

Relevance and identification in television content for children

*Analysing DR commissioners' perceptions of
children's media interests*

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ABSTRACT

This chapter studies the perceptions of children among the commissioning editors responsible for children's television at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR. Taking as a starting point the historical evolvement of Danish children's television, the chapter provides a framework to understand commissioners' perceptions of children as an audience within the transforming logic of public broadcasting. Empirically, the study relies on interviews with commissioners of children's television at DR. The analysis illustrates how increased competition, media professionalism, and digitalisation influence how the young audience is perceived. Before the turn of the century, children were considered as representatives of informed future citizens; the current view primarily perceives children as media users whom media professionals in public service companies consider as competent partners, in order to stay relevant and attract and keep as many young viewers and users as possible.

KEYWORDS: children's television, media logics, media professionalism, perceptions of children, digitalisation, commissioning

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Introduction

Since the early days of Danish television in the 1950s, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR, has addressed children via television content; therefore, DR has extensive experience of considering the media interests of young audiences. However, during the last 10–15 years, the television landscape has been transformed by globalisation, increased competition, and digitalisation. In this chapter, I discuss whether the perceptions of children have been the object of a similar transformation. During a period of radical changes in the television environment in general, what, if anything, has changed in the perceptions of children and their role in Danish public service children's television?

In this chapter, I investigate what commissioners of television content for children at DR understand to be children's media interests. The question is important, as media influence children socially, creatively, emotionally, and cognitively; may contribute to their educational development and identity formation; and may influence their quality of life, affecting them in terms of what they find important, relevant, and what is good or bad to engage with (Buckingham 1993, 2007; Davies et al., 2014; Marsh, 2005).

Children's television is produced by adults and situated within a media system shaped by adults, and the associated commissioning of children's television content is based on adults' perceptions of what a child is, or should be, or could be. The production of children's television can be based on adults assuming they *know* what is good and quality content for children, on the one hand, or adults trying to *imagine* what content children themselves prefer, on the other. In either case, adults must take into account the broader cultural and media systemic frameworks that determine the production of children's content. Naturally, production conditions are different depending on whether the content is produced for a global platform like Disney+ or for a small, national broadcaster like DR. Regardless of how professionally qualified the adults commissioning and producing children's content are, the challenge concerning how they can be sure they meet, represent, and express children's interests and preferences always remains.

Conceptualising this inherent challenge, I analyse how commissioners at DR perceive their role and conditions as commissioners for children's content, what perceptions of children they take into account when commissioning content, how they argue for and legitimate the relevance of their content for children, and how they fulfil children's interests.

Methodological approach

To answer the above, interviews were carried out with commissioners of children's television at DR. These informants have an important influence on addressing the children's audience, as they are key persons for obtaining information about the general priority processes and final decisions regarding

what content to aim for. As a result, the informants are considered as both elite and exclusive (Bruun, 2014; Hertz & Imber, 1995), in the sense that they are placed in central and powerful positions in the organisation, they own the strategic overview of DR's children's television profile, and they have responsibility for legitimising the choices made regarding children's content.

I carried out individual semistructured interviews with four commissioning editors of children's content at DR:

- the director of children's programming (2 December 2020)
- the digital commissioning editor of children's programming (30 September 2020)
- the commissioning editor of fictional content at Ultra (content for the 9–14-year-olds) (1 October 2020)
- the commissioning editor of Ramasjang (content for the 4–8-year-olds) (12 November 2020)

The interviews lasted 60–90 minutes each. The informants were asked about their perceptions of children as an audience and what challenges they found important in relation to children's content production. Questions did not address specific age groups in detail, but more generally referred to the young audience of DR which includes children aged 1–14. Questions concerned how the commissioners managed the dilemma of being in a field of increased competition between being relevant to children and providing quality content they think is important for children. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded in thematic categories (Miles et al., 2020), and quotes for use in this chapter were translated from Danish into English. In addition to interviews with the commissioners, the empirical study relies on readings of internal documents, strategic papers, and policy reports from DR, dealing with children's content.

