

Baroness Susan Greenfield, Professor of Pharmacology at Oxford University, was the key note speaker at the recent conference, Media, minds and neuroscience: the developing brain in a media-rich environment, held in Sydney on October 4.

A wide range of children’s health, education, counselling, and legal professionals, academics, regulators, and children’s and community organisations attended, and were very engaged in her paper “New media, young minds”.

Baroness Greenfield’s theme was that the environment is the key to brain development; that the 21st century environment with its digital technologies is unprecedented, worldwide and multifaceted. Her concerns included the loss of social interaction, changes to communication patterns, the loss of specific sequencing in thinking, attention problems, the constant need for balance between off-screen and on-screen diets, and challenged parents to be present in the digital playground.

The other five papers at the conference provided complementary messages and research that backs up much of what Baroness Greenfield had to say.

Associate Professor Mike Nagel’s paper focussed on contemporary research into how the brain develops in childhood and adolescence and how context and experience shapes the brain’s neuroarchitecture.

Psychologist Dr Wayne Warburton described the ways in which modern brain imaging techniques (fMRI studies) give insight into how media violence changes brain activity in the short term, and brain function in the long term.

Psychiatrist Dr Philip Tam outlined the emergence of Problematic Internet Use (PIU) as an increasingly recognised and now formally classified potential problem in young people, along with detection and treatment options.

Dr Kate Highfield reviewed the explosion of app titles, the claims of many to be “educational” and the benefits that can be gained from their use. She pointed to the need for balance between off-screen and on-screen diets, and challenged parents to consider ways in which policy decisions can take into account the importance of safeguarding the wellbeing of those most vulnerable to media impacts.

Graham Vimpani, Professor of Community Child and Family Health at the University of Newcastle and a part-time Senior Clinical Advisor in Child Protection for the NSW Ministry of Health, provided a scholarly overview of the issues raised during the day and challenged the audience to consider ways in which policy decisions can take into account the importance of safeguarding the wellbeing of those most vulnerable to media impacts.

Attendees found that the conference presentations made the science very accessible and stimulating. Several papers at the conference gained considerable media attention, with Dr Wayne Warburton’s paper being of great interest. The internet briefing for media set up by the Australian Science Media Centre two days before the conference was a catalyst for media coverage.

The conference was a joint project between ACCM and the Macquarie Research Centre on Children and Families, and was held in the Parliament of NSW Theatrette with sponsorship from The Hon Greg Donnelly MLC.

**New government policy on online safety**

The coalition policy on online safety for children, as announced before the election, has five main points:

1. Improved coordination of online safety activities
   - Establishment of a Children’s E-safety Commissioner
   - More research into the use of the Internet by children and young people

2. An effective complaints system, backed by legislation, to get harmful material down fast

3. A new, simplified cyber-bullying offence

4. Increased support for parents
   - Improved safety for smartphones, and other devices and internet access services.
   - Establishment of an advice platform with guidelines for parents about the appropriateness of individual media items for children

5. Increased support for schools
   - Increased scrutiny of online safety programmes to be offered within schools
   - The inclusion of a stronger online safety component in the National Safe Schools Framework
   - Increased funding for the inclusion of online safety programmes in schools

The complete policy can be found at:


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www.childrenandmedia.org.au/events/accm-seminars
Review of Adventure Time

Our guest editorial this month is a review of the children’s television series Adventure Time by the Vice President of ACCM, Dr C Glenn Cupit, who has recently had a new book published (see below).

I like Adventure Time (AT). It is a truly black animated comedy (think of some of Tim Burton’s work) that has won multiple awards. It is almost never predictable and bizarrely funny. It has a clear moral compass even though this is often portrayed through the immoral behaviour of characters (as in The Simpsons). For older children and adolescents it offers genuinely intelligent, if somewhat challenging and sometimes disturbing, storylines and characters.

