5WSMC Conference Report Policy Document

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University of Ulster

Public Service Broadcasting, Global Media And The Rights Of Children

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with

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Rowan Morrey

Centre for Media Research

MEDIA POLICY BRIEFING PAPERS

The Issues– Different Voices

'Radio changed my life.'

Tepitia, former child soldier to the 5th World Summit on Children and Media, 24th March 2007, Johannesburg, South Africa.

'Children are poets: that is why the prosaic and pedestrian bores them. They despise the long-winded and unimaginative. They possess the spark of creative genius, . . . which makes it impossible for any story teller to cheat them.'

Professor Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, Board member of the SABC, opening address to the 5th World Summit on Children and Media, 24th March 2007, Johannesburg, South Africa.

'States should encourage the role of the media in disseminating information to children that . . . respects the child's cultural background. . . , [Media] should disseminate information . . . from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources and . . . attend to the linguistic needs of minority and indigenous children'.

Article 17, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf./erc.pdf)

Children Deserve The Best Television.

We want commercial television to offer a diverse range of UK-originated, quality programming for all children. We are campaigning for Government . . . to formulate a long-term strategy for stimulating the production of UK-originated children's media.

Manifesto of 'Save Kids' TV' campaign, spring 2007, website address

'Growing market failure in popular content areas like comedy, drama, learning and children's will make public service broadcasting in the UK more necessary than ever by 2012',

BBC Director General, Mark Thompson, 10th July, 2007, Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre, London

CENTRE FOR MEDIA RESEARCH POLICY DOCUMENT SERIES: NO 5:

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING, GLOBAL MEDIA AND THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Including a supplement on the 5th world summit on children and media, Johannesburg, South Africa, Autumn 2007, http://www.5wsmc.com

BY
MÁIRE MESSENGER DAVIES

with MARION CREELY (RTÉ)

and ROWAN MORREY
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Introduction

Máire Messenger Davies

This latest in the CMR's policy document series, has as its focus the changing global scene of children's media. It includes a special supplement on the 5th World Summit on Children and Media, held in Johannesburg, South Africa in March 2007, which was attended by Máire Messenger Davies and Rowan Morrey of the CMR. Drawing on the material we collected at the conference, whose theme was 'Peace and Democracy', we have created a website (http://cmr.ulster.ac.uk) highlighting some of the many issues raised there by representatives of the 88 different countries who attended. The site also showcases some of the creative work produced by children and young people featured in the Children's Summit which ran parallel to the main events. The CMR representatives were part of an all-Ireland representation – and more information about the specific Irish contributions is given on pp 19-22 by Marion Creely, the leader of the Irish delegation, and a member of the Summit's organising committee.

About this Policy Document

This document has a number of sections: first, below, Máire Messenger Davies outlines some current policy issues in relation to children's media, specifically in the UK, but also raising the issues of international concern discussed in South Africa. Next, the central section contains material from the 5th World Summit on Children's Media in Johannesburg, including original photographs taken by Rowan Morrey, which give an indication of the diversity, colourfulness and global scale of this event. This section also includes a report on the Irish delegation's contribution, of which we were part, by Marion Creely of RTE, Executive Producer of the European Broadcasting Union's Documentary Exchange. On page 20, the talk given by Máire Messenger Davies introducing the Debate on Fair and Balanced Reporting on the second day of the conference is reprinted. Finally, on the last page is a small sample of the international delegates whom we met at the conference. These address cards were given in the hope and expectation that the international contacts and friendships initiated in South Africa can be continued and developed still further before and at the next Summit, in Karlstad, Sweden in 2009.

Children's Media Rights: The UK Situation

The issues raised at the South African conference – of children's media rights and of the empowerment of disadvantaged young people through their creative use of communications media – are particularly timely in the UK at this time, because children's television production (traditionally a highly-valued sector of British cultural life) is currently seen as under threat.

On the other hand, new possibilities are opening up for young people to participate in the media through what is called in the industry 'User Generated Content' (UGC); the BBC is actively pursuing ways of encouraging this alongside the academic community through a programme of research with the Arts and Humanities Research Council; the University of Ulster is involved in one of these projects. An umbrella organisation of producers, activists such as the Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV), educators and researchers, was recently set up to lobby the government and to inform the public about the need to safeguard the indigenous children's television industry, which is a major contributor of talent to these new online developments - this organisation is called Save Kids TV. (http://www.savekidstv.org.uk/)

Partly in response to the perceived threat to the children's television production industry, Ofcom, the British media regulator, is conducting a wide-ranging review of public service children's media provision and a Parliamentary Select Committee has also been addressing the issue. (See minutes of the Select Committee of the DCMS, Public Service Media Content Inquiry, 8th May 2007. (http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcumeds.htm)

The decline of children's public service broadcasting is seen by Ofcom as particularly urgent primarily because of two recent developments: first, in 2006, in response to extensive lobbying by nutritionists and some parental activists, Ofcom introduced a ban on television advertising during children's viewing times (that is afternoon and early evening) of snack foods containing high proportions of sugar, salt and fat – the so-called 'junk food ban'. The consequent reduction in advertising revenue, allied to generally increased competition for such revenue from the proliferation of commercial channels, led to the second development threatening children's PSB: the cancellation by ITV (Channel 3) of all new children's production from the end of 2006. This was despite the fact that ITV is the main commercial broadcaster in the UK, and, like other commercial terrestrial broadcasters in the country, (Channel 4 and Five), it has a public service requirement laid upon it to produce and broadcast public-value programmes such as news, documentaries, religious and educational material. PSB material could be seen to include children's, although children's programming is not specified in current legislation, which many Save Kids TV campaigners see as a weakness of the 2003 Broadcasting Act.

