

The presenters children want on television: who do children want to have explaining the world to them?

Munich, June 2012 – In children’s television, it is mainly men who explain the world to children. In German children’s television – which is a world leader in educational programming – but also in international children’s television, it is mainly men standing in front of the camera when it comes to knowledge. Is this what children want? The IZI organized a study involving over 2.800 children in 24 countries, who were asked what sort of presenter they would like to have in an educational programme. The result: if they could choose a person to help them understand the world, boys would generally want a young man or adult (but not an old man), while girls want a young woman or girl.

Men explain the world

Educational programmes are important and beneficial for children – and, as long as they are well made, also highly appealing. Generally, the programmes focus on one or two presenters who show the children something and explain it to them. Even in high quality programmes it is rarer to find a mixed duo, and only in exceptional cases is this explaining role given to a woman.

Do children want men to explain the world to them?

In a recent study, the IZI organized a survey of n= 2,839 children between 7 and 10 years of age in 24 countries, asking what sort of presenter they would like to have in an educational programme, a programme in which someone experiences, researches and explains something exciting for them.

One of the clearest findings worldwide: 85 % of boys and 85 % of girls want a presenter of their own sex.

The ideal presenter for children worldwide:

children who match the social ideal want to see the same features in their preferred presenter, but those who deviate from this ideal are unsure

In the choice of skin, hair and eye colour, those who see themselves as corresponding to a social ideal are certain that they want to see the same external features in their ideal presenter: light-skinned blondes with blue eyes, for example, would like to see exactly the same features in their preferred presenter.

This is similar for children with Asian facial features, who would also like to see people who look like this on children’s television.

Dark-skinned children, especially those of African ethnicity such as respondents in Nigeria, are not uniformly certain that they would trust someone who looks like them to show or explain something to them. They grow up with children’s television which comes almost exclusively from US productions. This probably has a lasting influence on their image of the ideal “explainer of the world”.

Given that learning-oriented programmes have a proven influence on children’s understanding of the world, sensitivity in the choice of presenters is particularly desirable here, from a pedagogical point of view.

The present study

In the period from February to May 2012 the survey was carried out in 24 countries: Germany, Argentina, Cuba, the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, Australia, Brazil, India, Thailand, Turkey, the Philippines, Slovenia, Romania, the Netherlands, Italy, Pakistan, Nepal, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya and Egypt.

The children were given an age-appropriate questionnaire, on which they could indicate the basic features of their desired presenter (man/woman, age), and roughly describe his or her appearance (colour of hair, skin and eyes, physical proportions, glasses, ethnicity). On a second sheet they classified themselves using the same categories.

The findings of the study were presented for the first time at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. This year the theme of the most prestigious festival of children's television in the world was "Watch, Learn and Grow with Children's Television". The International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television provided a framework of informative events in which scholarly findings were presented in a practically relevant manner.

The PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL was held in the BR broadcasting centre from 1 to 6 June 2012. 500 participants from 67 countries took part, watching the best children's television programmes together, discussing each of the 87 finalists in international discussion groups, and choosing their winner..

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