How television affects the learning of preschoolers

Maureen Fenno
HOW TELEVISION AFFECTS THE LEARNING OF PRESCHOOLERS

by

Maureen Fenno

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION (READING SPECIALIST) AT THE CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1971
This research paper has been
approved for the Graduate Committee
of the Cardinal Stritch College by

Sister Marie Colette O.S.F.
(Advisor)

Date February 2, 1971
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Limitations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Development of Children, Ages Three to Five</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Habits of Preschoolers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferences of Preschoolers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of Television and Role of Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning From Television</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misteroger's Sesame Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Television is the most powerful single medium of communication developed by man. It is likely that no invention will have greater influence on man's behavior or on society's course of events during the next hundred years than this medium of communication.¹

At the beginning of 1948 there were barely 100,000 television sets in use in the United States. In 1949, there were a million; at the end of 1959, 50 million. At the beginning of the 1950's about one out of 15 United States homes had television. At the end of the 1950's seven out of eight homes had television sets.²

More swiftly than anywhere else, television penetrated to homes where there were young children.³ Through-


³Ibid., p.12.
out the early years of American television, homes where
there were children under twelve were almost twice as
likely to have television. It was in homes with children
that television was most intensively used. ¹

Homes with preschool children have their tele-
vision sets on from 55 to 60 hours per week. Preschoolers
actually are watching about 30 hours; twice the amount of
time that preschoolers spent before the set in 1961. By
the time a child begins first grade, he will have spent
4,000 hours watching television. ²

There certainly can be no doubt that the preschool
child learns constantly from T.V. In the last two years
alone he witnessed two brutal assassinations of American
leaders, a war being fought, and a man taking his first
steps on the surface of the moon. ³

"Television, if properly used, can be our most
important tool." ⁴

Statement of the Problem

This research paper was undertaken in order to
review the literature to determine how the role of tele-
vision affects the learning of preschoolers. The writer's

¹Lyle, Parker, Schramm, Television In The Lives of
Our Children, p.12.


³J. B. Cooney, "Sesame Street," P.T.A. Magazine,

⁴C. C. Evans, "Television For the Preschool Child,
Elementary English, XXXII (March, 1955) pp. 541-42.
specific purposes were twofold:

To show how the years of a child's life from ages three to five are crucial years in intellectual development.

To demonstrate how television can be used as a readiness tool in preparing the child for reading.

Scope and Limitations

This paper was concerned with television in the lives of preschool children, ages three to five. The writer did not extend the paper to include children older than age five, because after this age he usually begins his formal education. Thus the paper was confined to the effect of television as a readiness tool, rather than as a tool of formal education.

Also the paper was confined to the impact of television in the home, rather than in the school.

Because of the present interest in this topic and of its concern to parents of preschoolers, much of the literature has been printed in the popular magazines rather than in educational journals.

Significance of Problem

The writer was chiefly interested in this problem: Why do some children appear to be much better equipped to begin formal reading in first grade than others?

Parents of preschoolers may be particularly interested in this research, since they are usually the principal educators of preschool children.
CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

Intellectual Development of Children, Ages Three to Five

It is generally agreed today that the most rapid mental growth occurs during infancy and early childhood.\(^1\) Between birth and age four, about half of all growth in human intelligence takes place; another 30 per cent occurs between the ages of four and eight. Thus, about two-thirds of a child's intellectual development occurs before he even begins his formal education.\(^2\)

Adults have been conscientious about learning to keep their babies germ-free and physically comfortable, but have not paid much attention to their early intellectual development. They have assumed that learning comes later when the child enters school.\(^3\)


Today, however, educators have become increasingly aware that the rate of learning during these relatively unplanned school years may well surpass that of the later, more highly organized years of school life. These early years are known to be a crucial time for the development of certain intellectual skills that will later be necessary for school success. Continuing neglect of these first five years of a child's life may be compared to the waste of a precious natural resource.