Theoretical framework and institutional context

Before I proceed with the analysis of the considerations of the commissioners, I consider the concept of children and childhood theoretically, as well as some historical perspectives on perceptions of children in children's television at DR. These perspectives constitute an overall framework for understanding children as a specific audience and point to some of the dilemmas related to producing public service television for children today.

Concepts of child and childhood

Media production for children presupposes a well-considered purpose of the content; this is necessary to reach the audience (children) and to meet adults' and parents' ideas about "good" content for children. Ideas attributed to childhood and children are, however, socially constructed and changeable

(James & Prout, 1997: 7), though not always clear. As Gisela Eckert (2001: 9) has pointed out, “within a society there exist shared, taken-for-granted, everyday ideas about what children ought to do or not to do [...]. Such ideas about children and childhood are not necessarily explicitly articulated at all times”, but they can be studied in many ways, for example, they can be “manifested in behaviors, conversations and cultural artifacts”. Studying television commissioners’ perceptions of children may illuminate manifestations of both explicit and implicit ideas regarding the audience for which media content is produced.

This chapter uses the more general theoretical concepts of children as “beings” and children as “becomings” as a point of analytical departure. For decades, these concepts – implicitly as well as explicitly – underlie discussions regarding perceptions of children and childhood (Huang, 2019; James et al., 1998; Jenks, 1996; Jensen, 2017; Lee, 2001; Prout, 2005; Qvortrup, 1994; Tingstad, 2019; Tisdall & Punch, 2012; Uprichard, 2008). The two perceptions concern whether childhood is considered a phase of preparation for children in their process of becoming adults *or* whether childhood should rather be considered a state of being in its own right. The discussion about childhood has often revolved around those two concepts as oppositional ideas, each generating a different perception of children:

Whilst the “being” child is seen as a social actor actively constructing “childhood”, the “becoming” child is seen as an “adult in the making”, lacking competencies of the “adult” that he or she will “become”. (Uprichard, 2008: 303)

When regarding children as “becoming”, attention is focused on the future, while regarding children as “being” emphasises “the child as an integral member of society” in the *present* (Huang, 2019: 100). I shall not go into detail with the different – and often controversial – theoretical approaches this discussion over time has given rise to in childhood research; rather, I use the two concepts as analytical frames in the context of analysing the commissioners’ considerations of the ideas associated with children in media production for young audiences. As I shall come back to, overall, the concepts have and continue to have an influence on the perception of children in the planning of Danish children’s television. Within the dominant paradigm of children as “becomings”, television content for children is regarded as an element that can or should help support children’s development, visions, and competences to grow up to be capable of taking part in culture and society; in that case, content such as magazines, news, and factual programmes about societal and cultural issues is found to be important, as it is considered relevant to children knowing about and being prepared for growing up. Within the paradigm of children considered as “beings”, the dimension of the future is toned down, and typically, programming will be in favour of content that

is aimed at satisfying children here and now with momentary experiences, such as entertainment shows or cartoon series. In DR's productions for children, such a distinction has never been absolute; however, it has been afforded varying levels of importance at different times, to which I return in the following.

