

If the BBC wants to appeal to future generations then this ability to call on our collective memory of inspiring programmes made by both the BBC and a diverse range of independent producers is crucial to its very survival. Yet BBC management rarely mention BBC Children's at all. This and some nagging concerns about the extent to which BBC Children's is working with larger transnational production companies on classic revivals (*Teletubbies*, *Danger Mouse*), combined with unanswered questions about where the production of children's content will sit once the rest of in-house production is moved into a wholly-owned subsidiary, suggest that the BBC needs to take much greater care of its mission to serve children. Apart from this the Corporation is missing a fantastic opportunity to connect with parents, politicians and the public in showing just how important it really is - because if the BBC fails to appeal to future generations now, it will surely atrophy over time as the public lose those fond memories, memories which the BBC has to work much harder to generate, because children have so many other opportunities in a fast changing media landscape. This is where the BBC can show that it is not only distinctive and popular in fulfilling a public service mission, that of financial necessity has to work with commercial partners, but also stand apart from commercial objectives if it is to maintain the trust of parents and children. Just how important children's content is for generating social cohesion and a sense of identity was clearly demonstrated to my colleague Naomi Sakr and me when we ran a workshop on *Children's Content at the Core of Public Service Media in a Multiplatform Era* at the World Summit on Media for Children (WSMC), in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in September 2014 on behalf of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (now Public Media Alliance). With 40 participants from 20 different countries ranging from Afghanistan to Uganda, we were reminded just how important regulatory, institutional and cultural factors are in the creation of innovative and diverse content that is relevant to children which they really want to engage with. Based on the evidence of several workshop participants, it was clear that there was no regulation or virtually no positive regulatory interventions to support children's content in many countries. In the absence of government policy or support measures, combined with the lack of distribution outlets for local content, production communities were not in a position to build the development capacity necessary for supporting local content on whatever platform. Nevertheless local content was clearly seen as a means of forging identities and our participants clearly recognised and understood why public service values mattered when serving children.

In our discussions universality was acknowledged not just in terms of delivery on widely accessible free platforms, but also in terms of content that was relevant and readily understood by children. Diversity was understood as opinions, different genres and approaches that had to encompass entertainment if it was going to appeal to children at all. Independence was discussed in terms of independence from the state, but also from corporate and commercial interests, linked to advertising and licensed merchandise and was pivotal in terms of trust. Distinctiveness was seen as closely related to independence and diversity, but in terms of quality is always difficult to define. Some suggested that the only way to assess and measure ‘quality’ in local children’s content was to measure it against both its educational or entertaining purposes, alongside its attractiveness to children, a task that may become harder in a multiplatform universe where content is harder to locate. In these discussions it was the orientation and objectives of public service that mattered to participants, regardless of the platform.

What the BBC has established with BBC Children’s is a unique and important marker of its commitment to children in the UK. In a more complicated media landscape, where it has to co-exist and collaborate with the private sector, it would help if it spelt out its approach more clearly in ways that demonstrate its commitment to children. **Professor Jeanette Steemers**