Changing childhood

The other factor influencing the changes in the children's media landscape is the very rapid and considerable change that has taken place in children's and young people's media habits in the last five years. Not only are there far more TV channels for them to watch, luring them away from the traditional terrestrial broadcasters, there are also the internet, video games, mobile phones and other technological playthings. Nevertheless, Ofcom's most recent review of children's media habits show three possibly hopeful findings for those who are trying to 'save' public service children's broadcasting: first, television still takes more of children's leisure time than any other leisure activity – about 13.5 hours a week (less than adults, who watch for 25 or more hours a week). Secondly, the reduction in children's viewing has been of adult programmes, not of children's programmes – indicating a desire on the part of children to see material that is specific to their own age and interests. And thirdly, all surveys carried out about children's favourite programmes show that among children's programming, home-grown programmes come top, being preferred to foreign imports. As part of Ofcom's review, Máire Messenger Davies conducted an academic literature review of research on the positive outcomes of children's PSB, and similar findings on the child audience were found in other countries.

In Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Europe, children wanted to see broadcast material that featured people and issues that were familiar to them, and to their own societies.

Although there are now over 20 different channels offering children's entertainment in the UK, only a small minority of them are in a position to commission and pay for original, home-grown production; most of the material on these channels is imported animation. The BBC, itself always under pressure from having to rely on Government for increases in its licence fee, is increasingly being left as the sole provider of informative and culturally-specific programming for children such as news, documentary and original drama. A further source of pressure for the BBC, as BBC commissioners themselves have argued, is that, without the kind of healthy production sector generated by competition and plurality of commissioning (in other words, without ITV) – children's programming generally will simply 'wither on the vine'.

This was emphasised at the Showcomotion conference on children's broadcasting, held in Sheffield on July 8th and 9th, 2007,
(See http://www.showcomotionconference.com/). Jana Bennett, Director, BBC Vision, told the conference: 'there is no slackening of the BBC's commitment to this audience. But this isn't just about the BBC. It's about plurality of supply and plurality of commissioning. The BBC doesn't want to become anything like a monopoly. It's not good for us. Competition keeps us sharp.'

(http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/speeches/stories/bennett_showcommotion.shtml)

Bennett went on to speculate whether there could be 'interventions in the market . . . in order to restore plurality and the financial health of the UK children's production sector.' She rejected the idea of top-slicing the BBC license fee to help other public service producers (which has been put forward by Ofcom) because 'the cake would stay the same size, even though its ingredients would be differently divided . . . it [also] does nothing to boost UK origination.' She floated three other ideas: firstly, tax-breaks for children's production, as in the case of the British film industry. Secondly, a requirement for all public service broadcasters (including commercial ones) to make an explicit commitment to serving children, backed by Ofcom. Thirdly, all broadcasters serving children in the UK, including the commercial digital channels such as Disney and Nickelodeon, (who are not currently labelled as 'public service') could be required to support the UK production sector, through a levy on profits, or an 'hours commitment' to home-grown programming. It remains to be seen whether any of these will be recommended in Ofcom's review of children's programming, due to be published in the autumn of 2007.

Africa, South Africa and the Developing World

In Britain, children and media regularly hit the headlines because of the perennial fear of harmful effects, for example the recent media attention given to Aric Sigman's review of harmful physiological effects of television watching (see http://www.whale.to/b/sigman.html). But these kinds of stories – which have been prevalent for decades – are a diversion from what this Policy Document proposes is a more important policy issue: the survival of public value in broadcasting both globally and locally. Public value, in the words of Patrick Barwise of the London Business School, 'includes indirect and/or citizenship benefits, e.g. from the BBC's investment in UK/regional production and training, or in its educational initiatives or its social, cultural or political contributions to the British quality of life.' (2004:19). These kinds of benefits apply in all societies.

In the UK, and Europe generally, the threats to public value are disturbing to a lively and culturally-valued component of the creative industries – children's television - but not life-threatening. The 5th World Summit drew attention to the very much more serious issues involving children and media which arise in less stable parts of the world. For example, in South Africa, Kids News was set up in 2004, with production funded by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, to address specific problems of South African children who 'have been and continue to be abused, tortured mistreated, neglected and abandoned.' (as we heard in a World Summit presentation by Joanne Hlongwane-Papo, 2007:2). The World Summit was valuable in drawing attention to the kinds of public service broadcasting being conducted in different parts of the world, which those of us in Europe are less aware of.

