



AS A BBC PARTNER IN THIS COLLABORATION BETWEEN
AHRC AND THE BBC,

I was very keen to see how academic research would help to inform us as programme makers and content producers. I was particularly interested to see how this approach would allow us to understand our child news audiences in ways that traditional audience research might not. I have to say I was not disappointed. In adopting innovative research methods alongside traditional techniques, and by using an academic, analytical approach to the resulting data, some very interesting findings emerged. Some of them confirmed what had already been understood from previous audience research undertaken by the BBC, but there were critical areas where important new insights into children's attitudes and behaviours emerged.

Some of the areas which were of particular interest to me and which are highlighted in the project report are:

- the relationship between linear TV and web usage;
- the importance of news from all UK nations in children's news provision;
- how targeting age groups is critical and how some are u

THIS COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT was funded through the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme's pilot funding call. The aim of this initiative is to develop a long-term strategic partnership, bringing together the arts and humanities research community with BBC staff to enable co-funded knowledge exchange



project

preliminary insights





*his report is the culmination of
twelve months of collaborative
research between four academic
researchers*

ASKING CHILDREN

what they want

to *improve*

CHILDREN'S



3.

This project consisted of three different
methodolo28 0Tm /F4.0 1 Tf n.0000 0 0 0.2400000 28.32 652.64cm BT 45 0 0 45 127 0Tm /F2.0 1 Tf9(h) Tj ET Q q 0.

Efforts to refine the questionnaire were limited

by the amount of time available. 6.72 cm BT 45 0 0 45 121.76 789.40 0 0 0.2400000 56.64 789.44 cm BT 45 0 0 45 1

gave them the opportunity to reflect on how the programme and website address children as citizens actively engaged in the world around them. Each child was provided with a folder explaining the activities each week and spaces in which to write their ideas down in response to a series of questions before they entered the 'diary room' to record. Since we were asking them to watch the *Newsround* television bulletin or to visit the website at least one time in each of the three weeks they were recording a video diary, we explained that writing down notes to address each of the

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■ TV IS

CHILDREN'S 'FAVOURITE

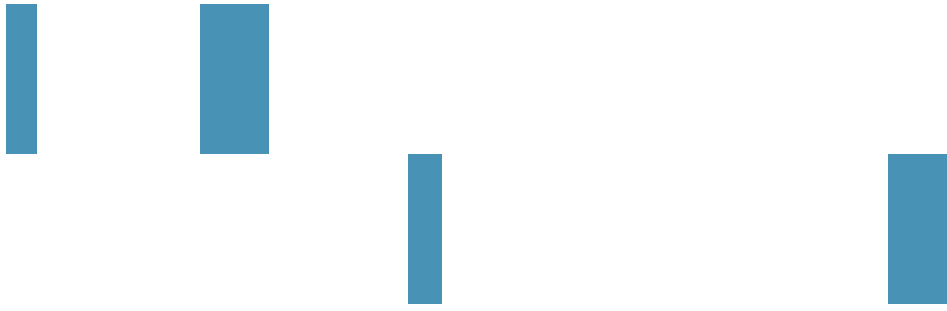
PLACE FOR NEWS' ■ *They*

think 'Mum' is the person

most interested in news at home

■

■



■ The majority of the children (96.8%) surveyed find the news to be 'interesting.' Only three (3% of those asked) did not.

■ Children offered a wide range of definitions of news. Key concepts included 'information'; 'reporting what's going on'; 'the world'. Local issues, including weather, were also seen as important.

■ Television is children's 'favourite place for news'. 52% mentioned TV by itself as their 'favourite.' When TV plus another medium, e.g. 'TV and newspapers', was included,



The main findings from the questionnaire are set out below, including the statistical tables on which they are based. Each table is accompanied by explanatory comments. These tables illustrate the main responses the children gave in their questionnaires, followed by brief discussion of the implications of the findings. The demographics (numbers, locations, ages and genders) of the 219 children in the study are showed in the Appendix to this report.

As we have already indicated in this report, there were four slightly different versions of the questionnaire, partly to simplify the versions

given to younger children.

CHILDREN *offered a wide range of definitions of news*

The children were asked to define news – this was an ope

Table 2. What News Is

Kn

The range of topics indicates that these children were very familiar with the kinds of news stories which typically feature in adult news and on
N

CHILDREN *watch*

Newsround *regularly*

Obviously for our collaborators at the BBC, and specifically the *Newsround* team, it was

VISITING *the website is less popular*

Table 10. I Visit Newsround's Website

Never	56	25.6	46.2
Occasionally	35	16	28.9
Sometimes, once a week	19	8.7	15.7
Often, most days	11	5	9.1
Total	121	55.3	100

Table 12. I Watch Newsround by Gender

Count	23	24	47
% within 'I watch Newsround'	48.9	51.1	100
% within boy or girl	34.3	40	37
% of total	18.1	18.9	37
Count	18	21	39
% within 'I watch Newsround'	46.2	53.8	100
% within boy or girl	26.9	35	30.7
% of total	14.2	16.5	30.7
Count	18	13	31
% within 'I watch Newsround'	58.1	41.9	100
% within boy or girl	26.9	21.7	24.4
% of t			

Table 18

Table 26. Have You Ever Complained about a Programme?

