

The Show with the Elephant

The Show with the Elephant was produced by Westdeutscher Rundfunk based in Germany. The world is elephantastic – Open your eyes and join in! The little blue elephant and his friends present things to discover, to do and to be amazed of. The show is created for small children from 3 to 6 years. Small, funny stories are mixed with fascinating documentaries and portraits of children, riddles, films schooling and inspiring the senses, or English as a second language. The presenters address the children in a direct way. To give those children a feeling for the length of the show or time in general, there is a ‘Halftime-Ritual’ in the middle of each show.

In this show you will meet lots of different people and characters. The twins Emilie and Marilu, who seem to be equal at first sight, but are not in every way. The good old friends, Nulli and Priesemut, like doing everything together – except eating. There is Anke, a famous German comedian, who notices that something is wrong with her, but she does not really know, what it is. You will meet a cow, who forgot how to moo. Fortunately a little sheep will help her. You will listen to a choir of funny cats – they definitely need the help of a conductor. There is also Robert Metcalf singing a song, kindly supported by some monsters. Tanja and André who conduct a thrilling experiment. And finally Elephant and his best buddy Bunny, the hosts of the show.

The Show with the Elephant was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2010 finalists in the “up to 6 Non-fiction” category.

International experts’ opinions

All the international experts appreciated the program for more than one reason. “I really liked the whole program, but that was one of those little ideas that I thought: *gee, why don’t we do that more often?* It was shot so that those clues or instructions were not blocking anything that you needed to see. I just thought that was a very nice way to encourage caregivers to be involved in not just sitting with the child. I liked the whole show. I liked the pace of the show, the variety in it; it was very controlled, and I really liked it a lot” (male expert, Canada). “That is an elegant program. It was generous... I like when you can see that a lot of money is spent on children’s programs” (female expert, Denmark). “I love the aesthetics of the show: the coloured blocks and the white background is very clean for this audience, this age group. The song was very catchy. I liked the song” (female expert, USA).



Figure 1: A dog conducted the cat choir singing Little Hans.



Figure 2: A dog conducted the cat choir singing Little Hans.



Figure 3: Emilie and Marilu are twins. One of them is left-handed and the other is right-handed.



Figure 4: Although the bunny and the frog eat very different foods, they can still be good friends.



Figure 5: Tanja and André showed children how to make a volcano erupt.

One of the directors of the program explained the concept behind it: “It is an educational show – it is also educational for the educators. This is for the parents who maybe are not so trained to watch children’s television or to even talk to the children. It has been running since September 2007. We produced about 160 shows until today. We have the whole show on the Internet” (female expert, Germany).

There was a lot of discussion amongst the international experts regarding the use of subtitles in the program. Some thought that the use of such instructions was very effective. “That is an extremely effective way to give the parents ideas as to how to work with their children. It would not work in the U.S, because, for the most part, parents use the television as a babysitter. So, if they are not watching with the children it would not have much impact” (female expert, USA). “I really liked that parent-bar that came up. I just thought that was fantastic. I imagine that it makes for a long interaction between the child and the parent in the room: brilliant” (female expert, New Zealand).

They also compared it to the use of subtitles by other channels like Cartoon Network. “The only difference between what this show did and Cartoon Network though, was that the Cartoon Network information was things like: ‘Oh, it is time to go and do your laundry.’ It was more like commercial break stuff, as opposed to parent-child engagement suggestions. I do not know if it would annoy the parent having it pop-up or feeling patronised. It was the first time where I thought: *Well maybe this might be an effective way to encourage parent-child engagement*” (female expert, Canada). The female expert from Germany, one of the directors, shed more light on the use of subtitles.