Here, issues of diversity, ethnicity, security and child-protection are to the fore. For example, one session dealt with programmes designed to 'teach children non violent conflict resolution techniques and promote dialogue and the development of social skills' in the words of 'Los Viajes de Ulises', an Argentinian public television initiative featured in the session. (www.Matz.com.ar/ulisestrip). There was also a great deal of celebratory material on show at the Summit, (see the photographic section on pages 14 and 15) emphasising the more joyful and humorous aspects of different cultures – aspects which are not always seen in the crisis-dominated news coverage by western media of the developing world.

Dafna Lemish (2007), an Israeli media scholar, summarised the importance of political action in guaranteeing children's media rights: 'content-related policies are directed toward the encouragement of broadcasting quality programs for children that have an added educational and social value.' (2007:198) In her book on children and television, she discusses the Children's Television Act, 1990, in the USA as an example of such regulation, requiring broadcasters to televise programmes of educational and informative value for children, as a prerequisite for the renewal of broadcast licences. The 1990 Broadcasting Act in the UK also required commercial broadcasters to provide children's programming at times when children were available to view, and which was age-appropriate for different stages of childhood. The more recent 2003 Act did not have this provision. Ofcom has recently stated that it has no power to insist that ITV reverse its decision to cancel children's production. Hence, there is little in the way of effective mechanisms to ensure that this important part of the British broadcasting industry can continue. This must be a concern in other parts of the world too.

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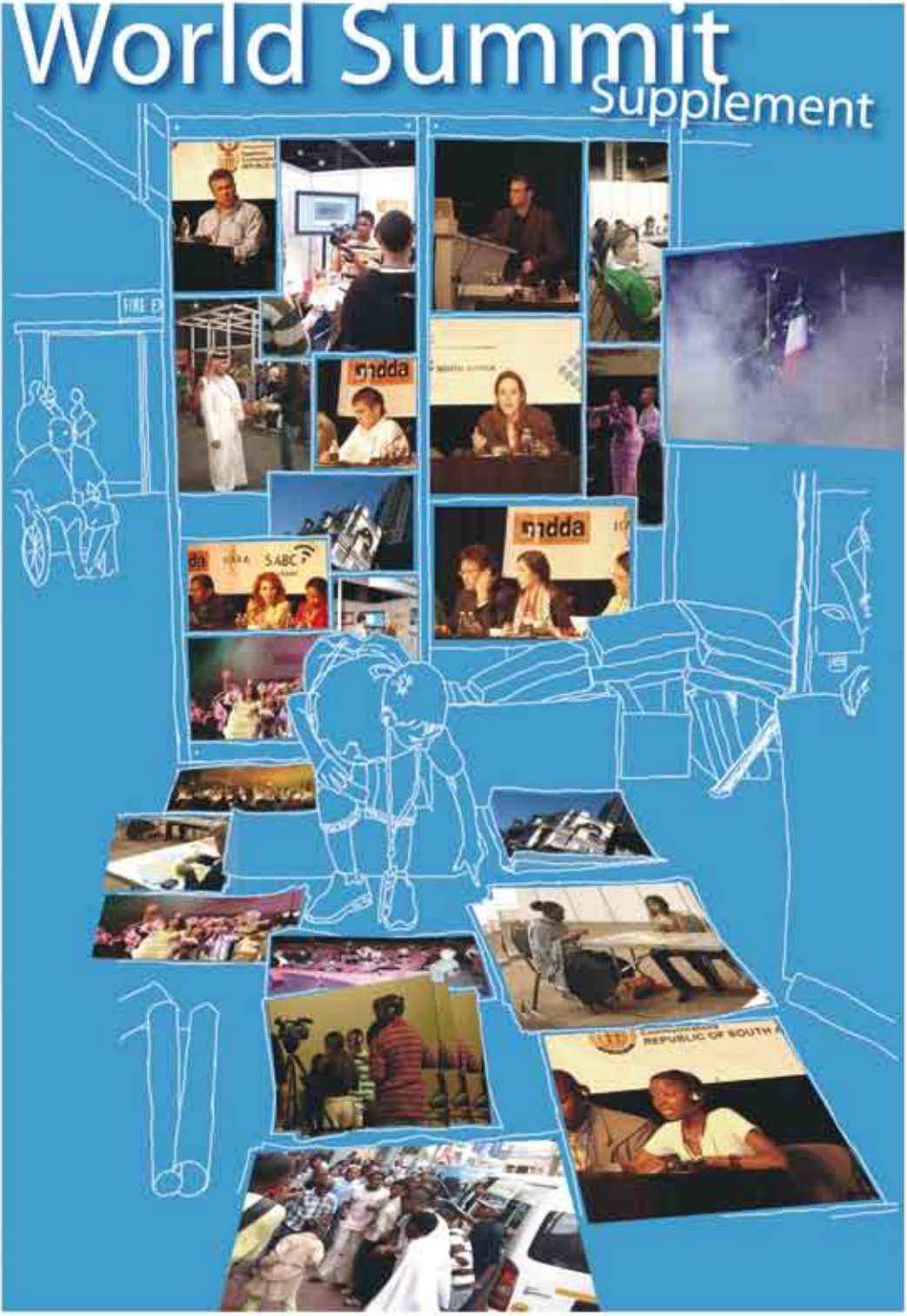
World Summit

Supplement



World Summit Introduction

In 1999, The World Summit On Media For Children Foundation was established to promote the World Summit movement. The Foundation is a not-for-profit public company incorporated in Victoria, Australia.

