

TELEVIZION

International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI)

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The *Teletubbies* in parent counselling

The *Teletubbies* seem less suited to answering why-questions

How do the *Teletubbies* go down with younger children at pre-school age, with the three- and four-year-olds? The FLIMMO¹ wanted to obtain leads on this by questioning children in several children's groups in July '99. Through participative observation during the reception of a *Teletubbies* instalment and in subsequent conversations and play activities we obtained the views and assessments of the 3- and 4-year-olds. *"I thought that bit with the vacuum cleaner was so funny. How it kind of blew out the ball again."*

While the *Teletubbies* were playing a ball-game the vacuum cleaner, Nono, joined in in his own way, and this is what 3-year-old Jan, like all the other children as well, enjoyed so much. The short film insert, in which the kindergarten children put on a competition in blowing cotton wool, was also well received. The repetition of the film, however, did not arouse much interest. "I know that now," Paul (4) echoed the views of most of the children. The sun with the baby-face, at first gleefully welcomed, also lost some of its popularity after it appeared on the screen for the third time. "Not the sun again," sighed Jana (4). The "Bye bye" at the end did not appeal to Fabian (3). That is something for "babies", he explained. He would have found a simple "cheerio" better.

The younger pre-school children pay attention in *Teletubbieland* to what is familiar to them from their children's world, what is funny or exciting. They especially like mini-stories which, like the episode about Nono, have a recognisable beginning, climax and a consistent ending. On the other hand, elements which are obviously thought up for young children do not meet with much approval. That is not surprising. Children at pre-school age have outgrown the phase of pure "watching". They have why-questions and are looking for explanations. And they want to be faced with a challenge, in the form of little stories with which they can go along and think about. But the *Teletubbies* have not a lot of that kind of thing to offer. Here the world is made very simple and provided with elements which, although they catch attention, do not get to the bottom of things. A lot simply happens or comes and disappears as if by magic. So in conclusion it has to be presumed that pre-school children can certainly enjoy the *Teletubbies*, but that, the older they get, their curiosity and their desire to discover is no longer satisfied.

NOTE:

¹ FLIMMO - watching television through children's eyes: the FLIMMO offers parents and educators guidance on television education. For this purpose the FLIMMO looks at television from the point of view of children aged from 3 to 13 years. The basis is provided by research findings and regular interviews. The society "Programmberatung für Eltern e.V" (Programme Counselling for Parents) is responsible for the project. The JFF (Institut Jugend Film Fernsehen) has been commissioned to conceive and execute the project. The FLIMMO comes out every four months as a brochure and is uPh.D.ated every 14 days on the internet under <http://www.flimmo.de>

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