These young and impressionable minds are very hungry for information. They are capable of receiving information and storing it, beginning soon after their birth. Four- and five-year olds are fully ready to learn if educators will only have the wisdom and sensitivity to adjust their ways of teaching to fit them. Their interests are varied and easily aroused. Few subjects are beyond their grasp when presented in a manner they can appreciate. Because children's minds are so open and flexible, it is important to expose them to the many valuable things in the world, while they are still at an impressionable age. One of the

---

preschooler's greatest assets is curiosity. A few years later, even as early as six years old, many children fail to learn because they have so few questions to ask. A preschooler, however, can ask more questions during a day's activity than most adults can possibly find the time or resources to answer.

Children's education should begin long before the traditional age of five and six. Although the social trend is toward adding a year or more of schooling prior to the traditional first grade, an equally significant trend is toward recognition of the important role of the parents, in the education of young children.

To put 12,000,000 preschool youngsters in the classroom would cost the country 2.75 billion dollars. To seat them before TV screens, found in the homes of 90 per cent of the population, however poor, would cost but a fraction of this sum.

**Viewing Habits of Preschoolers**

Television plays a very important role in the lives of preschool children. Children no longer regard television

---


4"Early Childhood Education," p.36.

as a marvel but rather as a part of their everyday living.¹ From the child's third year of life until some time near the end of high school, television comes near to filling one-sixth of all the child's waking hours.² By the time a child is 16, he has spent 50 per cent more time in front of the television than in the classroom.³ Preschool children, in the average American home, are watching TV for approximately 30 hours every week. These 30 hours represent more than a doubling of preschoolers' TV time since the last comprehensive survey seven years ago.⁴

More than one-third of all children in television communities are watching television by the time they are three. Four out of five children are television viewers by the time they come to school. Almost all of the children are regular television viewers before they begin to read. In these preschool years, only books read to them are serious competitors of television for their mass communication time.⁵

⁵Schramm, ed., The Impact Of Educational Television, p. 216.
By the time a child is three years old he is already committed to favorite programs. At the age of three a child can watch the set for one-half hour without losing attention. Many children at this age have established favorite programs and know the time they are to be shown. They also manage to be on time for these shows even if they are unable to do nothing else on schedule.¹

Research shows that the two-to-five year olds control the TV dial at 8 a.m. on Saturday morning. After nine o'clock the 6-to-11 year olds come in. The 12-year-olds come in around 10 o'clock.²

Preferences of Preschoolers

At four years of age a child is an emotionally different human being than a child of six. A four-year-old can't learn if he is required to remain at a little desk which is lined up in a neat row. He cannot learn if he must be quiet—total order and quietness are foreign to his nature. Preschoolers cannot be forced into structured learning situations.³ Children can watch the television and still move their hands and feet about all the time. In fact, children can even stand on their heads, and still watch

³"Captain Kangaroo," p.27.
and hear what is being said.  

In elaborate research that continued for three years, it was discovered that the fastest way to bore children is to have an adult talking to them. Nothing loses children faster than an adult full-face on the screen just talking. Young children find puppets and animals much more fascinating than flesh-and-blood human beings. Children like to see puppets, especially if they resemble pets that they own or know about. Since small children are obsessed with their smallness, they can readily identify with puppets because they are even smaller than themselves.

When children were offered some slow fairy tales, they soon lost interest. They preferred shows that would clip along at a fast pace; jump, and move. Youngsters are strangely fond of commercials— the shorter, more zestfully

---


3 "Forgotten 12 Million; Sesame Street, Program for Preschool Children," Time, November, 1969, p.95.


6 Morris, "What's Good About Children's TV; Friendly Giant, Misteroeger's Neighborhood," p.69.

animated the better. Children liked stories introduced by toys related to the story. The stories preferred were action stories; stories where something really happened. Too much time spent on any one subject is boring. Most youngsters can pay attention to any one episode, no longer than six minutes.

Entertainment values are the chief reason why children watch television. Children meet real needs through the fantasy derived from television. For some children, fantasy may make possible the testing of solutions to problems without being restricted or embarrassed by doing so in real life. Psychiatric opinion supports the view that it is essential for children to develop the concept of fantasy. It is important to permit the young mind to roam at will through the world of fantasy. Eventually children must be able to discern fantasy from reality, but to enjoy both.