The Danish media context

DR's children's television has largely developed in a similar manner as television in general, and Stig Hjarvard's (2013: 23–27) analysis of the institutional development of media and their interaction with other cultural and social institutions can to a large extent also be applied to the development of Danish children's television. Hjarvard has divided the media development into three phases. The first phase runs until 1920, with media being an instrument of other institutions steered by particular interests, such as the church and the party press, and with the purpose of persuading and agitating on behalf of specific interests in specific institutions (see the table in Hjarvard, 2013: 26). The second phase runs from around 1920–1980 and characterises a period during which radio and television were becoming the dominant media, marking “the point when the media began to address a generalized and often national public, whereupon they gradually assumed the character of cultural institutions” (Hjarvard, 2013: 24). Unlike previously, the main purpose of public service media during this second phase was to represent society's common interests in a public arena. The third phase runs from the 1980s onwards, with the agenda of deregulation, marketisation, and globalisation creating “a more commercial and competitive climate in radio and television, in which market forces challenged television's identity and importance as a cultural institution” (Hjarvard, 2013: 25). In this third phase, media have been professionalised while digitalisation continues to challenge the traditional logic of broadcasting (Bardoel & Lowe, 2007; Hjarvard, 2013; Lowe & Maijanen, 2019). The service of digital media was “not least to *produce social relations* between people, and users are increasingly prompted to *generate the content by themselves* [emphasis added]” (Hjarvard, 2013: 26).

The second and the third of Hjarvard's phases are the most relevant with regard to Danish children's television, as DR then started to manifest a wish to make children a specific viewer group and to appreciate them as a group being represented on television. In particular, from the late 1960s, children's programmes often expressed a modern and critical approach to culture and society. From then on, children were portrayed as curiously asking questions and discussing “truths” about the world. Institutionally, in the second phase up to the 1980s, the new media at the time (radio and television) were “meant to represent all parts of society and culture to the whole nation [and] were perceived as part of a national, general education project with all people

becoming acquainted with the important aspects of the nation's life: culture, science, politics, industry, etc. [translated]" (Hjarvard, 2016: 31).

The pursuit to represent society and culture also applied to children's television production. Children's programmes at DR treated almost every subject – pollution, foreign policy, space travel, poverty, experimental art, modern music, technology, satire shows, news, and fiction series – often with children and young people starring (Christensen, 2006). During the second phase of media development, since DR had a monopoly on broadcasting and didn't worry whether children could identify with the content or even found it relevant to watch television, experiments with form and content were often a natural element, with avant-garde tendencies (Christensen, 2022).

In this second phase, children were considered as "becomings" – that is, they were expected to use public service television as a learning opportunity for what their future would hold in modern society. The purpose of children's television was to make children visible in the general culture, give them a voice (Vemmer, 2006), and serve as a spokesperson for them (Christensen, 2006; Jensen, 2017). Ideally, children should be recognised as equal members of culture and society able to formulate independent views on most things. In this way, children's television constituted a cultural forum (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983) to legitimise children having different views than adults. It was a forum characterised by children being encouraged to confront formal authorities and respected for their independent activities. Gradually, children's television assumed the character of a separate cultural institution within DR, aiming to represent the entire society to a general children's public.

Programming intended to portray children "becoming" *children*, but with the same interests of adult citizens in all parts of culture and society, and incorporating corrective viewpoints from a child's perspective. Children were viewed as representatives of a modernised childhood as far as they created an alternative child's ways of doing things, sometimes in opposition to the adult world (Christensen, 2021). During this time, DR acted as a spokesperson for children, as well as for general societal visions of making children visible and encouraging them to realise their potential as human beings.

Then (corresponding to the third phase in Hjarvard's chronology) competition increased as DR was challenged by a new Danish television channel, TV 2 (established in 1988), which also broadcast children's television (albeit to a much lesser extent); global providers of children's content; and last, but not least, digital media in the twenty-first century. From the 1990s, viewing figures and an increased focus on age and gender segments became crucial to television programming. As a result, issues connected to a future perspective and to the larger world, such as politics, pollution, or poverty, appeared less frequently on children's television, and children's emotions and personal experiences as consumers and media users were more often brought into focus (Christensen, 2006, 2013).

From the turn of the century, increased competition for attracting especially school-aged children to DR resulted in programme strategies that placed more emphasis on entertainment (Christensen, 2006: 96–98), such as fascinating high-dynamic cartoon series, song contests, quiz programmes, and music videos, as well as content associated with individual identification processes, such as lifestyle programmes about shopping, fashion, or bodily appearance. Children appeared, in many ways, as equal to adults in the content produced. Thus, after a number of years, children’s television went from having a public, culturally enlightening and debating role in society, to also offering new, fascinating types of programmes that children were expected to like (corresponding to “modern public service media” in Bardeel & Lowe, 2007). Perceptions of children were manifested by ideas of the “being” child, recognised as an already competent, empowered individual child prepared for living up to and fulfilling the role of an adult actor in a modern consumer and media society.

