

*The Study of New Ideas and Integrated Proposal for Sustainable Development of
Future Children Television Programs of Thai Public Broadcasting Service*

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Abstract

This research is an in-depth interview study to get opinions from twelve experts on child development. The research findings are as follows: 1) Six characteristics a good children program must have are 1. Entertaining and captivating; 2. Containing beneficial content; 3. Promoting audience's positive thinking and self-esteem; 3. Promoting imagination and inspiration; 5. Stimulating participation, action, and interaction; 6. Stimulating continued learning after watching. 2) There should be another set of rating symbols with more detail, which can carry additional signs indicating desirable values that the program promotes. 3) The biggest obstacle to the development of children program is the difficulty of finding sponsors, which comes from unfavorable time-slot, thus limiting the number of audience. 4) A good program for the whole family could also be considered a good children program. 5) A children program should also provide advice for parents. 6) Using theme songs that reflect desirable values can help children learn through sub-consciousness. 7) Although ThaiPBS is perceived to be the leading television station for children, there are several areas for improvement, including the appeal of the programs, the time-slot for children programs, the short trial period, and the transparency of the program evaluation.

Keywords: Children program, television program, ThaiPBS

Introduction

Thai Public Broadcasting Service (ThaiPBS) was founded in 2008 to be Thailand's first public television. Since then, ThaiPBS has become the leading broadcaster of children's program, constituting to about 5-10% of airtime, while other free-to-air stations air children programs less than 3% of all programs. ThaiPBS employ the system of program selection committee for all programs, including children programs, to ensure the quality of the programs

Because the committee can only consider the finished programs, to further improve the quality of future programs, ThaiPBS's Academic Institute of Public Media (2012) sees the need to conduct a research to get new ideas for sustainable development of future children television programs to help guide prospective producers for the benefit of Thai children.

Research Objectives

1. To find new perspectives, suggestions, and new ideas to produce children television programs from experts in various fields
2. To use opinions and suggestions of the experts to analyze to get practical conclusion for sustainable development of future children television programs

Research Methodology

This research is an in-depth interview of twelve experts on child development in five related fields as the following:

Youth Idols

- 1) Phra Maha Wudhijaya Vajiramedhi (V. Vajiramedhi) : Famous Author and Thinker, Spiritual leader
- 2) Mrs.Kamolchanok Kemayothin: Actress, Mother and Former Host of Children Programs
- 3) Mr. Noppadol Songsang: Comedian and Host of Popular Children Programs “Jor Jee” and “Tum Sib”

Producers of Children Programs

- 4) Ms. Pattarajaree Aiyasiri: Former Producer of Popular Children Programs “The Little Bee Club” and “Smiling Apple.” Now Producer of “The Magical Mushroom Gang” Program
- 5) Mr. Wiwat Wongpattaratiti: Producer and Host of Popular Children's Program “Super Jeew”

6) Mr. Raywat Sangchuay: Host of Popular Children's Radio Show "Morning Kids"

7) Mr. Pakorn Santisoontornkul: Founder of "Dek-D.com," No.1 Website for Thai Students

Experts on Child Psychology and Development

8) Police Lieutenant General Anchulee Teerawongpaisal, M.D.: Child Psychologist and

Consultant for Popular Children Program "Om Yim"

9) Associate Professor Dr. Sairudee Worakitpokatorn : Director of the National Institute for Children and Family Development, Mahidol University, and Former Host of Popular Family Program "Rak Look Hai Took Tang"

Government Official Overseeing Media and Children

10) Ms. Ladda Tangsupachai: Director of the Center of Cultural Surveillance, Ministry of Culture (title held at the time of interview)

Non-Profit Organization for Children

11) Ms. Khemporn Wiroonrapan: Manager of Child Media Thailand

12) Ms. Sudjai Promkerd: Manager of Thai Cartoon Institute, and Manager of Thailand's Reading Culture Promotion Program

Research Tools

The interview questions are composed of five general questions, asked in the following order

1. Current situation of Thailand's children's programs
 - Strengths, weaknesses, problems and obstacles
2. Characteristics of a "good" children's program
 - Definitions, differences between good children's programs for younger and older children
3. Children's programs you would like to see
 - What would like to see more and less? What are some of the new ideas or technology that can be used to make good children programs
4. Solutions and factors that can help develop children's programs
5. Other recommendations