---

2 Evans, "Television For the Preschool Child," p. 541.
3 "Forgotten 12 Million; Sesame Street, Program for Preschool Children," p. 96.
6 Morris, "What's Good About Children's TV; Friendly Giant, Misterogers Neighborhood," p. 69.
Limitations Of Television And Role Of Parents

Most television programs are designed to enrich the educational experience of preschoolers, and are not intended to replace teachers.\(^1\) Television must be a supplement and not a substitute for personalized experiences. Television is a very poor substitute for comprehensive preschool development. All the affective and certain cognitive things are better done by teachers.\(^2\) Direct teaching has an important place in the learning activities of young children. Nothing can more effectively bring about significant learning than a well-concerned direct teaching experience.\(^3\)

Play must also be recognized as a basic way in which young children learn, explore, and test ideas. Most effective learning for preschoolers involves manipulation and self-involvement in playlike situations.\(^4\) Parents and teachers can aid in supplementing the programs seen on television. Some things can best be learned by doing. On television, a concept such as "round" can be presented only in two dimensions, which really is inadequate. So parents can supplement by showing the child actual round objects found in his own home.\(^5\)


\(^3\)"Early Childhood Education," p.40.

\(^4\)Ibid.

\(^5\)Culhane, "Report Card On Sesame Street," p.34.
The fact that children watch so much television is damaging. There is only so much time in a child's life and some of these hours should be devoted to establishing parent-child or peer group relationships. These relationships can't be developed if children sit in front of the television all day. Every time a parent finds his child viewing more than two and a half hours of television a day, staying inside with the television set when other children are playing outside, he might ask himself whether there is anything wrong with the child's relationship to his family and peer group. No matter what the influence of television or any other medium, the parents have the power to counteract almost anything that is bad for normal children. No child is likely to be much harmed by television if he has warm, secure, social relationships, and if he has no serious psychological troubles. What a child is before he watches television, what relationships he can build up within his family and his peer group, and what needs he takes to television, are the chief ingredients of television's effect on him.

Parents' responsibility also lies in guiding the child to acquire healthy appetites regarding television, and to view selectively on the television screen. In the majority

---

1 Culhane, "Report Card On Sesame Street," p. 34.
2 Lyle, Parker, Schramm, Television In The Lives Of Our Children, p. 222.
of families the young child watches almost as much as he wishes, and for the most part, views programs of his own choice. Mothers make little effort to supervise either program selection by the child or the total amount he watches. In most families, the father has little voice in determining the television behavior of his child.¹

Parents can set a good example by being intelligent selective viewers themselves. They can avoid using television as a constant baby-sitter. Other cures for boredom and unhappiness can be provided for the child. Parents can refuse to be a silent majority and write to networks to suggest programs they would like to see. They can try to obtain a better understanding of TV—what it does offer and what it can offer.²

Learning From Television

Schramm has done the largest television study in America, involving 6,000 children. He established the fact that there was a highly characteristic pattern when he examined the television behavior of children in relation to their mental ability. The bright children are early starters. They begin earlier to watch television, look at picture magazines, and read. These children of high mental ability

are more likely than the other children, to be heavy viewers of television during their early school years. During the first six or eight years of television viewing, the bright children tend to be heavy rather than light viewers. After ten years of age there is an abrupt change. Bright children older than ten are less likely than the others to be heavy viewers. By the tenth grade, light viewing is correlated with high mental ability. Bright children give higher prestige to books and newspapers and lower prestige to television and movies. Télévision ceases to challenge the bright child as it once did, and he may seek greater challenges in print media. Thus a very bright child who spends more than the average time in front of television is likely to deprive himself of useful learning experiences from print or personal contacts. A child of low intelligence, however, is probably substituting television for time that would otherwise be given to other fantasy materials, such as, comics and movies. He is probably learning from television at least as much, maybe more, than he would otherwise learn.