DR responses to increased competition

During the last two decades, almost all processes related to the production of Danish children’s television at DR have changed: for example, conceiving ideas involves children in creative processes before, during, and after production; new formats, such as shorter web series, are being produced; distribution is taking place on several media platforms, such as third-party platforms like YouTube and Instagram; and even children’s ways of using media content is continuously evolving (Redvall & Christensen, 2021; Sundet, 2021; see also Jensen & Mitric, Chapter 8 in this volume). Particularly, digital media have changed children’s viewing habits while simultaneously supporting children as potential producers of content (Livingstone et al., 2018). In general, most Danish children have access to media content whenever they want, wherever they are. They are independent and prolific consumers on all media platforms, which means that DR – to catch the attention of children – must compete with players like YouTube, Disney+, and Netflix.

As a first response to the intensified competition, DR introduced two separate television channels for children – Ramasjang in 2009 and Ultra in 2013 – both constituting a separate children’s media universe where special values associated with children unfold. In 2020, DR launched the former children’s television channel Ultra as a digital-only platform for 9–14-year-olds, while Ramasjang, targeting 4–8-year-olds, is (still) both a children’s television channel and a streaming service. In 2021, DR addressed their youngest group of viewers ever, launching Minisjang, a digital-only streaming service for 1–3-year-olds (Christensen, 2020).

Ultra has paid special attention to developing fictional content, such as series like *Klassen* [*The Class*] and *Akavet* [*Awkward*]. Typically, series like

those are close representations of kids' everyday life at school and on social media. The content is easy to identify with, as emphasis is put on social and emotional relations among children, and on how to navigate socially.

The changes in the overall mediascape have transformed television from a cultural institution to a media professional institution – with professionalism defined as the capacity “to act in accordance with the demands of a particular media industry, rather than the ability of a particular work profession to serve the public good” (Hjarvard, 2013: 26). As Bardoel and Lowe (2007: 9) have argued, broadcasters had to give up the transmission model to be “effective public service communicators [which] requires demand-oriented approaches to service and content provision”. Such a change has influenced the work of commissioners, as they have to pay special attention to please the immediate interests of children. In this process, according to Bardoel and Lowe (2007: 9–10), it has become important to secure “relations wherein audiences are partners rather than targets” and to have a focus “on forging a *partnership* with audience as active agents [emphasis added]”.

Media professional commissioners of public service content for children may nevertheless still have an agenda in relation to their specific audience – such as ideas of the public good and of enlightening children regarding future challenges – which reaches beyond professional and market considerations. With digitalisation, children's media usage may seem rather diverse, individualised, or even fragmented, and media content is produced to accommodate the individual interests of children in the present. However, general ideas of public good and preparing children for the future, as mentioned above, treat children as a specific group of citizens and as a public to whom media institutions feel a cultural and societal obligation to provide content, for the benefit of children in general. Consideration of children's own interests may therefore be split between several considerations and may require other forms of legitimacy than before.

In the following, referring to the empirical data, I look more closely into the ways the commissioners of children's television at DR navigate their mission between ideas of children as “becomings” and as “beings”. Additionally, I explore how they deal with dilemmas resulting from the tension between a broadcasting logic of transmitting a public good to children, a market-driven and media professional logic, and a logic of digital media dictating that children should be both addressed and considered as individual partners in content production.

Results

The questions examined in the following analysis concern how commissioners perceive children and how this influences the management of their roles as providers of television content for children at DR. Further, how commissioners argue in favour of and legitimise children's content provided by DR is examined.