For those who haven’t watched it, AT is about a boy, Finn, and his magical and physically ambiguous talking dog, Jake, living in a post-apocalyptic world called Ooo and interacting with variously dangerous characters like Princess Bubblegum (and other princesses), the Ice King, and Marceline the Vampire Queen. They often have to protect or rescue a princess from other characters (like the Ice King) but at other times a princess may transform into a demon, or the threat may be an assassin kitten living inside Jake’s head.

It feels a bit like a series of gamers’ quests but with constantly ambiguous characters. Here are some typical themes:

- a biscuit has a vendetta against Princess Bubblegum;
- a Demon Cat which has “approximate knowledge of many things”;
- aroused by watching her fight Ice King, Finn dreams that Flame Princess engulfs him in flames that don’t burn (yes, there is quite a lot of young adolescent sexual awakening implied);
- Finn and Jake traverse Marceline’s traumatic memories to discover the cause of a mysterious ailment;
- Finn and Jake with swapped genders;
- Finn controls miniature versions of Ooo’s residents to enact disturbing adolescent fantasies;
- Finn vows to help anyone who needs him, then finds himself faced with different people all wanting different things;
- Jake transforms into a monster and attacks Finn;
- Marceline writes a song for Ice King to make princesses want him but it refers to a previous forgotten relationship.

And that is where the issue lies for young children. Conceptually, AT is far beyond the grasp of younger viewers so the subtlety and sophistication will be lost on them. But the visual transformation of form, the grotesque presentation of the characters, the moral ambiguity of characters (including the two ‘heroes’), and the sense of threat that underlies many ‘adventures’ may well be disturbing to sensitive children.

So parents would be well advised to preview before allowing their young children to become an audience for the show. Many episodes and some background into the thinking of the creators are readily available on line. Just type ‘Adventure Time’ into a search engine.

Adventire Time screens on GO! (7 network), at 8-8.30 am and 5-5.30 pm and is classified PG

New book

Play and quality in early childhood: Educating superheroes and fairy princesses

Dr C. Glenn Cupit

Price: $15.95

This new book by ACCM Vice-president Glenn Cupit looks at the transition in child’s play from generations, the impact of media and technologies, children’s imagination, general advice, safety and the pros and cons of superhero and fairy play.

The fact that Superhero and fairplay forms are so attractive to so many children suggests that they fulfil genuine needs for the children involved. Consequently, it is important that educators value and address the needs the play expresses.

A truly educational response is to seek ways to transform superhero and fairy play into what we consider to be stimulating quality play. Even media sourced play can be used to foster positive development if guided and nurtured into scripts that are more flexible, creative and negotiated. To do so involves hard work, careful thinking and loads of imagination. But quality early childhood educational care always demands those.

The Weekend Australian 21-22/9/13

FOR a generation reared on the expectation that everything would come “in good time”, it's hard adjusting to the idea that everything should be “in my time”.

If you spent a childhood hearing adults say they’d be there in good time, or the results would be known in good time or the Easter bunny would take his time, you got the message that was under the control of someone else (usually the adults pointing to their wristwatch).

So, it feels revolutionary to witness how control of time has switched from adults with wristwatches to anyone with smartphones, and the technology is not coincidental to this.

If you watch how younger people handle phone calls, you’ll get a good idea of how they've been able to wrest control of time. They don’t answer the phone. Instead, when their phone rings, they check to see who’s calling and then decide whether to answer straight away or call back later (if the caller isn’t identified, then forget about it).

This results in telephone tag as each person decides whether now is the perfect time to answer the phone, and eventually the phone-off is resolved by a text. And if anyone is still surprised at how texting became so popular, it’s because it enables a person to reply — in my time. Phone companies are thrilled younger people consider answering a phone call a possibility rather than an imperative, but a lot of businesses are not impressed.

Last week the Free TV group began lobbying for an end to time-zone rules that push sex and violence to after-8.30pm slots. As the chief...