Its Board of Directors comprises representatives of the principal host organisations of previous and future World Summits and regional summits. The Foundation's objectives are to encourage and promote the World Summit movement, as well as select and assist host organisations for future World Summits. The World Summit movement was inaugurated with the First World Summit in Australia in 1995, hosted by the Australian Children's Television Foundation. There have been four World Summits since 1995.

5th World Summit: Media for Children – A Tool for Global Peace

The Summit consisted of round tables, workshops, panels, master classes, plenary sessions, exhibitions and an international Children's summit. Key themes and concepts the World Summit were:

- Global and regional Achievements since 1995

- The Charter and its implementation – toward 2010

- Regional collaboration and setting objectives for the next Summit

- Globalization of children's media
- Children's access in the Information Society
- Children's Media Rights
- Investing in Children's Media- Funding

- The North/South divide
- The Role of Governments,
- NGO's and Donor Organisations
- The role of regulators- a comparison of different approaches
- The role of content providers

- Arab Nations and Muslim Children what is the best way forward?
- HIV-AIDS and its impact on Children's Media
- South-south partnerships
- Training for producers (adults and children) of children's programming

- PBS, National, Independent and Regional Broadcasters- what is their role?
- Distribution of children's media- Equity and partnerships in materials distributed
- The role of Broadcasting Unions
- Children's voices- how can children participate meaningfully in the creation of their own media.

- Research and comparative studies New Media and Convergence of Technologies
- Internet and the World Wide Web content development and language rights.

Conference in Johannesburg

Vision

The vision of the hosts of the 5th World Summit on Media for Children in South Africa in 2007, was to produce a global and interactive conference to discuss and debate issues around children and media, with tangible, workable and sustainable outcomes.

Purpose of the Summit

The 5th World Summit on Media for Children showcased the diversity of the global children's media environment with a focus on developing countries' achievements. The common purpose is to ensure that a multiplicity of children's voices is heard. It provided a platform for debate, a forum for discussion, participation in interactive sessions, and an opportunity to share best practices.

The extent of Africa's media environment was on show, but it was also a World Summit relying on the spirit of ubuntu - **"I am because you are"** - to share global needs, situations and possibilities.

Today, interactive multimedia technologies provide us with new ways to draw upon children's natural impulses.

These new media encompass an abundance of materials including text, voice, music, graphics, photos, animation, and video but they provide more than abundance by bringing all these media together means that we can expand vastly the range of learning experiences to open up the social and natural worlds to a wide audience.

Goals & Objectives

The 5th World Summit on Media for Children's underlying goals and objectives are in line with the objectives of the World Summit Foundation on Media for Children, the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the priorities outlined in the Millennium Development Goals and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- To meet the objectives of the World Summit Foundation in raising the status of children's programming both within the region, across the continent and around the world.
- To draw to the attention of key players in media globally the importance of children's media issues.
- To encourage continental and global collaboration on the production of programme content.

Goals & Objectives...cont.

- To provide opportunities to share expertise and ideas for future quality children's programming.
- To generate interest in the Summit not just in the immediate region (i.e. South Africa) but across the entire continent of Africa, to extend its relevance beyond the host nation.
- To ensure that it is a World Summit with a programme and content of relevance and interest to delegates worldwide – a voice that is led by Africa, but is informed by the world.
- To ensure that media plays an active role in the social development of youth, with a focus on HIV and AIDS.
- To explore opportunities within the multi -media environment and unlock developmental potential and business opportunities.
- To initiate debate and discussions to formulate a global children's media policy and guiding principles around children's media issues in both developed and developing countries.
- To review, evaluate and take forward discussions from previous Summits on charters and declarations on children's media.

Outcomes

These have taken the form of widespread awareness in the international media community of pivotal issues: the protrayal of children in international media, programming for children in conflict, media as a tool for peace, to new, collaborations and projects to raise awareness of the plight of children in under-privileged areas, bringing them together through media and educating them in how to interpret the media that they are as much a part of as a spectator to.

It has outlined our responsibility to the children to ensure they are informed and equipped to deal with the situations that they find themselves in and furthermore, our responsibility to enable the youth to express themselves and communicate their identity through the media.

Quotes

"From Africa to Asia, Middle East to Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean and North America- they gathered.

Young, old, weak, strong, golden bronze, brown, white- they gathered.

They represented all cultures, diverse tongues, many nations. They gathered- in harmony under the banner of Peace and Democracy.

They gathered to prepare, present, participate and witness the event that would determine the media environment of children for the next three years- they gathered

They gathered to share and celebrate, to discuss and debate, to ensure that through democratic instruments they would charter a way forward that would place children's media on the national, regional and global agendas- they gathered

They gathered to find solutions that would include the previous charters and declarations and that would assist in the formation of an integrated media policy that will help determine best practice in children's media- they gathered

They gathered to bring one voice, to witness in one tongue, to present to all nations, the need for unity within the children's media environment- yhey gathered!"