Thus it seems apparent that television is probably helping some children more than others to grow into better-informed adults. Television contributes to a fast start in

1 Lyle, Parker, Schramm, Television In The Lives of Our Children, p. 79.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
learning but the advantage does not last for all children.¹

A child is more likely to pay attention and retain information if it is new to him. As he becomes more familiar with TV, he learns to sort out the material. He notes familiar things and sets up a pattern of expectation, which keeps him from having to pay too much attention to them. The new things, however, he singles out for storage.²

On the basis of this "familiarity principle" the greatest amount of learning from television takes place in the early years of a child's use of it. Television is of most help, as a source of knowledge, to young children. The period of greatest learning from television comes before the child learns to read well enough to read on his own. The ages from three to six are the years in a child's life when television has the least competition. Almost any experience is new to him and therefore absorbing. After the child begins school, television has greater competition for attention and interest.³ By the time a child is six, he is absorbing information from dozens of sources—family, friends, neighbors, school, magazines, books, and occasional glances at newspapers. Consequently, what he is learning

¹Lyle, Parker, Schramm, Television In The Lives Of Our Children, p. 77.
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
specifically from television is a matter of speculation.\(^1\)

After the child has learned to read and has access to the
world around him through print, television loses much of its
advantage as a source of information. However, in the years
before the child learns to read, his horizon is still narrow
and his curiosity is boundless. Almost everything beyond
his home and family circle is new. Thus television has
a unique opportunity to contribute information.\(^2\)

Another reason why television is an especially
effective agent of learning to preschoolers, is because it
seems so real to the child. Children of this age have a
shadowy border between the story world and the real world.
Children believe that what they see on the screen is really
happening. As the child grows older, he removes himself
further away from the experiences on TV. Older children do
not give themselves wholly to television like the younger
children do.\(^3\)

Most of the child's learning from television is
incidental learning. Practically all of a child's early
use of television is in quest of entertainment.\(^4\) When
children are free to select programs, their choice over-

\(^1\) Edith Efron, "Television As A Teacher," Education

\(^2\) Lyle, Parker, Schramm, Television In The Lives Of
Our Children, p.77.

\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Ibid., p.75.
whelmingly favors fantasy over reality. A child does have a second reason for viewing television; he wants to learn something.¹ "Quality television for children requires the recognition that it is not sufficient to be entertaining. The programs at the same time must fulfill the intellectual and emotional needs of young children."²

The most noticeable effect of television on the child is reflected in his vocabulary.³ Children in a television community now start school about one grade higher in vocabulary than do their fellow students in nontelevision communities. High vocabulary is related to heavy viewing.⁴ One study showed that vocabularies are 30 per cent higher for first graders in towns receiving television than in similar communities without television reception.⁵

The young child in the television era is being exposed to more information about the world beyond his immediate neighborhood than the young child in the pre-television era. When the young television viewer enters first grade he is familiar with wider worlds and knows more about social problems. His concept of the world and its people is enlarged, because television is available

⁴Lyle, Parker, Schramm, Television In The Lives Of Our Children, p. 152.
to tell a story or show him pictures of people and places strange to him.\(^1\)

Research workers recently validated their concept that children can learn their letters and numbers kinesthetically by film animation. Tots are also learning shapes and concepts such as "up", "down", and "over", from viewing television.\(^2\)

Since reading is a language skill, it is reasonable to suppose that children who read earlier than usual do so because of especially high language ability or especially appropriate exposure to language. When children fail to learn reading, it is reasonable to look for lower verbal ability or lack of appropriate exposure to language.\(^3\)

Typical of many early readers is their great interest in identifying words when they see them. Among their earliest reading materials are television commercials and can labels.\(^4\) "One black boy in Georgia had learned to read so well from watching television—particularly commercials—that he entered school reading and writing on the level of a third-grade pupil."\(^5\) "Today's child arrives at school able to read the basic vocabulary of his favorite TV commercials."\(^6\)

\(^1\) Lyle, Parker, Schramm, *Television In The Lives Of Our Children*, p. 84.

\(^2\) Little, "Children's Television Workshop," p. 27.


\(^4\) Ibid.


Commercials are frequently repeated, so that whatever a child fails to learn in one showing can be drilled ad nauseam in subsequent days and weeks. It seems possible that from commercials a child could get a start on a basic vocabulary and make a few inferences about phonics, extend his reading knowledge through phonics, use the redundancy of language in simple books, ask occasional questions and be corrected by an adult.¹

Television can also provide children with the appropriate exposure to language necessary as a background for beginning readers. "For some children television provides their only real chance to learn standard English other than in school."² One key for learning to read is the child asking the right question of his environment. If the child does that he can get the answers from a variety of sources; television being one of the sources he is most frequently exposed to.³

Most studies of the amount of reading before and after the acquisition of a television set have shown little or no reduction in the amount of reading. Some studies claim that the amount of reading has increased. Witty's studies show that children read a little more today than in pre-television days.⁴ Reading can also be fostered with unusual success by teachers or parents who help children to obtain books related to television programs or


³Torrey, "Learning To Read Without A Teacher," p.556.

