

# Bente's Voice

*Bente's Voice* (VPRO Television, Hilversum, Netherlands) is a 30-minute reality program about an 11-year old girl who loves to sing (cf. illustration 1). Bente dreams of entertaining people and making them happy with her voice. She shared her songs on YouTube and entered a contest on *The Voice Kids* television program in Holland. After the audition, she tells her father that she does not have a good feeling about her performance, but she enjoyed it very much. As she goes to sleep that evening, she hopes to become famous, get a record contract and a poster from the Voice. The next day at school, Bente feels isolated and different from other children. She goes wall-climbing at the gym. The RTL4 TV camera crew is outside the gym with her family. They are planning to videotape Bente opening a letter from the Voice for another audition. Bente's family helps the camera crew stage the news that she will go on for another round of competition. They perform for the cameras. Later, Bente's mother helps her prepare as she chooses her clothes and talks about her feelings of nervousness and excitement. When the family arrives at the studio for Bente's audition, they encourage her. Backstage, they cheer as the judges approve of her performance. Bente chooses professional coaches Nick and Simon to assist. Suddenly, Bente is popular at school. At home, she shares complex details in contracts that are required by the television station. She tells her mom that she doesn't feel like singing the song that was chosen for her. Before falling asleep, she expresses disappointment in Nick and Simon. Finally, it is the competition day. When she isn't selected for the finale, Bente and her family are disappointed but glad it is over. Bente has mixed feelings about the whole experience and questions her choices. Although sad about this outcome, she begins to see that her life is ahead of her, and she vows to do her best.

*Bente's Voice* was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2014 finalists and placed third in the 12–15 category.

## INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS' OPINION

International experts shared their opinions about *Bente's Voice* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2014. Given the immense popularity of *The Voice Kids* on television in the Netherlands, there was debate about how the competition was portrayed and how the lead character interacts with cameras throughout the program. In terms of media education, experts agreed that *Bente's Voice* succeeded. Yet some experts wondered whose thoughts and ideas were promoted during the program—the girl's or the producers'? Some experts also questioned the way in which Bente's relationships were depicted.

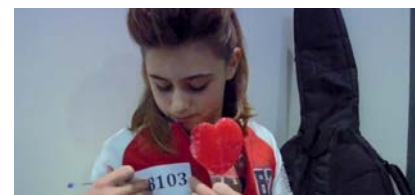
"It makes you wonder how much was staged with her getting into the competition and getting on the stage." (female expert, United States)

"I like her but not the situation that she found herself in. She is a cool girl and she survived that situation." (female expert, Slovenia)

"My first instinct was I really loved it actually. I found her to be a very appealing character that would fit with the target audience. It allows you to go on an emotional journey with her." (female expert, New Zealand)



Ill. 1: Eleven year old Bente loves to sing



Ill. 2: Preparing to audition



Ill. 3: Mom in front of the TV camera crew

Screenshots from *Bente's Voice* © VPRO Television



III. 4: Retrieving an envelope from the climbing wall



III. 5: Family provides support backstage



III. 6: Bente sings on *The Voice Kids*



III. 7: Kids at school crowd around Bente



III. 8: Bente looks forward to the future

Screenshots from *Bente's Voice* © VPRO Television

“For me it was genius. I asked myself could it be fictional. The story is so perfect that it couldn't be reality. So many children want to be famous.”  
(female expert, Norway)

OPINIONS FROM TEENAGERS IN 7 COUNTRIES

PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2014 included the votes of an international youth jury, which was organized in cooperation with broadcasters worldwide. Teens between 12 and 15 in 7 countries discussed and judged 16 programs in the 12 to 15 category. Here is a summary of their discussions about the program *Bente's Voice*.

Many of the youth jury members connected with and appreciated the character of Bente because of her talent. Teens in Jordan, Canada, Colombia, Malaysia, Namibia, and New Zealand described how the girl demonstrated persistence and belief in herself. Jurors from Malaysia appreciated that parents supported their children in this program, no matter what. The youth juries communicated what Bente came to understand in this story: a need to be realistic in pursuing dreams and to carry on when discouraged. A youth jury member from **Jordan** stated the moral of the program this way, “This show teaches us not to give up and to have faith in ourself.”

Members of the youth juries in **Canada** and **Namibia** picked up on issues of popularity. “I felt kind of sad for her because she realized these people were just being her friend because she was on the TV show,” said a juror from **Canada**. “When she didn't make it, she didn't want to tell her friends because she was afraid that they would stop hanging out with her and that's how it also is in real life,” said a juror from **Namibia**. Others in **Colombia** and **Montenegro** discussed the dreams of so many young people to be famous like Madonna or Lady Gaga. Most of the jury members were very interested in and raised questions or remarked about the behind the scenes depictions in this program. For example, from these scenes they learned that several takes are needed in reality shows. A juror from **Montenegro** put it this way, “You get sucked in a machine of the media industry.”

All of the youth juries indicated *Bente's Voice* is right for their age group, except a juror from **New Zealand**. This juror thought older people from the age of about 50 up would “like the heart-felt spirit of it but some teenagers just wouldn't care at all.” Overall, comments about the program were enthusiastic, such as a statement from **New Zealand**, “She was so young. She was so truthful about it all and seeing how she had to cope with the decisions and how she was really honest and open.”

*Elizabeth Spezia, PhD Student, Southern Illinois University, USA*

Target Audience 8.15	Idea 7.31	Script 7.56	Realization 8.04
Average Score per Category by experts' voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2014			