quality which are made specifically for them, and which do not exploit them. These programs, in addition to entertaining, should allow children to develop physically, mentally, and socially to their fullest potential.

• Children should hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their languages and their life experience through television programs which affirm their sense of self. Community and place.

• Children’s programs should promote an awareness and appreciation of other cultures in parallel with the child’s own cultural background.

• Children’s programs should be wide-ranging in genre and content, but should not include gratuitous scenes of violence and sex.

In short, children's TV must have the following qualities:

• Well-made and age-appropriate;
• Reflects the child’s culture;
• Promotes respect for cultural diversity; and
• Varied in format and content.

Let us view some Prix Jeunesse award-winners. These are programs or excerpts from three age groups (Up to 7, 7-12, 7-12) in both fiction and non-fiction category. Later, we can discuss some aspects which you think made them excellent TV programs for children.

**VIEWING OF EXCERPTS FROM SAMPLE PROGRAMS**

1. The Boy, The Slum and the Pan's Lids (Up to 7, Fiction)
2. Us - That's Us (Up to 7, Non-Fiction)
3. Queen of the Colors (Up to 7, Fiction)
4. Birds in Passage (Up to 7, Fiction)
5. Bernard's Watch: Giving Time (Up to 7, Fiction)
6. Tele-Julia (7-12, Fiction)
7. Popular Mechanics for Kids (7-12, Non-Fiction)
8. Confession of an Adolescent (12-17, Fiction)
9. Wise-up (12-17, Non-Fiction)

I hope these examples of excellent TV programs for children will inspire us to evaluate our own production and move us to make better programs for children.
In conclusion, let us review some points to consider in TV programming for children:

- First, it is our legal obligation to provide children of all ages with television programs, and other mass-media materials. The CRC enshrines the important role of media in the survival, development, protection and participation of all children.

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- Fifth, children's programming must use a variety of genres and deal with wide-ranging subject and issues.

Before ending this short presentation, I would like to invite you to sing "Imagine," which was sung during the launch of The World Alliance of Television for Children (WATCH). This John Lennon song captures the kind of world children will surely be happy to live in. Together, let us imagine and sing and celebrate this vision.

IMAGINE
(John Lennon)

I
Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Livin' for today... Ah...

II
Imagine there's no country
It isn't hard to do
Nothin' to kill or die for
And no religion, too
Imagine all the people
Livin' in peace... You... hoo...

REFRAIN

You may say
I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday
You'll join us
And the world
Well live as one.

III
Imagine no possession
I wonder if you can
No need greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man,
Imagine all the people
Sharing all he world. You-hoo...

(REPEAT REFRAIN)
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1. THE BOY, THE SLUMS, AND THE PAN’S LIDS (Up to 7, Fiction)

This exuberant short piece from Brazil is 1996 Prix Jeunesse runner-up in Up to 7 Fiction. Produced by TV Cultura Brazil, “The Boy, the Slum and the Pan’s Lids” is excellent example of how suspense, surprise, and humor can transform a simple but well-structured storyline into an engaging piece.
2. **BIRDS IN PASSAGE** (Up to 7, Fiction)

In 1998 Prix Jeunesse, this program entitled “Birds in Passage” from ZDF-Germany got the highest rating in Up to 7 Fiction. It tells the story of a boy who asks his father where birds go when snow comes. We’re showing an excerpt from the boy’s imaging of birds’ winter.

3. **BERNARD’S WATCH: GIVING TIME** (Up to 7, Fiction)

“Bernard’s Watch” is from Carlton TV-London and is 1998 runner-up in Up to 7 Fiction. Bernard, the character has a watch which can make time stand still. In this episode, his parents go on a holiday and Bernard is left with his Granddad who always has plenty of time for him. Let’s watch excerpts from “Bernard’s Watch: Giving Time.”

4. **TELE-JULIA** (Up to 7-12 Fiction)

The next program, “Tele Julia,” is from Poland, it is the 1998 Prix Jeunesse winner in 7-12 Fiction. The lead character, Julia, finds a magic cap which receives TV waves. She became all the programs being shown on TV --- from Chaplin, horse, detergent to Flintstone. Then, she became the “Robo Killer.” We’re showing excerpts, from “Tele-Julia.”

5. **FIRST KISS** (12-17 Fiction)

Another 1996 winner from Brazil, 12-17 Fiction. This program seems to appeal not only to children from 12 to 17, but even to adults like us who still get tickled pink when we remember our first kiss. Let’s watch a short excerpt and reminisce “the way we were.”

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Nothin' to kill or die for
And no religion, too
Imagine all the people
Livin' in peace... You... hoo...

REFRAIN

You may say
I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday
You'll join us
And the world
Well live as one.

III
Imagine no possession
I wonder if you can
No need greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man,
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Sharing all he world. You-hoo...

(REPEAT REFRAIN)
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DAY THREE

21 APRIL 1999