⁴Witty, "A 1964 Study of TV; Comparisons And Comments," p.137.
characters viewed on television. Television can provide unusual opportunities for parents and teachers to promote wholesome development of children.¹

From September, 1966 through June, 1967, Perlish investigated the effectiveness of a television reading program. The program included parental involvement in helping three-year old children learn to read. The hypothesis was that children between 36 and 47 months of age, who were helped to learn to read by a television program and their mothers, over a nine-month period would learn to read significantly better than children from the same population who did not have this opportunity.

An experimental group of 135 children and a control group of 162 children was selected. The television treatment program was named Wordland Workshop. The control group began daily viewing of Captain Kangaroo. The experimental program series consisted of 195 half-hour programs. The television hostess introduced 87 words and 17 sentences during a nine-month period. Cooperation from the parents of both the experimental and control groups of children was required from the outset to the completion of the study.

The results showed that the reading performance of the experimental group was indeed significantly better

than that of the control group. The performance by the children who watched Wordland Workshop, and who were helped by parents at home, implies that well-designed television programs may be very effective in introducing preschool children to reading. A bimodal score showed that the children learned either very little or a great deal.

The findings also suggest that the greater the interest a child has in such a television reading program and in associated home-conducted reinforcement activities, the greater the competence and interest of the child's parents, and the better a child's health— the greater will be the extent to which a child will learn to read via a series of television reading programs.¹

Following is a description of two popular television programs for preschool children. The writer chose to write about these two, "Misteroger's" and "Sesame Street," because of the different aims of these programs. "Misteroger's" aims to meet the emotional needs of children, while "Sesame Street" is geared to meet the intellectual needs of children.

Misteroger's

Fred Rogers is writer, producer, and host of the television show, "Misteroger's Neighborhood". This show

drawing the three-to-seven-year olds, is the first, and perhaps the only, program on American television which consciously aims to foster the mental and emotional health of children.\(^1\) One of Misteroger's primary objectives is helping children deal with their emotions.\(^2\) Each program has a theme to suit an everyday growing experience of children.\(^3\) Misterogers tackles the problems grown-ups too often fail to discuss with their children, dismissing the problems as unimportant.\(^4\) His goal is to help children recognize jealousy, rage, sadness, and trust as facets of loving and being loved. "His NET program is, in the deepest sense, a Christian show, aimed at a reassurance and realization."\(^5\)

The program has two segments: reality and fantasy. After Misterogers talks with the children about their fears, later in the program the audience is transported briefly to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe.\(^6\) Misterogers discusses both types of childhood fears; real and imagined.

---

He proved to one audience they couldn't go down the bathtub drain. He has shown that haircuts do not hurt; neither do injections from the doctor. Misterogers has also tackled such child-upsetting experiences as a new baby in the family, moving to a new neighborhood, being rushed by parents. He treats childhood traumas with respect and tries to help children with the problems that bother them.¹

Misterogers tries to let the children know that their worth comes from within. Each child is treated as a person of intelligence and sensitivity. Almost every one of his programs includes the statement, "you're a very special person, and I like you, just the way you are."²

Rogers wants to help children become autonomous. Rogers feels that "There is so much wasted energy in schools where conformity is the highest value. If we help the child to resolve his normal feelings, he can be much freer to learn in school."³ Rogers thinks that too many programs make children feel that if they don't know the alphabet or numbers they don't have values.⁴

Rogers is always an adult in relation to the child, which he considers to be an important aspect of his program. Rogers states, "I am not a clown. I'm myself, a man, and I deal with things that I think are important to the child's


²McCleary, "Big Friend To Little People," p. 22.