Identification in public service content for children

The commissioners first and foremost confirmed their identity as media professionals based on their knowledge of how children navigate in the media market. Secondly, they referred to having a holistic approach to the child. The commissioners stated that they always consult other professionals for advice on how to communicate complex or sensitive issues. The director of children's programming at DR said:

It lies in our DNA that we're on the children's side. We don't work from how we think children should be; we ask how children's lives actually are. Children's lives are not always easy, and children do not always behave as the adults want, but it's okay too. Children do not always ask the questions adults want; they ask all sorts of other questions, and we would like to help answer them.

In fact, this reflects what a DR commissioner might have expressed 40 years ago: referring to visions of enlightening and giving children a voice (see Vemmer, 2006). A different approach appears when the director of children's programming continued:

We want the children themselves to put their world and their reality into words; it does not have to be communicated through a host with a microphone. In fact, we could remove that function. This will also increase identification and make clear to children that they are capable – that is, you also give the courage to other children: “Listen, you can actually talk about this, and have an attitude about it, and what you say doesn't need to be translated by others to be relevant”.

Previously, the figure “host with a microphone” was often found in, for instance, children's magazine programmes, where children were interviewed about their interests and points of views. This figure has almost disappeared from children's television, illustrating the weakened transmission logic of broadcasting. Symptomatically, the statement above is about the ways children, as agents and beings in their own world, ought to put that world into words without the mediation of adults. The director elaborated further:

We [DR] must be really good at dropping our adult views and learning from the kids. A basic insight is, we are not kids. We have to be humble towards the target group we're working with [...] for we depend on being able to continually follow them where they are right now.

The director clearly articulated a perceived inherent dilemma with adults producing content for children. The dilemma is not because adult producers know *nothing* about children and their lives, but rather that adults might not know what children *themselves* find relevant. The last part of the quotation above is important: Commissioners do not necessarily prioritise enlightening

children about the future perspective of the world, with children as “becomings” in mind (as was the case according to the transmission model); rather, the commissioners want to “follow [kids] where they are right now”, with children as “beings” in the here and now in mind.

According to the logic expressed above, children are involved in testing content early in production processes, regarding, for example, relevance, identification, and language. Children are considered as agents in their own world, and it seems that media professionals intend to serve children by presenting this “authentic” world of “beings” in media content. The digital editor of children’s programming at DR underlined the importance of making sure that “children can mirror themselves in the content”, and thus, “avoiding the presentation of content in an adult way”. Authenticity and identification seem to be important elements in making content relevant to children. Children are thus both recognised as “beings” actively constructing their own interests and preferences and offered content meant to mirror such experiences of their own life as “beings” here and now.

Empowerment through media content

Collaboration with children has opened the way for a demand-driven logic of public service media in which children are considered partners. Consequently, an important issue for commissioners is how to involve and be “at eye level” with kids. When asked about the meaning of meeting children at eye level, the director of children’s programming explained:

Being at eye level is a historical concept, a reaction against the time when children’s television was more about learning, that is, when children were met with the ambition of learning something for the benefit of the future they were about to enter. We left that ambition, and instead, we asked: “Where are you right now and here, you little child?” I have announced that Ultra is not about preparing children for a good adult life waiting ahead. Other institutions take care of that.

This clearly shows how ideas of the “becoming” child are being abandoned as the basis for commissioning DR children’s content. A general rule of production, the director said, is having children acting in most of the roles: “It has to be children who save the day; instead of adults solving all problems in the end. Children have to come up with the solution to problems”. This is one of the reasons why adults, such as parents and teachers, are fewer in children’s television content than in the past. Similarly relating to portraying the agency of children, the commissioning editor of Ramasjang said:

Children are wise. They know much more than we think they know. Then we have to speak to them on that basis. We should show children who can, who dare and will, but who may also be afraid of things. We have

to show all the nuances. [...] We empower the children. We would like to express that children are, in themselves, a force of power, a children's power. They influence many things; you have to listen to them.