-Firdoze Bulbulia, Opening Speech

"For me, it was the conference theme as the substance of so many sessions that was among the most outstanding contributions of the 5th Summit. All too often the nature and potential of "peace and democracy" are abused by being bantered about as slogans or vague ideals. In contrast, this Summit enabled us the opportunity to delve into the details, dynamics, multiplicities, and potentialities involved in working to achieve more democratic cultures through the media."

-Peter Lemish- Israel

"I was thrilled to be in the presence of internationally renowned producers, musicians, practitioners, researchers, educators and youth from all around the world. The youth who attended our workshop were passionate about learning to use and express themselves through video. It was a life changing experience for all of us. You can be confident to know that we all took home a piece of our South Africa experience that will continue to motivate and inspire us to use media in our work with youth as a tool for peace and democracy. Thank you and congratulations."

-Steve Goodman, USA

Archbishop John Foley
SABC

Werner Trieselmann

Marion Creely

Irish kids from Blast

Yvonne Chaka Chaka

Prof. Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane

Firdoze Bulbulia (closing cer-
mdda

Milton Chen (Lucas Arts)

Prof. Máira Messenger Davies

Roy Disney

Final Day: Tired Delegates

Prof. Máire Mesenger-Davies & Dr. Peter Lemish
Conference Delegates
Tepitia (former child
Eddie Funde, Head of SABC
Prof. Máire Messenger Davies, David Kleeman &
Lumko Mtimede
nidda
ICASA
Per Lundgren
Patrizia Boglione
Traditional Dancers
Ian Stewart & Fidoze Bulbulia

"We have come away from the Summit with a renewed commitment to make this earth a better place by better educating and entertaining the next generation. No doubt the discussions in Johannesburg will have a lasting effect through the work we all must carry on from there. Congratulations on the achievement."

- Firdaus Kharas, Canada

"As an event of huge dimensions I think the 5wsmc gave everyone a feeling of being together creating something new. The big amount of active, engaged children and the general respect for their opinions gave new hope for the future. Let us do everything to spread these aspects for peace and understanding instead of violence and silly stereotypes!"

-Antonia Ringbom
(animator/director/artist)

"Children are the hope of nation and the future of the world.
Children's media should plant the seeds of peace and friendship in
children's young heart. Let all the children's media of the world join
hands to provide a green homeland of heart to children and to build a
bridge of spirit to a harmonious world."

-Yu Pexia ,China

To put this a bit more in my own personal context, when I say "quality media," I am talking about responsible storytelling...And there's a wonderful ting about responsibility. Not everyone can be a great artist or musician or athlete. But everyone can be responsible.

-Roy Disney

"...And I am glad that you join us in our work. You are joining the movement of sport for the development of peace. You are focussing on media as a tool for democracy and peace.
You are working on the merge between sport and media in a common project of social and cultural understanding and peace: 'the Alexandra Project'."

-Adolf Ogi, United Nations

"Talking about youth issues is very important; having youth voices taken into account is vital. But all
this has depth and meaning only if the life of a young boy is saved today from the humanitarian
tragedy happening in Darfur. Or more humbly, if a young girl today in Guinea takes the road to school
in a country where a large percentage of girls do not have this option. This is something. Some
positive change in society and for democracy; even the smallest change is a winner."

-Mimi Brazeau

Ireland and the 5th World Summit

Marion Creely

The 5th World Summit on Media for Children took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 24-28 March 2007, around the central theme of Media as a tool for global peace and democracy. It was an exciting and dynamic event, attended by over 1300 delegates from more than 80 countries and all continents, including a parallel Youth conference of 300 teenagers.

For the first time, Ireland was represented at a Summit. And, appropriately, this representation was truly an all island affair. Appropriately, because as Prof Máire Messenger Davies, Director of the Centre for Media Research at the University of Ulster spoke to the assembled delegates on her research into media and conflict resolution beside her Dublin colleague, RTE producer, Marion Creely, politicians in Northern Ireland were reaching a resolution to a long standing and painful conflict. In this context the Summit theme, of media as a tool for global peace and democracy had particular resonance for the Irish delegation.

The Irish participated and contributed enthusiastically and in diverse ways. KYTV (Kildare Youth Television) daily manned the Irish stand at the conference centre. They had come to the Summit hoping to explore the concept of an Irish based youth media IP channel, to develop a transnational youth media project with a youth media group from Tanzania and to make new contacts and ideas.

Kevin Smith of KYTV was delighted with the large and diverse groups who visited the stand. So many youth groups from all over the world wished to contribute material to the channel, that KYTV plan to launch it in September! The transnational project with Tanzania is successfully launched and there are plans to develop the concept with other youth media groups initially within the EU.

Cork based **Blastbeat** youth band 'The Impressionists', performed daily for the Youth Summit and appeared live on radio and TV. Blastbeat's founder, Robert Stephenson, led a seminar to explain the Blastbeat concept which promotes music, multimedia and entrepreneurial skills for school going youth. The movement which is already thriving in Ireland, Brussels and LA, has now been taken up by **6 African schools**.