⁴Ibid.
growing. There's the idea of part and counterpart. Without relationship we won't grow."¹

Misterogers does not want to be a parent substitute, but an extension of the parent, offering additional warmth, understanding, knowledge, and guidance.² He hopes to devote at least one program a month to talks with parents. He feels there are many subtle things that he does that the layman might not notice. He would like to let the parents in on some of them.³

Sesame Street

"Sesame Street" must certainly be the most completely researched and thoroughly publicized show in television history.⁴ Eighteen months of research produced quantities of new data on what holds children's attention and what gets the message across.⁵ In the spring of 1968, Carnegie Corporation joined with the Ford Foundation and U.S. Office of Education to fund the Children's Television Workshop. Joan Cooney was named executive director. During that summer a board of professional educators, child-development

¹McCleary, "Big Friend To Little People," p.22.
⁴"Sesame Street Opens," p.111.
⁵Ibid.
experts, and psychologists got together in daily sessions with film makers, book illustrators, television producers, audience researchers and advertising men to trade ideas. The result was a television program aimed as 12 million three-to-five year olds which has drawn the highest audience rating of any program ever broadcast on the National Educational Television network. A recent national survey indicated that it was already reaching more than six million children a day. Yet because of its popularity, Sesame Street reaches its audience at a cost of about a penny per child.

The purpose of "Sesame Street" is not merely to be educational in general but also to help prepare children for the elementary grades, particularly children from less-favored homes. "Sesame Street" is helping to lay some of the groundwork for early steps in education. The show utilizes contemporary television techniques to help preschoolers begin to acquire some of the skills necessary when they start their formal education. It is an experimental show, whose aim is to use television not only to find new ways of teaching preschool children numbers and letters, but to introduce them entertainingly to a


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.


multitude of people, places, and things. "Sesame Street" has seven major goals: recognition of the letters of the alphabet, recognition of the numbers one through ten, simple counting ability, beginning reasoning skills, increase of vocabulary, increased awareness of oneself and the world around oneself. Special emphasis is being put on letters and numbers in the first session; next year there will be preparation for actual reading. Plans are under way to launch a second series in 1971, aimed at 7-to-10 year-olds and stressing reading skills. Lesser, adviser to the producers of "Sesame Street", states:

Different children learn in different ways and profit from different experiences. "Sesame Street" is an effort to provide one option, one alternative that may be useful to some children. We do not intend that this one television series will substitute for all other forms of educational experiences included. We are providing one small component of what ultimately must become a full range of educational opportunities for all young children.

Because the show must be interesting it contains music, comedy, cartoons, and stories. The Muppets, a famous puppet group, are regulars on the show. Comedy-wise, the rule is slapstick; while songs and games are also favorites. Producers have borrowed from commercials. "Sesame Street" commercials, however, are used to popularize numerals and letters of the alphabet. Space relation-
ships are taught by brief slapstick dramas. ¹ Individual segments of "Sesame Street" do not last longer than six minutes; many are only ten seconds long. Television workshop investigators found that the attention span of a preschooler need not be brief. They are confident that if the material is kept interesting enough, a three or four year old can be induced to watch most, if not all, of each show. ²

Measuring "Sesame Street's" achievement is impossible at the present. New evidence of it's impact emerges daily; it's ultimate effect on American education may not be fully known for years. ³ There are mixed feelings about the program and considerable differences of opinion. The overall impact of the show is not yet known. The Educational Testing Service, tested more than 1,200 preschool children to determine their educational-achievement level before they began viewing "Sesame Street". These youngsters were tested again when the series ended. The results are being evaluated but have not yet been publicized. ⁴


²Scott, "Turning On Tots With Educational TV; Sesame Street," p.28.

³Doan, "The Impact of Sesame Street Has Been Enormous." p.6.