According to the editor of Ramasjang, children are considered inherently competent, independent, and powerful beings: Their voices are important and their actions influential. They are also considered, however, to be vulnerable and afraid of things. Thus, the editor was aware of the importance of not idealising everything and recognising that children might have problems and do not always behave cooperatively. The important thing, however, as the director of children's programming argued, is to "include these emotional aspects in our stories to avoid a 'Disneyfication' or a simplification by only portraying the positive sides of children's lives".

Producing nuanced content based on children's manifold experiences and emotions, such as vulnerability and anxiety, was emphasised as a crucial element by several respondents. Particularly the emotional dynamics among friends seem to be very important to both children and in content production, and they have to be portrayed as experienced by children themselves. Elaborating on the tagline for Ultra: "Ultra får dig til at mærke, hvor du står" ["Ultra makes you feel where you stand"], the commissioning editor said: "We [DR] are trying to show many fates of children and trying to sharpen a lot of issues to make children say: 'I've done that', 'I feel this', or 'I distance myself from that'". In one respect, this tagline is an echo of 1980s Danish youth film and television; this also portrayed independent young people characterised by inward-looking reflection and an emotional sensibility. In another respect, children's television is inspired by reality-TV (Jerslev, 2004), focusing on individuals handling social conflicts and emotional dramas intended to create emotional and moral reactions for or against the persons involved. In sum, the emotional empowerment of children as emotional "beings" in television content is considered important from a media professional point of view.

Navigating a competitive market

Throughout the interviews, the commissioners underlined their interest in children's experiences. This was motivated by a genuine interest in children, but it was also a result of a market logic that requires attracting the attention of as many children as possible to be competitive: If DR's content does not meet children's interests, the children turn to other providers, thus representing a serious challenge for DR (DR Medieforskning, 2021; Det Danske Filminstitut, 2023; Jensen and Mitric, Chapter 8 in this volume). The commissioner of fictional content at Ultra reflected on the issue in the following way:

We have changed our focus from being an omnibus channel, which is, so to speak, a mini-DR which may contain a little of it all, to saying we have

certain areas where we can reach [children] and areas where we should not compete with others, because we cannot compete with YouTubers and influencers. We cannot get so close at all. We should not make content within all genres. If we did, we would just end up representing the institution and not the person.

What the commissioner pointed to is that the transmission model of broadcasting (the “omnibus” model) is inadequate for competing with a demand-driven logic of modern public service media. He realised that children feel attracted to the short formats and authentic aesthetics of YouTubers and influencers who communicate privately, generating content by themselves about intimate, real-life topics. Seemingly, the challenge for DR is to find the ways in which they can communicate with their users as equals and avoid being perceived as an institutional voice. Following this perspective, children are regarded as “beings”, and as individualised communicators who do not necessarily understand themselves as being part of bigger groups (e.g., children) or institutions of society (e.g., DR’s children’s television). Using digital media, children have become accustomed to being addressed individually. The commissioner of fictional content at Ultra expressed frustration in relation to this:

Our experience is that children sometimes watch content we feel is completely far out. For example, several influencers on YouTube communicate with content that is not as interesting, not as innovative or exciting as content we communicate to users. The insight we have in specific cases or specific stories or the fantastic environments we invent in our stories, they should be able to compete, but users are just not there.

As a public service provider, DR must continually legitimise content in the eyes of viewers and users. As professional media workers, all the informants were aware of not only having to struggle to attract viewers and users, but also of the consequences this might have for the content that DR produces. The director of children’s programming argued:

People often think there is a contrast between, on the one hand, public service of high quality, and on the other, commercial content attracting many viewers. My approach is that we have to hold on to public service quality in relation to our productions, our themes, topics, and our approach, but you cannot talk about public service if you have no users.