Natasha McConnell of The Base, Ballyfermot found the **media literacy** seminars especially inspiring and has already initiated a pilot scheme on media literacy for schools in Ballyfermot.Manus Moynihan of the Dán project in the Liberties ensured that the Irish youth got full value from the seminars and workshops and that they got to see something of African before and after the Summit. Highlights of the trip included stroking a cheetah at a cheetah reserve and visiting the 'cradle of civilisation'.

Since returning home, the young people have reported their experiences to their local communities through reports in newsletters, community radio and screenings of some very attractive videos! All the youth, who appeared on live radio and TV for SABC during the Summit, and on TTV for RTé Network 2, believe the experience has broadened their view of media and society, increased their media literacy skills, deepened their understanding of cultural diversity and given them a sense of what it means to be 'global citizens'

For the academics attending the conference the experience was equally rich. Ms Paula Hicks of Trinity College Dublin, presented her IT based concept in health infomatics daily at the Irish stand to a large and interested audience.

Prof. Máire Messenger Davies addressed the final plenary session of the first day of the Summit on Children, fair and balanced reporting in media and her contribution was especially relevant to the conference theme.

Jan Peterson, of the Dublin Institute of Technology School of Media, participated in several sessions on media and preschool, an area in which he is conducting research. He has made useful global contacts for his continuing research projects.

RTÉ producer and member of the Summit International Think Tank, Marion Creely, acted as rapporteur for Day One of the Summit. She reported on the problems facing producers of children's media in the Arab World as passionately outlined by delegates from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. As executive producer of the EBU children's documentary series in which Egypt and Jordan participate, she has witnessed these difficulties. She emphasised the important role of children's factual television in allowing young people to engage with the realities of their world in a way that will grow their sense of citizenship and civic participation.
Marion Creely also participated in seminars on quality public service broadcasting for children and on documentary making for children .

So what next? Well the sheer breadth of ideas, projects and programmes seen at the Summit is certainly something that Ireland Inc deserves to experience. As a first step, we propose to hold an All Ireland Youth Media Conference in March next year.

The conference will be hosted by DIT, Dublin and UU, Coleraine. 'Children's Media Futures': a Conference on Young People and the Media in Ireland, North and South, promises to be an exciting event and a worthwhile follow-up to the extraordinary event that was the 5th World Summit on Media for Children.

I believe the Irish participation in the 5th World Summit on media for children has already achieved much in contributing to quality debate on children's media in Ireland and Africa, in forging direct links between media players, teachers and youth around the world, so that continued collaboration is assured into the future.

'Debate on Fair and Balanced Reporting'

Máire Messenger Davies

In this presentation, I first want to say something briefly about my own research which relates to this topic. Second, I want to flag up some questions arising from these studies, in order to encourage discussion.

But first: what do we mean by 'fair and balanced reporting'? Fair according to whom? What's fair to me might not seem fair to you, if you and I are in disagreement. And is 'balance' necessarily always a good thing? Sometimes one side of an argument has a better case than the other side, particularly in the case of victims versus perpetrators – so is it really 'fair' to suggest that the two sides are equal?

As an ex-journalist, I recognise the absolute professional journalistic responsibility of reporting the facts. You must find out what happened, who was involved, where it happened, and when it happened and these facts must be checked. How and why it happened may be more elusive – and here we have to talk to the people involved, whether governments, eye-witnesses, perpetrators, victims. But some facts will seem more salient than others, depending on who's doing the reporting, and which agency you are working for. This is inevitable. You will never get the whole truth – but you must do your level best to get as near to it as you can.

Research on news

I became particularly involved in research on children, media and conflict when some colleagues at Cardiff University, and myself, started an ongoing research project on children and news, linked to the Channel 4 news programme *First Edition (1997-2003)*. This research is documented at http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/en/research/28/192.html.

From this study, we derived a number of interesting findings: first, children do watch, listen to and read adult news. Of the 110 eleven and 12 year old children involved in our study, 34% said they watched adult news very often; 59% said they watched it sometimes; only 6.8% 'never' watched it. Children may say news is boring but they pick up a great deal of information from it just the same, and we all need to bear this in mind. Secondly, they do value children's news – *First Edition* was particularly valued by the children we interviewed and the opportunity to interact with it, and with its extremely eminent and senior journalist presenter, Jon Snow, was highly appreciated. Nevertheless, children's news is not a profitable commercial format, and not all schools took the programme, so Channel 4 cancelled *First Edition (2003)*.

The representation of children in news

The second area of study arising from this project was an analysis of how children are represented in adult news. A small content analysis of British adult news coverage of the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003 showed that the vast majority (26 out of 27) representations of children in a conflict situation were passive; they showed children as victims, as patients in hospitals, as refugees, always carried, always lying down or otherwise dependent on adults. None showed children as agents in any way. This represents a wider issue which I want to raise in a moment: are children completely without agency in conflict situations? Only one out of the 27 news stories I studied showed children as active: these were young war protesters in England and they protested by lying down in the street and playing dead – thus making my point ironically.