Rau: Games need re-rating

SHERADYN HOLMHEAD POLITICAL REPORTER

CHILDREN are being exposed to sex and violence in online video games which should carry adult classifications, outing Attorney-General John Rau, who is urging authorities to tighten up the ratings.

Mr Rau said 83 video games released this year were rated only MA+ but carried a higher age rating in Europe and the US, despite Australia’s new classification system that established R18+ and tightened the lower clusters.

“These particular games have been assessed as having intense violence, blood and gore, nudity and suggestive themes,” Mr Rau said.

“I am asking the new Commonwealth Attorney-General to have a look at the way the Australian Classification Board is assessing these games and ensure the community that the rules are being applied appropriately.

Formica SA Attorney-General Michael Atkinson was criticized for blocking the national R18+ classification for video games because he wanted to keep such games banned.

Mr Rau said he was “not suggesting we wind back the clock and remove R18+ games from circulation”.

The move comes as the State Government tries to re-establish public confidence in its protection of children.

“Unlike movies, children can be active participants in the control of video games and the effects, while largely disputed, cannot be positive,” Mr Rau said.

Mr Rau said he would prefer not to use the South Australian Classification Council to review the games and up their classification in the state, even though he has the power.

“The preferable position is to do it nationally because if other states had a completely different regime to ours not only would it be confusing for retailers but it would also mean there is no opportunity for people to buy online and interstate and have things protected to here,” he said.

Aussie Council on Children and the Media president Elizabeth Handley said it was disappointing children could still access adult games.

“The community expected a lot of material that was classified as MA+ would be now classified R18+ as a result of the new guidelines but that hasn’t been the case,” she said.

“A lot of games classified as adults everyone are classified MA+ here. These games should not be for kids,” she said.

“The problem is because how exposure to violent media influences thoughts, attitudes and behaviour it can desensitize people to violence.”

The Advertiser 21/9/13
Kids get adults only TV viewing

NATASHA BITA NATIONAL SOCIAL EDITOR

TV stations want the right to screen adults-only shows day and night, demanding that the industry dump its long-standing ban on sex and violence before children’s bedtimes.

Free TV, which represents the major free-to-air stations including channels Nine, Seven and Ten, says TV time zone rules – which means an 8.30pm start for M-rated shows – are obsolete in the digital age.

But child advocacy groups say the move is a threat to the nation’s “default bedtime” for children of 8.30pm and risks exposing them to sex and violence.

Free TV has told the Australian Communications and Media Authority that the long-standing ban is “irrelevant” because parents can now use DVD players, personal video dubbers or direct the children to ABC2’s dedicated children’s channels.

“Free TV recommends the removal of some restrictions for commercial-free-to-air television broadcasters, on a staged basis if necessary,” Free TV says in its submission to ACMA’s inquiry into community safeguards.

The Advertiser 7/9/13

Abbott urged to tackle the cyber bully

CHRIS GRIFFITH SOCIAL MEDIA

The incoming Coalition government is being urged to reduce the incidence of suicide induced by cyber-bullying by fulfilling its election commitment to demand that Facebook and Twitter be part of a government-sponsored complaint program.

In its pre-election policy to combat cyber bullying, the Coalition pledged to establish a “Children’s Safety Commission” along with legislation that can order large social network sites to “get harmful material down fast”.

The Australian Christian Lobby yesterday said the new government to proceed with the plan despite reservations among some social media providers. 

Managing director Luke Sheldon said self-regulation of complaints by social media “was not enough”, and social media sites had been “ lax” in dealing with complaints.

“Self-regulation has been shown to be a monumental failure — the complaints process is never finished. There does have to be an oversight body with teeth and with penalties for non-compliance in place,” he said.

“Think people would acknowledge that it (social media) is the problem,” he said.

The Coalition has confirmed it will back former Optus executive Paul Fletcher, the new Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for Communications Malcolm Turnbull, who will chair

FROM PAGE 1

“Not all children grow up in families where parents are vigilantly watching over what they’re seeing on TV”, Ms Biggins said.