An in-depth study of 500 families in New York's low-income Bedford-Stuyvesant area was conducted, March 1969, by the Daniel Yankelovich public opinion polling firm. Findings indicated that 90 per cent of the children between the ages of two and five who spend their days at home rather than in day-care centers or nursery school watch "Sesame Street". Findings also indicated that half of the children tune in the set themselves each day without waiting for help from their elders.¹

Impact studies focused on 130 poor children in day-care centers in Tennessee, Long-Island, and Maine. Half of the children were viewers, half non-viewers; both groups were divided about equally racially. Children who watched "Sesame Street" regularly in its first six weeks made gains two-and-one-half times as great as gains made by those who did not watch it.² A 26 per cent gain in the ability to group and separate objects according to configuration was made by the children who watched "Sesame Street", compared with only 3 per cent advance for non-viewers.³

Palifroni analyzed responses to a questionnaire related to "Sesame Street", which she circulated through Pacific Oaks College and Children's School. The population reached indicated 107 Southern California middle-class

¹Culhane, "Report Card On Sesame Street," p.34.
²Ibid.
families. Most parents agreed that the specific learning activities of "Sesame Street" were far more constructive than the learning by-products of most other television shows. Language facility increased among preschool and primary children. The program sparked verbal interaction between children, children and parents, and children and teachers. It was an almost unanimous conclusion that "Sesame Street" helped to prepare children for school.¹

For many children, particularly children of poverty, lack of intellectual stimulation preordains almost certain disaster in school and adult life. "By the age of five or six, slum children trail so far behind middle-class children that they are already remedial cases."² "Sesame Street" may be widening the gap between middle-class and disadvantaged, but it is still raising the Lower group above the literacy level.³ One thing "Sesame Street" can do that many teachers are prevented by circumstances from doing, is to show blacks and whites living together in harmony.⁴

Rather than making children read less, television has increased the reading of many youngsters who storm

³"TV's Switched On School," p.68.
the libraries for books that will tell them more about events or subjects they have seen on television. Librarians report that there have been rushes on local libraries as children discover first on television, and then proceed to books. To participate fully in television experiences, preschoolers and primary school children turn to books as natural extensions of the television screen. "The book after all was the first teaching machine." Five "Sesame Street" books and other material based on the program have been developed. "Sesame Street Learning Kit" contains, besides the five books, a 12-inch long playing record, two wall posters in color and a 16-page guide for parents, which explains the goals and scope of the set. At the end of each book is a two page explanation of the book's goals and suggestions for possible expansion on the material provided. A major emphasis is to make the parents aware of what needs to be done and how to do it; an attempt to educate the parents to be an educator

---


2 Efron, "Television As A Teacher," p. 15.


4 Ibid.
The Parent-Teacher Guide to "Sesame Street" is also available. It consists of a large foldout containing both program information and suggested follow-up activities for a month's programs. It also contains a list of children's books selected by a committee of librarians. The guide outlines one or two activities parents can engage in with children to reinforce curriculum elements in each program.

Summary

The most rapid mental growth occurs during infancy and early childhood. Between birth and age four, about half of all growth in human intelligence takes place. These early years are a crucial time for the development of certain intellectual skills necessary for school success. Preschoolers are fully ready to learn. They have varied interests, open and flexible minds, and great curiosity.

Television plays an important role in the lives of preschoolers. The average preschooler spends approximately 30 hours a week viewing television. Preschool children cannot be forced into structured learning situations. Preschoolers are fond of puppets and animals.

---


They prefer television shows that clip along at a fast pace. They like commercials—short and animated. Entertainment values are the chief reason why children view television.

Television programs are designed to enrich and supplement, not replace personalized experiences. Direct teaching still has an important place in the learning activities of young children. Parents and teachers can aid in supplementing the programs seen on television. Watching too much television is damaging. However, no matter what the influence of television or any other medium, parents have the power to counteract almost anything that is bad for normal children. No child can be harmed by television if he has warm, secure, social relationships, and no serious psychological troubles. Parent responsibility also lies in guiding the child to view the television screen selectively.

During the first six or eight years of television viewing, bright children tend to be heavy rather than light viewers. After age of ten, there is an abrupt change. Bright children older than ten are less likely than the others to be heavy viewers. They seek greater challenges in print media. A child of low intelligence, however, is probably learning from television at least as much, maybe more, than he would otherwise learn.

Most of the child's learning from television is
incidental. The most noticeable effect of television on the child is reflected in his vocabulary. The young child is also being exposed to more information about the world beyond his immediate neighborhood. His concept of the world and its people is enlarged through television. He can learn numbers and letters of the alphabet from television. Television can provide children with the appropriate exposure to language necessary as a background for beginning readers. An experimental study implied that well-designed television programs could be very effective in introducing preschool children to reading.