The case of Northern Ireland

As you may recognise, I work in an area – Ulster, Northern Ireland - which has a very troubled history. For 30 years, broadly between 1969 and 1999, (although there were violent incidents both before and since this period) Northern Ireland – part of the island of Ireland, but constitutionally part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - suffered violent internal conflict in which over 3,500 people officially (and more unofficially) were killed - in a population of only one and three quarter million. Many thousands more were injured.

Many of these casualties, of course, were children and young people. Some of these deaths – notoriously on Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972 when 13 unarmed civilians were shot dead – were inflicted by the forces of the state - the police and the British army; the publication of the proceedings of the most recent official inquiry into what happened on Bloody Sunday is still awaited. There were and are many ingredients to this conflict, which began in the 1960s as a Civil Rights campaign by Catholics who were suffering discrimination in housing, health and education; these other ingredients include religion, and also organised crime, but the conflict is basically about which country Northern Ireland should belong to – Ireland or Britain. Today, (27th March 2007), as I saw on Sky News, we have reached a constitutional settlement which brings these opposing groups together in a power-sharing regional government for Northern Ireland, still within the UK, but with the practical and financial support of the Irish government. It's fittingly symbolic too, that this deal has been partly brokered by Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, a former anti-apartheid campaigner from South Africa.

The ways in which the media report, and reported, the struggle in Northern Ireland are very interesting from the point of view of having to be 'fair and balanced.' Again – fair to whom? If you believe in a united Ireland, maybe you don't want to hear the point of view of people who want to stay part of Britain; and vice versa.

However, the main news media in Northern Ireland – the national broadcasters, the public service BBC and the commercial network UTV (ITV) – have to represent 'both' sides, even though they might be seen to be representatives of the British state and as such untrustworthy to those who distrust the British state. This has created a difficult situation for journalists working in the British media wanting to conduct accurate (and fair and balanced) reporting; it is one which provides an interesting case study of the kinds of constraints that can operate on a traditionally free and democratic press in a developed country in a civil conflict.

Children as political agents

In my own research, I was particularly interested in how the media represent the issues to children – not just the conflict, but the political and ideological issues behind it, and behind this interest lay another question, the question of children's agency: this conflict has lasted 30 years, so children have grown up and matured during it. To what extent have children played a part in continuing the conflict? Were they always just victims? Or did they grow up into perpetrators? Well – looking at the fatality and injury figures over time, the most recent bombing atrocity being in the town of Omagh in 1998, killing 28 people including babies, children and pregnant women - obviously some of them did. Could – or should – this have been prevented? And what was the media's role in how these children grew up?

A comment from a participant in a seminar we held on Children, Media and Conflict in 2005, who had carried out a study with 16-24 year olds, was: 'They look at TV news reports and they think it's true and they generalise everything from what they see on TV. They are scared of the other side because of what they see on TV. ' This is a classic 'media effects' argument, yet media did not feature in her study (which was about sectarianism) and, as Patricia Edgar said here at the conference, media are not one of UNICEF's indicators of children's well-being. This omission seems incredible to me, given the several media articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Conflict seminar

In April 2005 we held a seminar at the University of Ulster on children, media and conflict, focusing on divided societies, in particular Israel and Palestine and Ireland North and South. We have produced a transcript of this seminar – and it's available online at http://cmr.ulster.ac.uk/pdf/policy/childrenconflict.pdf At the seminar, Dr. Sami Adwan, a Palestinian educator, made a very important point which I don't think media-educators should forget. Referring to the various examples he had given of children's lives being affected directly by violence, conflict, danger and distress, he said: 'I think reality has much more effect than the media.' He did not share the kinds of concerns about media violence that some people worry about: children are affected by real violence, he pointed out and cartoon violence or American cop shows, are really not the problem.

A second key point was made by Peter Lemish, from Israel, about the reporting of peace. As we all know, the reporting of war and conflict and rebellion is very dramatic visually. But what does peace look like? How do we represent peace to children? How do we represent democracy? Conflict resolution, democratic negotiation and peace building are not dramatic – they are painstaking, and long-drawn out and – as in the case of the early stages of the Northern Irish peace process - they have to be carried out in secret, because talking to 'the men of violence,' as Margaret Thatcher called them, could have been seen to be treasonable. But conflict resolution can be demonstrated dramatically to children – and we've seen some examples at the conference, for instance in Peter Lemish's session about the Prix Jeunesse programmes.

Children in active roles in conflict

The third point I want to make from this seminar and for me, it's the most important one, concerns children as agents, not just as victims. One of the contributors to the seminar, a psychologist who has done a lot of research with children in Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles, said: 'Children don't want peace because it means the other side has won.' This very starkly illustrates the important point that children are not indifferent to politics. Children usually (though not invariably) take the same side as their parents and their communities in a conflict situation – they don't really have much choice about that.

But this is not necessarily an unconsidered position: they may genuinely believe that 'their' side has justice on its side, they may be very well informed about the history of 'their' side, and have all the facts and figures of past grievances at their finger tips. Why should they see the other side's point of view? They don't agree with it! But fair, balanced and accurate reporting should nevertheless represent points of view to children, and to all of us, with which we don't agree. Simply confirming our prejudices isn't reporting, and it isn't journalism - it's propaganda.

