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**TEORETICAL MODEL OF POPULAR EDUCATIONAL CHILDREN'S TV
PROGRAMMES FOR EARLY AND MID-CHILDHOOD**

Abstract

The subject of interest in this text is popular educational children's TV programmes in Macedonian production and in Macedonian language (aimed at children aged 2-12) in the time period before Republic of Macedonia's independence (1985-1991/2) and from thereafter until today (2020). The content analysis of these children's programmes provide an insight into the problem (which does not seem to have any background national research and even the wider region as regards the subject of the research), a breakdown of main points, elaboration and guidance through a specific theoretical model for further application into practice, with the intention of raising the criteria and improving the strategies of producing better quality children's TV programmes, since all current analyses indicate insufficient quality when it comes to educational and pedagogic elements.

Keywords/phrases: content analysis, children's TV programmes, pedagogic and educational elements, television, theoretical model

INTRODUCTION

The quality of content of all TV programmes aimed at children as the focus audience is a (relatively) unresearched field in Macedonia, and the wider region. The conclusion arising from all consulted literature around this topic as well as conducted field research is that past and current investigations related to children's TV audiences are mostly around the influence of specific TV content on children's behavior and their psychological and emotional development. In that context, a starting point of analysis is violence shown on TV and this type of research is focused on its influence upon children's behavior and development. Also, a frequent starting point of analysis in that type of research is a specific inappropriate content shown on television in time slots that allow the content to be available to children even though it is not appropriate for their age and level of psychophysical, intellectual and emotional development and have a negative effect on them (for example, content containing violence, erotic scenes, pornography, hate speech, 'soap operas' etc.). That type of research often provides recommendations and advice on increasing the quantity and quality of children's TV programmes; however it lacks analysis of specific content aimed at children that would offer an appropriate model and guidance for creating relevant and good-quality TV programmes for children.

In 2012/13, research was conducted over the quality of popular educational children's TV programmes in Macedonian production broadcast by Macedonian TV stations in the period before Republic of Macedonia's independence (1985-1991/2) and after (1991/2-2012). This research pointed to the need for creating a theoretical model for a children's TV programme that will take into consideration all aspects of the research and that would summarise all findings, ultimately creating a relevant model for a popular educational children's programme (for early and mid-childhood¹) that would be applicable in practice.

In his research paper „Quality in Children's Television“, Peter Nikken (Nikken 1999) notes and mentions the fact that certain institutions and other research shows that TV stations and productions should offer better quality programmes to children, without actually specifying the qualitative standards that these programmes should satisfy nor do they offer a model to follow in the process of creating and executing children's programmes. Aiming to fill this gap is the primary focus of the theoretical model of a children's programme further presented in this text, as an outcome of the extensive research.

When creating a theoretical model for a popular and educational children's programme, the following elements/aspects need to be taken into consideration (Koneska-Vasilevska 2013):

I QUALITY OF CONTENT IN CHILDREN'S TV PROGRAMMES

When it comes to the quality of content in children's TV programmes, the overall focus is on the content's effects: “The media no longer address us to broadcast objective

¹ Early age or early childhood refers to children aged two to six, and mid-childhood refers to children aged six to twelve, therefore the age spectrum for these children's programmes is from two to twelve.

information, but to conquer our minds. As Gebels already emphasised: ‘We no longer talk in order to say something, but to achieve a certain effect’” (Ramone 2004: 24). When it comes to this element, the type of effect on the audience is crucial considering that producing (bad) quality TV programmes directly influences the psychological, intellectual and emotional development in children and therefore is especially important what and how the content is shown, since this will determine what the effect of these programmes will be on the children (Bryant and Oliver 2008).

In regard to the effects of the message on the recipients within the communicative process, the main theory (model) to consider is the one by Harold Lasswell that includes the following elements: Who → Says what → Via which channel → To whom → With what effect. In this model, Lasswell emphasises the question of produced effect more than its meaning (Fiske 1999: 30-31). The segments of research included in Lasswell’s model (or paradigm) are: analysis of control (which corresponds to the *sender*), analysis of contents (which corresponds to *what is said* in/with the message), analysis of media and support (which corresponds to *via which channel* is the message being sent) and analysis of effects (which corresponds to the *effect* of the message on the recipients) (Fiske 1999).

Also, when it comes to the element of (bad) quality children’s TV programmes and the effect that broadcasting this content on television has on children, it is especially important to mention George Gerbner, who represents the *cultivation theory*. This is a social theory interested in the long-term effects of television upon viewers. Cultivation theory points to the influence of television in educating an audience, mostly consisting of children and youths (Shanahan and Morgan 1999). Gerbner believes that television as a mass-medium is fundamentally different than all other mass-media and emphasises its power in shaping the way our society thinks and functions and in distorting the perception of reality among viewers. And the children are the most vulnerable group of TV viewers. Gerbner is of the opinion that what you watch on television in childhood can have a special effect on your personal beliefs and view of the world and society which the child will cultivate further in life, as an already grown-up adult (Shanahan and Morgan 1999).

II SOCIETAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Another aspect to be considered when creating a theoretical model for a children’s TV programme is the societal, political and cultural context in which the content is being created, and which has an overall and general influence upon all aspects of life, including the media, and the content of TV programmes aimed at children specifically (Jameson at Gjorgjevic 2012). In this regard, it is important to mention the societal, political and cultural theories (A. and M. Mattelart 2003; Gjorgjevic 2012). Within this context, it is also necessary to mention the ownership of media, or television specifically, which directly depends on the type of organisation and development during the various time periods; thus, the Republic of Macedonia’s independence welcomes the first appearance of TV stations in private ownership alongside the existing public service.

In relation to this, when comparing socialism and capitalism on societal, political, economic, and cultural grounds, Erich Fromm (The Frankfurt School) says that the capitalist order is ruinous for humanity, because everything comes down to profit. He believes that in capitalist society (in all its shapes) capital rules over man with a sole goal – maximum profit, whereas socialism puts man in the middle, to rule over capital, over circumstances to use it for his own goals, and the expenditure and profit are not goals of their own (Fromm, 1989). Perhaps this can be an explanation why there are significant differences between our production of children's TV programmes before our country gained independence and right after and all throughout the following years (Koneska-Vasilevska 2013).

III PEDAGOGIC AND EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTS/CONTENT

A third aspect to be considered when creating a solid theoretical model for a children's TV programme is the pedagogic and educational elements or content. A conclusion can be drawn from the 2012/2013 research that the pedagogic and educational elements and content are more present in children's TV programmes of Macedonian production and in Macedonian language in the period before the country's independence (1985-1991/2) and right after (1993), compared to the following years within the given timeframe (2012) (Koneska-Vasilevska 2013). Thus, in the total of 13 analysed episodes of "Ajde da se družime" and "Bushava azbuka" (produced in 1985) and "Dajte muzika" (produced in 1993) TV programmes, research findings show that there is presence of pedagogic and educational elements and content, and this can be observed via the following (Koneska-Vasilevska 2013: 93):

1. Use of a standard register and modern Macedonian language by the participants in the programmes.
2. Selection of appropriate, relevant and diverse topics and genres in the programmes.
3. Qualified and technical team for the ideation, preparation and production of the programmes, which led to the use of appropriate audiovisual elements.
4. Appropriate and decent external appearance of the participants in the programmes.
5. Appropriate and decent behavior by the participants in the programmes.
6. Appropriate and decent non-verbal speech by the participants in the programmes.
7. Stimulating playfulness by the participants in the programmes.

When it comes to programmes produced after Republic of Macedonia's independence (in the period from 2002 until 2012): "Aj ti zamizhi", "Bonton", "Pet plus", "Svetot ima osum strani" and "TV-lektira", the findings after analysing 23 episodes are that the previously mentioned categories are either not as present as in the programmes "Ajde da se družime", "Bushava azbuka" and "Dajte muzika" or in some cases completely absent (Koneska-Vasilevska 2013: 93). It is important to single out the "Dajte muzika" programme as standing in the middle, because, although produced after the country's independence, it does contain pedagogic and educational elements and quality content at the same level as the programmes produced before the independence; however it lacks certain other elements, as characteristic for those programmes produced after. Therefore, this programme signifies the process of "transition".

Hence, the findings of the full research point to the necessity of creating a theoretical model for a children's TV programme that would ensure the presence of quality content for all future children's TV programmes.

CONSTRUCTING A THEORETICAL MODEL FOR A POPULAR EDUCATIONAL CHILDREN'S TV PROGRAMME

The extensive research from 2012/2013 was instrumental in initiating the creation of a model for a children's TV programme, but a few new children's TV programmes in Macedonian production created in the last few years, such as "Svetot na Bibi", the new version of "Dajte muzika", "Gore-dolu site sme ednakvi" also encouraged this research. A new wave of children's TV programmes that are mindful of good quality content has been noted. "Pet plus" was one of the programmes included in the research from 2012/2013 and it was a solid starting point for further creation of good quality children's TV programmes, unlike the "Aj ti zamizhi" programme, also included in the research, where the quality of content is not appropriate and the primary focus must have been on creating a commercial product (Koneska-Vasilevska 2013).

Thus, in "Svetot na Bibi" TV programmes ("Skaznite na Bibi", "Azbukata na Bibi", "Uchime so Bibi i Bobi"), an expert team responsible for the entire "Svetot na Bibi" project including its TV programmes is noticeable: there are scriptwriters, illustrators, professional actors, animators, editors, producers, directors. Therefore, these programmes have both entertainment and pedagogic and educational elements. A team of experts stands behind the new version of the "Dajte muzika" programme too, which is a project that, above all else, carefully considers quality content for children's TV audiences, and therefore provides appropriate entertainment mixed with pedagogic elements and takes special care of sets, costumes, music and acting in service to the psychological, intellectual and emotional level of age-appropriate children's development.

