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Canal Futura

We discussed the war in a different way

As regards the war in Iraq the Brazilian educational channel Canal Futura deliberately avoided putting its emphasis on war reporting. Instead, the channel suggested tolerance by means of TV spots and an artwork Olympiad.

Background Information about Canal Futura

Canal Futura is the first private television channel in Brazil which is exclusively dedicated to education. Its programming is designed for children, teenagers, workers, housewives, teachers and the community. Launched in September 1997, Canal Futura is financed by 14 institutions.



This drawing is the contribution of 12-year-old Fernando to the "Artwork Olympiad" organised by Canal Futura. The boy comes from one of the poorest and most violent districts of Rio de Janeiro.

These include private corporations, foundations, professional associations, financial and communication groups which – in collaboration with the channel – extend their scope by investing in education. Today the channel reaches more than 48 million viewers.

The success of Canal Futura is down to the partnership model of the Roberto Marinho Foundation which, with this project, has promoted a new way of thinking and educating through television.

Education, service and useful information for the everyday life in Brazil

Before its launch Canal Futura carried out research showing that youngsters, workers, housewives and teachers look for a variety of information on television. They believe that television complements their education. Many programmes, which are classified as entertainment, are regarded by them as educational.

In its round-the-clock broadcasting, Futura presents its own productions; programmes from its partners' archives; as well as acclaimed international programmes. Among its attractions are teacher training programmes, programmes for the classroom, educational news programmes, debates, and series for children, the community and professionals.

The channel's educational programmes range from Brazilian school curriculum content to questions and services relating to the areas of health care, labour, citizens' rights, ecology,

music and cultural heritage. On Futura, teachers can find the only Brazilian newscast programme exclusively devoted to education. Futura's newscasts encourage educators, parents and students to reflect on issues such as public policy, illiteracy, teaching quality and professional training courses.

Canal Futura broadcasts to an audience network consisting of more than 10,000 Brazilian institutions, such as schools, day nurseries, libraries, unions, companies, churches, hospitals, prisons and neighbourhood associations. Specifically trained mobilising agents work within this network.

Our principles of war coverage

Even when dealing with an issue like the Iraq War, all Futura's programming is guided by its specific values. These are based on community spirit, entrepreneurial spirit, ethics as well as cultural and educational pluralism. *Community spirit* – this can be understood as solidarity and the participation of citizens in the building of society; also, as a commitment on the part of the human beings to the common good, that is, to improving an understanding of the importance of each individual in solving community problems.

Ethics in public and private relations – The main principles of Futura's pedagogical project are based on ethical values and citizens' rights. The project is supposed to encourage individual responsibility towards society and towards the government.

Entrepreneurial spirit – This may be seen as the stimulation of individual initiatives, risk-taking, decision-making, the upholding of the responsibility of personal growth and the country's development.

Cultural and educational pluralism – Futura speaks to the whole country, reflecting the social, cultural and educational diversity of Brazil.

When we address children we need to be extremely careful. It is essential to organise information in a way that is interesting, relevant and comprehensible to children. With regard to the war in Iraq, Futura believes that children's television should only give an ongoing war as much attention as other topics. However, since war is such an important issue, our task should be to provide detailed information on the social and historical context surrounding the issue. We need to supply our young audience with the possible reasons which might justify the conflict and, above all, we have to try to explain that there are different perspectives that make war a reality. There are always different motivations in different countries – economic and religious reasons, for example, may be related to a conflict or war. These interrelations need to be explained.

As an educational channel we avoid any form of war coverage which focusses on hard news. We try to discuss both the meaning and the consequences of such an aggressive or violent attitude towards the world in general. It is also our belief that an excessive use of images of violence does not supply children with either sufficient critical information or knowledge. Therefore, in order to lay the emphasis on the critical approach to the issue, we prefer to avoid a detailed description of the technological equipment of the US forces or a numerical evaluation of the consequences of ongoing fights. We also consider it our duty to go further than a television channel might want to. For us, the mere repetition of hard

facts is not enough. We want to show examples and comparisons which, by stimulating a critical perception of reality, support our audience and our young audience in particular in contextualising the issue.

Prevention of war and peace pedagogy

We also want to give children other keys to their understanding of humankind. War is just one part of human behaviour and we believe that the world would be different if human beings found other ways of dealing with the existing differences. By being plural, generous, receptive and kind we try to show children that there is hope in the world and that life can become better if one practises tolerance and respect in one's daily life. Our programmes did not focus on the day-to-day developments of the war. Instead, we chose to talk about peace, and about cultural tolerance in general. Our perspective on the war issue was based on our belief that our audience already had access to an abundance of information about the conflict itself: the instability of Saddam Hussein's government; Bush's reaction to the world opinion on the war; the oil interest; the terrorist menace towards the western world, etc. We truly believe that if children learn to understand and accept each other's cultures, languages, perspectives and life styles, they will respect each other's rights, needs and ideas. Therefore, we did not talk about the war as such, but about the motivations for war and the consequences that are likely to be part of a conflict like the war in Iraq. One of the spots we produced on the subject of peace education was called "Peace, an attitude". In this spot we dealt with basic attitudes that children encounter in their everyday lives. There is always space for a respectful dialogue with others, for generosity and tolerance that can lead to mutual understanding.

We also produced five spots on violence prevention which we entitled "Futura's attitude". The spots showed typical everyday life situations – in town, in schools, in the streets – which escalated into violence but which were overcome in the end by means of peaceful behaviour.

Art instead of war

Our work would not be complete if we did not consider children's opinions and reflections about the issues that we raise. On Canal Futura children can participate by sending their own writings and artwork, or by creating their own material in Futura Generation TV workshops, which are offered regularly for kids up to 21. In interviews children get the possibility of expressing their fears, expectations and opinions about what is going on in the world.

Together with an American organisation, Futura also developed an artwork Olympiad in order to allow children between 8 and 12 to discuss their perceptions of the world and the new millennium. The theme of the competition "Me in the new millennium" deals with the issue of children and society: "How do I see myself?", "How do I see the world?", "How do I want the world to see me?", "What do I want to change?". The project aims to demonstrate how children can participate in fostering cross-cultural understanding, co-operation and peace. We received a significant number of works of art about the war in Iraq and about urban violence, all expressing the anxieties and fears of the children. ■

THE AUTHOR

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