Ms Biggins said M-rated programs contained material that could be harmful to young children.

“They are going to be exposed to adult concepts they don’t understand, and in some cases harmful violence,” she said.

“More children will choose to use aggression when put in conflict situations, and will become desensitised to violence.”

Free TV claims that more children watch ABC2 than all the commercial free-to-air stations combined.

“The provision of two advertisement-free, dedicated government-funded children’s channels (ABC2 and ABC3) significantly reduces the need for intervention on the commercial free-to-air channels directed towards protecting children,” it said.

They provide ad-free spaces for all Australians where children are guaranteed protection from age-inappropriate or harmful content.

Free TV has made a compromise of screening M-rated shows from 7.30pm, if ACMA can declare the classification time zone is not seen as desirable in the interests of children.

Free TV chief executive Julie Flynn yesterday said: “In analogue, time zones were seen as an essential tool to protect children from inappropriate content. Today there are myriad options available to parents to regulate and control what their children see, including parental locks, EPSG, on-demand content and DVDs as well as two dedicated, ad-free children’s channels on the ABC.

“The current time zone restrictions do not make sense in a converged media environment where viewers are accessing content from a range of sources on a single screen.”

Ms Flynn also cited an Australian Law Reform Commission report which said M55 should now be watched at any time of the day in any Australian home on the internet, pay TV or on a DVD.

ACMA is still considering the submission, as part of its review of broadcast regulations.

ACMA’s discussion paper states that it is “timely to explore” a phase-out of the time zones for adults-only content, given that so many Australians now watch pay TV or TV shows streamed over the internet.

“There continues to be a strong community expectation that children should be protected from harmful content, it says.

ACMA general manager for content, culture and citizen Jennifer McNeill said: “The ACMA accepts that the time zones mandated for broadcast coding are under strain as a regulatory tool. However, the extent of the problem and any appropriate way to address it (regulation) is less clear. These are among the issues we are exploring in the inquiry.

“Many of the networks declined to comment.

TELL US SHOULD THE TV RILES BE CHANGED? ADVERTISER.COM.AU

The Advertiser 7/9/13

Time to read

HOW can we expect children to become readers if parents “do not have time” or are “too tired” to read with them at night (The Advertiser, 27/8/13)?

How can we expect them to develop a love of reading and the learning which goes with it if they do not participate in it with the joy of a book at bedtime?

There is now an expectation that both parents will go to work. It is what many, perhaps most, families want.

Some will say it is an economic necessity. Certainly it is not likely to change.

It is also something that has social, psychological, emotional and ethical consequences for society.

The consequences can be negative as well as positive. We need to be aware of that. Having children is a responsibility, not a right.

If parents don’t have time or are too tired to read to their children then perhaps they need to reconsider their priorities and make time.

The opportunity will not come again, and children who miss out on the experience of being read to will miss out for a lifetime. It is a child’s right to be read to.

K.M. GUINN, Lower Mitcham.
NEW PUBLICATIONS

ADVERTISING

FOOD ADVERTISING

MEDIA EFFECTS - EDUCATION


Cantlon, JF; Li, R (2013) Neural activity during natural viewing of Sesame Street statistically predicts test scores in early childhood. Plos Biology, Vol. 11, No. 1, Art. No. e1001462

MEDIA EFFECTS - HEALTH


MEDIA EFFECTS - SOCIAL


VIDEO & COMPUTER GAMES

Rosenberg, RS; Baughman, SL; Bailerison, JN (2013) Virtual superheroes: Using superpowers in virtual reality to encourage prosocial behavior. Plos ONE, Vol. 8, No. 1, Art. No. e55003


VIOLENCE


CONFERENCES
Infant and Early Childhood: Social and emotional wellbeing
National Convention Centre Canberra, Australia.
30th Oct – 2nd Nov 2013
www.ieceswc2013.net.au
NZ children a priority

Children’s television in New Zealand is getting a funding boost. Children are the focus of the latest NZ On Air television funding round, with just under $15 million being committed to around 350 hours of 2014 programming.