Research Findings

The research findings can be concluded into seven main points, as the following:

1. Six common characteristics that most experts agreed a good children program must have are
 - 1.1 Entertaining and captivating all through the program
 - 1.2 Containing beneficial content, not necessarily academic-oriented, but it must be appropriate to the audience's age range
 - 1.3 Promoting audience's positive thinking and self-esteem
 - 1.4 Promoting imagination and inspiration
 - 1.5 Stimulating participation, action, and interaction, both during and after the program, among the audience, especially through the use of senses, other than seeing and hearing
 - 1.6 Stimulating continued learning after watching.

These six characteristics can be adapted to create criteria for the evaluation of children television programs, along with the evaluation of production quality.

2. Almost all of the experts interviewed emphasized on age-appropriate content. However, the children might not be able to know what age group the program they are watching is designed for, because the rating symbols for children programs are not specific enough, and ThaiPBS's programs are not rated. Therefore, the researchers believe that it will be helpful to create another set of rating symbols with more detail, specifically for children programs, which can also carry additional signs indicating desirable values that the program promotes.
3. One of the main obstacles to the development of children program is the difficulty of finding sponsors, which comes from unfavorable time-slot, thus limiting the number of audience. Therefore, all of the involved parties, especially producers and organizations for children, or even ThaiPBS themselves, should come together to ask the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) to issue policies that can help the children programs to get better time slots, and also to call for the legislation of the safe and creative media fund. Moreover, ThaiPBS could consider allowing some types of unintrusive commercial sponsorship (not commercial breaks, or product placements or tie-ins) for children programs, to allow the program producers a chance to improve production quality.
4. Several experts believed that "children programs" are not necessarily about children, but it could be a program that can be viewed by any anyone in the family. The development of the children will come from interaction among family members while watching the program, which in some cases might have better effect than letting the children watch the program alone. Therefore, the producers of children programs can

think about creating a family program that aims to promote healthy relationship in the family, which is likely to get a better time slot than children programs and thus better sponsorship.

5. One expert suggested that children learn better through the sub-consciousness, especially through the use of bodily senses. The more senses used, the more likely that the children absorb the content into long term memory. Therefore, children programs can also be designed to repeat the same message in the program, or even across program or across media to help emphasize the common desirable themes. Moreover, the program should help stimulate action during and after viewing, along advice for parents.

6. One of the best approaches that help children learn through sub-consciousness is by using theme songs that are written specially for each program. The songs' lyrics should reflect desirable values that are the key concepts of the program, and played repeatedly in each episode. Many programs that the interviewed experts mentioned as their favorite programs, especially "The Little Bee Club" (Samosorn Peungnoi), and "Mr. Myna" (Chao Khunthong) had used this technique successfully before. Theme songs are also a key success factor for many popular international children programs such as "Sesame Street" "Dora the Explorer" "Blue's Clues." Theme songs can help digest difficult materials into bite-size chunks for children. But theme songs for current Thai children programs are quite rare. Consequently, the content might seem too dry in some parts that aim to feed children new data. Theme songs will invite children to get up and move their body parts, sing and dance with the rhythm. This is a clear example of expanding the learning besides only watching and listening. The producers can also make an album of songs in the programs, as well as use them for the program's websites or games, to increase channels of revenue.

7. ThaiPBS is perceived by all of the experts as the leading television station for children. However, there are several rooms for improvement, including the appeal of the programs. Surveys of young audience satisfaction should be done to create the "must watch" children programs. The aim should also be placed at international level. Moreover, the 3-month trial period should be extended to at least 6 months to ensure continued development of the producers. Awards should also be given to quality programs and should be promoted to better time slots. ThaiPBS could provide morning time slots to children program, starting from dawn to about 10.00 am., then followed by morning news, just like the schedule of PBS network in the USA. The children programs might start at 5.00 am. for babies, followed by programs for increasing age ranges. Also, some popular children programs could produce merchandises to increase their channels of revenue. Moreover, many experts expressed their views that the evaluation process must be transparent, perhaps with a help of a standard evaluation criteria that will be made specifically for children programs. This will create confidence among production companies that are interested in producing children programs.

References

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