The challenge of getting users to choose DR has become even bigger with the transition from flow to digital distribution. For a traditional flow provider, a less popular programme can be scheduled after a very successful programme in the hopes that viewers will stay; however, in a digital universe, no viewers are “hanging on” from one programme to the next. Additional choices are thus important, and as the digital commissioning editor of children’s programming explained, “frequency is of paramount importance because, if content

you just got used to, suddenly, is no longer there, then the habit is broken, and you lose the users”. Thus, as the market and media professional logics dictate, volume, frequency, and fascinating content are of key significance when children access content throughout the day.

Children as (dis)loyal production partners

The next theme emerging from the interviews concerns children being perceived as media users. Referring to 9–14-year-olds, the director of children’s programming said: “They are disloyal, they change, they are direct, and we offer something that has followed them throughout their childhood. And then, we still want them to choose DR when they become teenagers”. In other words, teenagers are used to finding content about everything on their private phones and they want different content, not least to mark that they are not children anymore. It is thus a challenge to engage children as they grow older with the potential to become loyal users who could even be considered partners in new productions (in the terms of Bardoel & Lowe, 2007).

Usually, audience loyalty is constituted over time. Branding is a well-known way of creating users who consider themselves loyal partners of products and services. Branding has also become an important instrument for DR to attract the attention of children. Minisjang, Ramasjang, and Ultra have their individual brand platforms, that is, an internal tool helping to describe what makes each of them identifiable. The commissioners repeatedly used the rhetoric of branding when talking about their considerations in commissioning content: They talked about positions in the market, segments, strategies, products, campaigns, users, user investigations, target groups, value, and the like, registered within the rhetoric of business and marketing. They all used words that are seemingly far from words associated with children, childhood, or the production of cultural content (see also Redvall, Chapter 4 in this volume). In this respect, the media professional aspects of commissioning appeared crucial, compared with cultural institutional aspects: Additionally, ideas of children as “becomings” seemed to be reduced to ideas of children becoming future loyal media users.

Quality means relevance – relevance means recognisability

The commissioners were also asked to discuss the concept of quality in relation to media content for children. The director of children’s programming explained that DR has redefined the applied concept of quality, recognising that they could not use their own professional, aesthetic, and adult view of quality in the commissioning of content for children. Regarding the launch of *Klassen* [*The Class*], a fiction series with 13 seasons and 743 episodes around 9–14 minutes each, the director defined quality as relevance:

Klassen did not win praise from colleagues or newspapers, but when we talked to the target group, they did not pay attention to the number of cameras, but to the relevance they found in the topics of the product, which they couldn't find anywhere else.

Being a small national content provider, intending to produce quality content, DR's key policy argument is to produce alternatives to media content from the big players by emphasising characteristics of Danish culture, language, and values (DR Strategi, 2019). According to the director general of DR, Maria Rørbye Rønn, DR is in no way able to produce on the same scale as the big players, but DR offers Danish content to a Danish audience. At the press conference of the launch of *Minisjang* in 2020, Rønn said:

We produce content for children in Denmark. We use as a starting point their reality, their world, and that content does not have to be adapted for it to go in Italy, in China, or in Chile. It is produced in Denmark in Danish, and it has a completely uncompromising Danish distinctive character.

This statement resonated in the answers of the informants of this study when discussing the characteristics of DR's children's content. Relevance was consistently interpreted as recognisability. The digital commissioning editor of children's programming stated that they take Danish children's culture as their point of departure in their work:

We always have as a goal to take as a starting point where the Danish kids are right here and now, and we don't worry about whether this is appropriate for American or Turkish children. We only have a focus on Danish children [...]. This mirroring is important”.