“The parents obviously like it. The children do not seem to bother. Personally, I was a little bit concerned at the beginning. I was thinking: it must be irritating to have something that might distract you or force you to want to read it – although you are a child and also cannot read as a preschool child. But the children don’t seem to mind, and the adults like it.” She shares the research they did to find out the reactions of the parents. “We have many reactions; we did an online research when it was the first time on screen. Many parents like it very much. Many parents liked that there are English parts, that the children can learn English, they would like more of that: *we can improve our English too*. It should help the parents to watch with their children. And it works. At first maybe they are dealing with not knowing what it is, but they accept this. They watch it with the children, and it works. And they like it” (female expert, Germany).



Figure 6: Robert taught the kids a song.

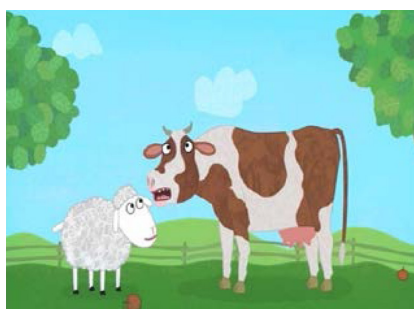


Figure 7: A cow finally learnt to moo like a cow after a sheep taught him.



Figure 8: The bunny and the elephant helped each other during the sleep.

Screenshots from *The Show with the Elephant* © WDR

Some experts shared a similar experience of using the subtitles in their programs. “We have just made a program called ‘Talky-Time’, which has been designed as a tool to work both in the nursery with the nursery teacher interacting with the children, but also at home with the parent interacting with children. So, there is an awful lot of interactivity, but on the screen we do have the dialogue to prompt the teacher. It is quite complicated to explain, but basically from all the research it is already been done in seven different five-minute, ten-minute clips. So far the research has been shown that it works very well for both the parents, teachers, and the children. The children don’t pay any attention to the writing, even if they understand the writing on the screen. They just completely disregard it. They are just engaged with what is happening with the presenter, so it doesn’t seem to bother them at all” (female expert, Scotland).

Some international experts suggested using the similar style in their home country. “I do not think we have tried it in Sweden. I kind of find it inspiring if you want to profile a channel somehow – like this is a good channel for the parents to – and you can explain how you were thinking when you created the show, and then you can give something to the parents. But many in Sweden want to be good parents for the children, so I think maybe this in some ways could work” (female expert, Sweden). Similarly, “Of course we have not tried that yet, so I am not sure about it. It would be encouraging for the parents and children to watch together. It would be easier for the parents to explain something like that. It may be effective” (male expert, Japan).

“I think the Korean parents really like that kind of program, because in the evening the mothers watch TV with their children. Maybe they like that kind of information to guide some particulars from the items. I think we can try that kind of under-bar on our shows. It is very interesting to me. I have a six-year-old boy, and as a parent I think it is a very impressive and effective way to show how I can use those kinds of items. But I wonder if the preschoolers like that

kind of under-bar or not. That is the question, but the parents will like. But the target audience is – the preschooler, so that is the question: the preschoolers like that kind of obstacles – the underlined ones?” (female expert, Korea).

Other participants also expressed an interest in this strategy: “I think in our country in South Africa we do not have the options or choice of programming, and in fact there aren’t many preschools. A lot of kids do not go to school until six. So for parents that would have a program where they could actually take that role of and understand an opportunity of education, I think it is a fantastic idea. Obviously it is not tested, but I think that the banner would not bother the preschooler, because it is an element; it is a graphic element. It is a literacy prompt for the adult, but I would not see that as an obstacle” (female expert, South Africa). Similarly, “In Spain these kinds of programs do not exist, but I think it is a great idea. We have the same problem that somebody said – TV is used as a babysitter. But, these

kinds of programs can maybe be useful in order to approach parents to the TV to watch TV with the children” (male expert, Spain).