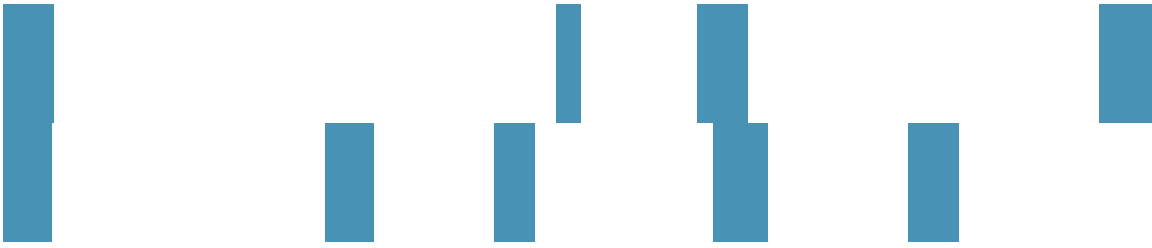


SELECTED *comments on the questionnaire*

The bulk of the qualitative comments are found in the reports of the classroom tasks that the children carried out, and in the video diaries. However, the few piquant remarks made by some children on their questionnaires are worth noting below. They support the other qualitative data in signalling, for example, a desire for more news from the different nations (and les



■ Children and young people see themselves as citizens



children were as

"Our views aren't treated as important, and because of YOB culture and knife crime on the news, we aren't often asked our opinions" (Carys, Cardiff, Year 10).

While young people's representations in adult news is a wholly separate issue, which deserves thorough exploration, these negative representations risk serving to reinforce barring young people from public life (Carter and Messenger Davies, 2005, 2007; Messenger Davies, 2007).

A number of the children said that their ideas held special merit because of the unique position children occupy in society. Their youth allowed them bring to forth "fresh ideas" (Eddie, Glasgow, Year 9) that perhaps had not previously been thought of before. Others argued that children should be listened to because "they are the new future" (Samer, Cardiff, Year 9).

for others it was because they felt that children would not understand the consequences of their actions, would not bother to research who to vote for, or that they were susceptible and easily influenced and would end up voting for their parents' choice. Interestingly, all but one of the six respondents who voiced such opinions were teenagers, suggesting perhaps that as they matured, they too began to subscribe to ideas that children are immature, irresponsible, and only want to have fun – or perhaps they were remembering how they felt at that age. Because our small sample size is not representative of teenagers as a whole, we wish to refrain f

and for the former, ethnicity. While some of these students have access to the internet at home, they were surrounded by peers who might not be so fortunate, and therefore often raised issues of access during group activities and in their video diaries.

Another important theme that emerged was that most children and young people were happy with the various ways of interacting with *Newsround* available to them. When asked if they could think of new ways to be interactive that *Newsround* does not already offer, an overwhelming number of respondents said 'no,' or that they were happy with the current ways. Nevertheless, some children had new ideas, which included making their own videos:

"I think they could maybe have a video that could be sent to them, so people could show what they want to be done instead of just saying it" (Kathryn, Coleraine, Year 5).

Aside from using video to interact with *Newsround*, other forms of 'new' technology were proposed including use

In the group based activities we asked children to creatively im

"I don't think Newsround covers enough stories on Northern Ireland, and I know there are less people here, but that doesn't mean it's not as important" (Caitlin, Coleraine, Yr 7).

Nearly all of the participants from Mill Strand Primary School made mention of the importance of including more news from dif

unintentionally marginalising teenagers and risk losing them as young citizens by expecting them to jump straight to 'adult' news

In an era of seemingly unlimited information, argues Moeller (2009), there is clearly an urgent need for citizens to become more 'news literate'. As far as children are concerned, they "must learn not just how to surf, link, load and click, but how to ask, judge and think to understand our world." In her view, the development of greater 'news literacy' would allow all citizens, including children, to become more active and critical participants in civic life. "The goal of news literacy, and its most modern form, digital literacy," she concludes, "is to give

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RECOMMENDATIONS

arising from the questionnaire data

◆◆◆ *News and Citizenship*

- Producers working with children and young people should be encouraged to question their own assumptions about how children relate to the news.
- Local issues (especially those linked to nation) are important to children and should be reflected across children's factual programming.
- Citizenship issues are obviously linked to news consumption and production. However, it should be borne in mind that in three of the four nations in our study, citizenship and national identity are often contested, with many children defining themselves as Welsh, Scottish or, in the case of Northern Ireland, in three different ways (Irish, Northern Irish and British). It woul

◆◆◆ Gender

- Given that there were no significant gender differences in viewing *Newsround*, but that girls were more likely than boys to say that they visited the website, producers should be confident about producing material for both sexes on both media platforms (broadcast and website).
- The journalistic cliché that hard news is



Allan, S. (2006) *Onlin*

Mendes, K., Carter, C., and Messenger Davies, M. (2009) 'Young Citizens and the News,' in Allan, S. (ed), *Routledge Companion to News and Journalism Studies*, London: Routledge (in press).

Messenger Davies, M. (2007) "What Good Came of It At Las



Table 33: Proportions of Pupils in Each School

Dominican NI	32	14.6
Bournemouth Secondary	31	14.2
Radnor Primary	29	13.2
Bournemouth Primary	28	12.8
Hillhead High	27	12.3
Hillhead Primary	26	11.9
Millstrand NI	23	10.5
Llanishen High	23	10.5
Total	219	100

ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUN

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