On the other hand, the "Gore-dolu site sme ednakvi" programme continues the trend of one moderator, who is simultaneously an author of the programme, as is the case with the "Aj ti zamizhi" programme (Koneska-Vasilevska 2013), which significantly reduced the standards of having more diverse and better quality television offering for children, since it lacks expert guidelines for including appropriate pedagogic and educational elements. Frequent use of jargon and slang by the moderator can be detected as well, and elements of ensuring the programme is a commercial product etc., which implies that additional pedagogic and educational elements are needed and a more diverse offering of similar content, as well as taking care of proper use of language and presentation of topics in order to be identified as a good quality content, appropriate for children TV audiences.

According to the findings above, it is paramount to offer a theoretical model for a popular educational children's TV programme which would be applicable in practice, that is, that would help the ideation and creation of this type of TV programmes and provide a direction for creating content that maintains appropriate qualitative criteria and standards and would include appropriate educational elements (see: T-1).

T-1: THEORETICAL MODEL FOR A POPULAR EDUCATIONAL CHILDREN'S TV PROGRAMME (FOR EARLY AND MID-CHILDHOOD AGES)

PROGRAMME PREPARATION	Analysis of societal, political and cultural context	Before starting on creating and implementing a specific children's TV programme, it should be placed within the societal and cultural milieu in order to be accepted.
	Assembling a team <i>Psychologists, pedagogists, communicologists, proofreaders, producers and editors, directors, scriptwriters, set designers, costume designers, professional actors, professional moderators, composers and songwriters, technical staff, various culture, arts and education collaborators</i>	An expert team is especially important for the preparation and further implementation of a children's TV programme since a diverse team would naturally involve inclusion of various aspects and elements that would contribute towards a comprehensive final product, that is, an expert in each field would bring quality to some aspect, and when combining all aspects, the final product would offer good quality and diversity for the children and would include everything that a popular and educational children's TV programme should contain.
	Selection of topics	Topic selection for children's TV programmes is especially important when it pertains to the educational and entertaining element. All topics within the programme should be age appropriate, relevant and diverse and include several pedagogic and educational, as well as entertaining aspects and popular content, in order to intrigue the child, encourage curiosity and ensure the child is entertained while learning.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME	Speech - <i>Verbal</i> - <i>Non-verbal</i>	Verbal speech: To use standard register modern Macedonian language by the participants in the programme. Non-verbal: Appropriate and decent non-verbal speech by participants in the programme, without any vulgar, forced and mocking gesticulations and grimaces.
	Appereance and behaviour by the participants in the programme	Appropriate, decent and natural external appereance of the participants in the programme, as well as their appropriate and decent behavior.
	Audiovisual elements	Use of audiovisual elements which, when combined with the rest of the recommended aspects and elements, would contribute to a well-created whole.
	Playfulness	Implementing playful activities in order to encourage playfulness among children, and positive feelings as a consequence.
EFFECTS OF THE PROGRAMME	Impact on the mental, intellectual and emotional child development	In terms of the effect upon children's audiences, the TV programme should have a positive impact on the mental, intellectual and emotional development of children and "impose" a specific system of values long-term.

Considering all these findings, it is important to mention that when ideating, creating and implementing popular educational children's TV programmes, these projects should ideally be independent ventures in order to reduce the commercial aspect which should not be a primary concern and all given laws, regulations and norms set by relevant institutions for abiding by the qualitative standards and criteria should be respected, as well as having a moral responsibility during the entire process.

CONCLUSION

The results of the extensive research conducted in 2012/2013 that investigated the quality of content in popular educational children's TV programmes in Macedonian production and Macedonian language in the time period before the Republic of Macedonia's independence (1985-1991/2) and after (1991/2-2012) drew a general conclusion that children's audiences in the Republic of Macedonia should consume TV content that would involve more educational elements, has better quality and is more appropriate, because those TV programmes currently offered either do not contain all necessary elements or have not been appropriately presented, and in some cases those elements even come second because of the strong focus on commercialisation of this type of programmes.

Henceforth and also due to the occurrence of a few more recently broadcast TV programmes, the need for constructing a theoretical model for a popular and educational children's TV programme (for early and mid-childhood) has arisen, with the aim to raise the level of quality television content offered to children.

These programmes should use the good quality programmes produced before the country's independence and right after as the standard and they should adapt these to the current level of development and therefore offer children an all-round good quality product. Gaps should be identified and negative elements that are not contributing to a better-quality children's TV programme should be removed. And in combination with new technologies and achievements, which have not been available before or were significantly less available, huge breakthroughs can be made. However, in order for this to happen, some "classical" values and standards with no "expiry date" should be met. Only in this way would children be offered good quality TV programmes and encourage maintaining real values and set real criteria and standards for further development.

This text aimed at summarising all this in a single theoretical model for a children's TV programme that can be applied in practice, taking into consideration the findings and conclusions from the more extensive research in 2012/2013 on the quality of children's TV programmes in Macedonian production and adding those in context to the current and future offering.

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