In cases where it is the powerful forces of the state who are ranged against the children and their communities, as in the case of Catholic/Nationalist children in Northern Ireland, or the forces of another state, as in the case of Palestinian children, then children will want to oppose those powerful state forces. The cover of our conflict booklet shows images of children who are not being passive victims: one is of a Palestinian boy confronting an Israeli tank, the other shows two young boys in Belfast running away after taunting a British soldier. These children are not unwilling conscripts – unlike the child soldiers we have heard from at the conference. They are agents, freely acting on behalf of their communities against what they see as oppressive forces. Are these children wrong? I raise this as a discussion point for others to address – particularly in terms of how media for children need to take account of genuine political and ideological differences between children which cannot be massaged away by the 'let's all get along together

in peace and love' kinds of goodwill messages that we've also heard here at this conference – and of course, these messages are very necessary too.

Some recommendations from children arising from this research

So what do children want from the media, when it comes to reporting conflict situations?

First, they want understanding and explanation; they don't only want to see dramatic and violent explosions, they want to know why these explosions are happening, and what the underlying conflict is about. This is one way in which the 'other' side can be represented to children, and constitutes a major ingredient of 'fair and balanced reporting.'

Second, and arising from this, it's important to remember that children are agents, as well as victims. They should be shown as having agency; their views on the conflict should be sought and where children are active participants, whether as fighters, or as heads of households or whatever they are, they should be consulted. The example of the South African children of Soweto in 1976 has been mentioned several times here. These children didn't have access to media technology, so weren't 'empowered' in that sense – but they were certainly empowered in the actions they took, which are still remembered and which still have influence.

Third, there is the important ingredient of what some Dutch researchers on children and news have called 'consolation'.

News and documentaries for children need to remember the vulnerability of children to being upset by representations of suffering children, including the use of children for propaganda purposes which they can find offensive. (I felt this was the case with the Al Jazeera children's 'news' bulletin we saw, which was not informative, requiring political agency from children, but emotive, requiring distress from them). There are degrees of distance from violent conflict for children. For those directly involved and suffering, as Sami Adwan said, the media violence isn't an issue, the real violence is, but this still needs to be sensitively and accurately reported. For those not directly involved and suffering, but still members of a conflict-ridden community, there is a need for rational explanation of what lies behind the images and the need to represent the point of view of 'the other'. For those who are not part of the conflict at all, but are children watching and listening from elsewhere, there is a yet further need for explanation and contextualisation – and for these second two groups, there will be great anxiety that something bad could happen to them too. Good children's news programmes, like the BBC's *Newsround*, or the Swedish *Aktuellt*, will offer helplines and have counsellors and experts on the programme to discuss children's worries about their own potential victimhood; they should also offer practical advice on what children can do politically and democratically to make the world a better place.

Fourth – there are many ways in which political and ideological conflict can be represented, as well as in news reporting: drama can do it, and even comedy, as in the case of the BBC's *Give my Head Peace* in Northern Ireland, with its No 1 slot among children and its 63% share of the child audience; this popularity is surely because this grotesquely caricatured version of the opposing communities represents quite honestly how horrible the protagonists can be to, and about, each other – and children know this to be the truth. They know the nicknames and the stereotypes and these can be represented safely in comedy, less so, obviously, in news and factual programming.

Empowerment

And finally – the question of empowerment, a word that has been used repeatedly at the conference. It is indeed inspiring and uplifting to see how children can be enthused by access to the creative and communicative potential of new media – the ability to make things happen at the touch of a button, to communicate with children on the other side of the world, to use radio and the internet as instruments of peace, as the former child soldier, Tepetia, did. But there is another aspect to empowerment too. We must not forget that globally and economically, the media corporations (as Roy Disney reminded us) are huge, powerful, rich institutions with very close relationships with governments in some non-democratic countries and with a considerable degree of influence and closeness to the corridors of political power in democratic ones.

In terms of children's relationship with the media – the key issue is to do with real power relations: who has the money, who makes the decisions, who calls the shots? Children need to understand how the mass media work, how powerful, influential and wealthy they are, and they need to demand access to these institutions in terms of influencing their policies; this is true democracy – influencing the major governing structures of one's society and one's country.

Historic day

However, good news, I hope: as I've said, today is an historic day. The meeting in Northern Ireland at which Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams sat down together and agreed to share power in government was an important step in the resolution and political negotiation of an apparently intractable conflict. Peter Hain (a South African and veteran anti-apartheid campaigner) – so highly symbolic – announced the deal along with Dermot Ahern, the Irish foreign minister, on the steps of Stormont House, with the door open and a picture of the British queen Elizabeth behind them; a carefully framed image, obviously aiming at 'fairness and balance' to all parties. The assembly finally began in May with the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, two groups whose political aims are fundamentally opposed and will remain opposed, working in it together.

This must be good news – and its implications need to be fully explained to children, and to go on being explained

as long as the cultural, religious and political divisions in their society continue to exist, as they still do.

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