“Children’s programming is a high priority for NZ On Air. We spend on average 23 per cent of our budget on locally made content for children,” said CEO Jane Wrightson. “The majority of this content would not be made at all without NZ On Air support. We provide the financial backing for 76 per cent of first-run locally-made children’s programming.”


Full marks for trying!

The Australian Obesity Policy Coalition reports that the Advertising Standards Board (ASB) found a Kellogg’s Coco Pops ad in breach of the Responsible Children’s Marketing Initiative (RCMI). The ad showed animated Coco Pops swimming in a bowl of milk playing the game ‘Marco Polo’. The cereal was being eaten by a young boy.

Kellogg’s defended the advertisement saying it used imagery “to prompt nostalgic recollections of main grocery buyers regarding the fun times they may have experienced during their childhood” and, in relation to physical activity, the game “indirectly promotes swimming and pool games as being fun and highly enjoyable activities”.

However the ASB ruled that the ad was in fact directed primarily to children and did not include messaging that encouraged good dietary habits nor did it encourage physical activity.

http://www.cfac.net.au/junkfoodinjunction_sept2013.html#1

Meanwhile, an online petition by a Victorian mother asking Little Athletics to drop McDonald’s sponsorship has reached over 12,000 signatures.

Last year, the Advertising Standards Board ruled that an email to young children encouraging them to attend a Little Athletics coaching clinic and offering McDonald’s branded showbag and “a chance to meet a special guest in ‘big red shoes’” was outside their scope because “it is not related to Advertising or Marketing Communication”.

The people who have signed the online petition obviously disagree.


US study finds kids less obese

New research in the US shows progress in the battle against childhood obesity.

In a study published in the October issue of the journal Pediatrics, lead author Ronald Iannotti writes that children aged from 11 to 16 are exercising more often and eating more fruits and vegetables. They are also watching less television and consuming fewer sweets and sugary drinks. The findings come from data collected from American children between 2001 and 2009.

http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/132/4/606.abstract?sid=0394e857-477f-4a15-be0d-982b13d4177a

KIDS’ TV

A selection of children’s programs screened on TV during the period

ABC 1
Classic Tales; Play School; Fluffy Gardens; Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood; The Worst Witch; Five Minutes More.

ABC 2
Connie the Cow; Pinky Dinky Doo; Pocoyo; Lazy Town; Peppa Pig; Ben and Holly’s Little Kingdom; Postman Pat; Ready, Steady, Wiggle!; Mister Maker; Mike the Knight; Gaspard and Lisa; Louie; Waybaloo; Penelope; Lunar Jim; Tilly and Friends; Joe & Jack; Olivia; Arthur; SamSam; Milly, Molly.

ABC 3
YooHoo and Friends; Stoked; Almost Naked Animals; Chop Socky Chooks; Bindi’s Bootcamp; Outriders; BTN Extra; The Silver Brumby; Roy; You’re Skitting Me; Daní’s Castle; Prank Patrol.

SEVEN
Saturday Disney; The Smurfs.

TTOO
Shake It Up; Wizards of Waverly Place; Toybox.

NINE
Bubble Guppies; Dora.

GO!
Thunderbirds; Pixel Pinkie;Scooby-Doo; Looney Tunes; Magical Tales.

TEN
Wurrnathy; Totally Wild; Scope.

NICKELODEON
Legend of Korra; Slimefest; Kung Fu Panda; Cat Dog; Angry Beaver.

DISNEY CHANNEL
Mickey Mouse Clubhouse; Jake and the Never Land Pirates; Sofia the First; Dco McStuffins; Henry Hugglemonster; Toy Story Toons.

NITV
Yamba’s Playtime; Bizou; Tangaroa with Pio; Tipi Tales; Waabiny.