To watch other children tackling well-known situations in different ways could help put into perspective situations children know from their everyday life. On the other hand, following this line of reasoning, children's television could end up forming a bubble of recognisable values only for initiated Danish children who are not confronted with foreign or unfamiliar children and their life conditions. All the commissioners were aware, however, of this dilemma, and they emphasised the importance of their public service obligations to deliver content that not only fascinates but also makes children wise and competent and encourages them to reflect. When asked about what they thought of the earlier, more paternalistic way of addressing children through DR content, the commissioner of fictional content at Ultra said:

I don't think it will ever disappear. If it does, I don't think we can keep faith in what we do. As a human being, I have to have a vision. When I am to choose a topic – whether it is about the most delicious snack or the fact that one in ten is exposed to mental or physical violence – I have to decide what is going to be produced and go with the money. In such

a case, I have a paternalistic attitude in saying that this is important for [children] to know about. I think there is something more important than food and snacks.

Generally, the commissioners were proud to be responsible for children's media production and have the opportunity to work with difficult issues, such as bullying, the body, divorce, sexuality, death, and feelings of sorrow, often in both realistic and experimental and provocative ways. A recent example mentioned by the informants is the programme series on Ultra (for children 9–14 years old), *ULTRA smider tøjet* [*Ultra Strips Down*], which is a series aiming to ease body anxiety by exposing children to naked adult bodies. Five adults stand naked in front of a children's audience, and the children may ask all kinds of questions to the five naked persons about their bodies. Even though *Ultra Strips Down* is a quite unique production, it illustrates that the commissioners feel pride in being part of an institution that comments critically and provocatively on the conditions and pressures to which children are subject (see also Lysne, Chapter 3, and Qassim, Chapter 7, in this volume).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I study commissioners' perceptions of children and childhood in their role of commissioning television content for children at the public service provider DR. During a period when DR has found itself being squeezed in competition from global streaming giants, on the one hand, and social media networks available to children night and day, on the other, the dominating media logic has changed from transmission-based to demand-oriented. Against the background of the early days of Danish children's television, the chapter provides a framework to understand the perception of children within the present, transforming logic of broadcasting. Theoretically, the concepts of children as “beings” and “becomings” are used to analyse whether children are addressed as in need of knowledge and education to become “good” future citizens, ideally interested in all aspects of culture and society, or whether children are addressed primarily as beings in their own right, creating knowledge through the mediated mirroring of their own social life here and now.

The conclusion is that the concept of the “becoming” child, in all its aspects, was more visible in content for children before media work was professionalised and digitalised, and that the perception of children as “beings” has increased with competition and digitalisation. The analysis illustrates, however, that addressing children remains as complex as before. As a broadcaster, DR previously had a clear mandate to deliver content for children about almost everything within all genres. Such television content was rooted in the perception that children were open and curious about whatever content *adults* found important, funny, provocative, and interesting for children. Explicitly,

the sender perspective was legitimised by the perception that children were representatives of the future and should be informed, entertained, and involved in content to be as well prepared as possible both for having a good childhood and for achieving a good future life.

With a changing media landscape, DR still has a mandate to deliver content about everything and within all genres, in principle. However, due to a highly competitive market where children have access to all kinds of media content on alternative and social media platforms, the commissioning of children's television content today implies being aware of producing content that, firstly, children do not find on other platforms, and, secondly, is relevant to children on the digital media platforms where children are, such as YouTube.

At DR, children's television content is legitimised by having a direct and specific relevance to Danish children where they are, here and now. Involving children as "partners" before, during, and after production clearly follows a logic of digital media, prompting children to find themselves as professional media partners who contribute to the creation of content. The orchestration of universal themes, such as social relations producing emotional and moral reactions, is taking place in familiar localities meant to represent a Danish way of doing things. Quality is made synonymous to relevance, and relevance is interpreted as recognisability. Consequently, addressing children's own interests relates to the mirroring of well-known everyday activities that children perform with other children, such as texting and socialising with friends.

DR has so far succeeded in the role of a partner to children, constituting a mediated test-room for trying out social and emotional evaluations. However, the study also illustrates that, despite the intentions of reaching children as beings on their own terms, media professionalism has prevailed as a pervasive media logic of commissioning children's content, while the challenge still remains regarding how commissioners can be sure they meet, represent, and express children's own interests and preferences.

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