Despite this enthusiasm, however, some participants expressed their discontent at the use of subtitles. “I did not like it. I did not like the instructions there. I thought the results were not explanatory for us. You do not need those instructions at all” (female expert, Ghana). Several could not understand the rationale behind using them. “I think that was quite confusing to watch it with subtitles and with those instructions for the people here.” (male expert, Germany). Some also thought that the use of subtitles was controlling the thoughts of the audience. “If I had kids that age (I don’t have anymore) I think I would have been provoked by those instructions: how I should think and what to do with my kid. That was my feeling about it. The thoughts are great, what the purpose of this and everything, the producer’s goal of it. It is good to get somewhere, but maybe not beaten on your nose and watching, because you can interpret it in different ways. In making the point: *this is how you are going to watch this*, you don’t give the viewer an opportunity to experience it” (female expert, Sweden).

The international experts admired each of the segments of the program. “I thought every segment was just right on. I thought it was very well done and age-appropriate” (female expert, USA). “I think the segmentation was very good: the elephant and the rabbit have a very nice relationship. I really liked the segment with the guy named Robert playing the guitar with the monsters appearing. To me, that was a really great use of the animation. It wasn’t particularly complicated animation but really effective, and the design was really funny. There was this kind of build each time a new monster came out. I thought it was very well done” (expert, Argentina). They liked the diversity shown in the program. “I thought it had wonderful examples of diversity with the frog and rabbit segment that showed it in an entertaining yet meaningful way” (female expert, USA).

They also discussed the concept of using a pause at a halfway point. “Yes, but the instructions were very helpful, and they weren’t so proscriptive: this is how you have to do it. Just – here is a thought, a suggestion. Even a little time we have a little conversation or little thought – with a halfway point – I liked that, because it was like: *oh, yes, this has been halfway* – whether it registers as that, but maybe after a few weeks of doing that you start to get a sense of time. It does not hurt to do that. I just thought it was a very interesting educational show” (male expert, Canada). Some participants disliked the use of the pause in the program. “People finish what they say, and then they stare at the camera for a while. It is quite disturbing. Clearly not for your audience, but for some audiences; you kind of think: *Oh, God!* I am interested in if you are encouraging parents to talk to them, or whether they are going to talk to them? Perhaps in those little moments when there is a pause, when there is a long stint of music than you would ever have, with nothing particularly happening on the screen. It is very brave. You are one click away from people screaming and driving racing cars and fighting monsters” (male expert, UK). “These short segments in between, and those blocks are there for the kids to calm down for a second and then start a new topic. So, we try to do it this way” (female expert, Germany). Some justified the use of pause. “But the second time the screen is with all the colours, you know that all the characters are coming back. You are waiting for a second, and then they are going to enter the screen. I think the kids are waiting for it” (male expert, Chile).

However, some experts questioned the duration of the program. “I really liked it. The only criticism that I have is that it is a little bit too long. We catch so many things, and wonderful things; I do not know the time span you set for the concentration at this age? I thought it is like 20 minutes” (female expert, Israel).

The director of the program emphasised the use of the right content in the program for the target audience. “We always try to keep in mind that the children are three – to six-years-old, which is very young; so we always have experts who are kind of controlling if this is OK for them, to pick them up where they are at that age, and if they understand our program – every little part. So we give our best” (female expert, Germany).

The international experts also discussed the singing and music in the program. “We were talking about this song called ‘Names’. I liked that very much, because it was repeating so many times; so children can learn that too, I think, and sing along” (female expert, Sweden). They found the use of song in sync with the target audience. “I thought the music was particularly beautiful, and the use of it, and the way that it is absolutely perfect the sort of compliment what was going on – for that young age group. It was just beautifully timed all the way through it. It just takes you along – the pace was just perfect – really well made program” (female expert, UK). “It fits very well. I like the program. For me the best part is the singing, the grandpa-looking guy. I thought that was very sweet and well arranged” (female expert, Korea).

The female expert from Germany summed up the concept behind the program. “There is a lot of discussion and thinking about everything inside, which you maybe do not see in the first moment. The people who are involved in this program are very involved, and they are trying to make a good program for the kids, and to involve the kids, and to maybe invite them afterwards and to discuss with them to look how they feel when they see themselves, for example. The whole program should be comfortable. It should be fun; it should be nice to see, and endearing. It is very important that the parents like the program too.”

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