Two popular television programs designed for today's preschool children are "Misterogers Neighborhood" and "Sesame Street". "Misterogers Neighborhood" consciously aims to foster the mental and emotional health of children. Misterogers treats childhood traumas with respect and tries to help children with the problems that bother them. He tries to let the children know that their worth comes from within. "Sesame Street" aims to help preschoolers begin to acquire some of the skills necessary when they start their formal education. It is a show aimed to find new ways of teaching preschool children numbers and letters, as well as introduce them entertainingly to a multitude of people, places, and things.
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing the current literature on television in the life of the preschool child, the writer concludes, that television plays an important role in the learning of a preschool child, and will most likely continue to do so in the future. Today, more than in previous years, the years of a child's life from ages three to five, are being recognized as crucial years in intellectual development. Television can serve as one of the most important tools in developing the child's intellect during these crucial years. Television is available in 90 per cent of the homes, and has little competition from other means of communication in the lives of most preschoolers. Thus, it can serve as a readiness tool in preparing the child with certain skills necessary for later school success. Television programs are designed to enrich the educational experiences of preschoolers, however, and are not intended to replace the personalized experiences with teachers and parents. Parents, too, have the responsibility to guide the child to view selectively, the programs he views on
television. Parents also have the responsibility to keep networks informed of the programs they wish to see on television. The writer feels that "Sesame Street" and "Mister Rogers" are among the finest programs available for preschoolers, and that efforts should be continued to obtain other worthwhile programs for children, such as these.

Television is the greatest communication mechanism ever designed and operated by man. It pumps into the human brain an unending stream of information, opinion, moral values, and esthetic taste. It cannot be a neutral influence. Every minute of television programming—commercials, entertainment, news—teaches us something. Television is here to stay. It's the single most significant force in our society.

Television influences adults as well as children in our society today. "Most Americans tell pollsters that television constitutes their principal source of information." 2 Many times television networks are assuming the roles of parents, teacher, preacher, public official, doctor, psychiatrist, family counselor, and friend for tens of millions of Americans each day of their lives. 3

Because of the great influence of television on our society, television calls for understanding and certain responsibilities, on the part of parents, broadcasters, teachers, and other persons influential in a child's life.

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
Even though television has an extremely important role to play in education, it still cannot replace personalized experiences. Thus not only the amount of time spent viewing television, but also the kind of program viewed, is the responsibility of every American citizen.

"If U.S. children are to gain some undistorted knowledge of society, and of themselves, television must change."¹ Children get the television their parents deserve, and if the public doesn't raise its voice, there is little reason to expect lasting change.² But there is reason for optimism in the fact that for the first time all three television networks—ABC, NBC, and CBS—have appointed vice presidents of children's programming.³

Television must realize its full potential as a carrier of ideas and information. For television to accomplish this task, all people involved must assume the responsibility.

Parents must provide security and love, friendships and other healthful activities, in their child's nontelevision hours. They must share the responsibility of demanding wholesome programs for their children to view.

Broadcasters can offer programs that will be attractive to children without large doses of violence. They can provide programs that will meet the intellectual

¹ "Who's Afraid of Big Bad TV?", p. 73.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p. 68.
level of their viewers. They must prevent the commercial sponsorship from dictating the kind of programs to be viewed.

Parents can help children develop standards for viewing television. They can reinforce the children's selections of worthwhile programs by discussing them in school. Teachers can use television as a source of enrichment.

Government can ensure that finances are available to researchers so that they can undertake some intensive studies to improve the quality of television for today's Americans.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Articles in Journals and Magazines


"Forgotten 12 Million; Sesame Street, Program for Preschool Children," Time, November 14, 1969, p.96.


Little, S.W. "From A to Z to Sesame Street." Saturday Review, May 12, 1969, pp. 62-64.


Terry, C. "Learning Can Be Fun; Sesame Street." Good Housekeeping, April, 1970, p.48.


"TV's Saturday Gold Mine." Business Week, August 2, 1969, p.96.


"Who's Afraid of Big Bad TV?" Time, November 22, 1970, pp. 60-73.