

Communication Studies - Investigation

H: Young children acquire most of their sex roles and communication skills through the morals choreographed into children's television programmes.

In the process of gathering information for my investigation I came across a theorist called Eric Bandura. Bandura believed that young children are most likely to learn their appropriate sex roles through television as it is likely to have a stronger opinion regarding roles. I surveyed a variety of male and female students ranging from year seven (11-12) to year 13 (17-18). I approached members of these age groups and asked, "When you were a child did you want to act:

- the way you wanted to whether that manner was seen as acceptable or unacceptable for your sex because you were told to do so by your parents;
- under your own influence;

or

- because you wanted to copy what you saw on TV?"

I found a survey by Eric Bandura which was taken in 1987 which stated that children aged between 2-11 were estimated to watch over 200 hours of television a year. This was the reason I chose to survey children who were in year seven. Their age group was the oldest age included in the age range of the 1987 survey. 100% of the male and female year seven students stated that they believed their choice to assume their appropriate sex role was not in any way influenced by either watching TV or their parents. They assumed that this decision had been made of their own accord.

In my interview with the year eights, 100% of both female and male students stated that they felt TV had the stronger impact on their sex role.

The reason the Bandura survey had chosen to survey children of that age group was because this age range was the age when young children were the most vulnerable and prone to imitate their surroundings. Berne believed that the human mind consists of three emotional states known as 'the three egos'.

The year sevens' characteristics were similar to those of a human in the child state and the fact that they did not recognise the cause of their choice of sex role to be anything other than their own influence suggests that they are unaware of television's added influence on them.

Bandura stated that watching a large amount of television affects the way a child behaves because children assume the images they see are real. The fact that year eight students, children who were only a year older than the children used in the survey, chose to believe that TV had had an impact on them rather than that they had had an impact on themselves proves their acceptance of their own vulnerability giving them an ego state more suited to that of an adult. The point of progression between a year eight and year seven student proves that at the age a child comes to realise the source of their inspiration. If a child doesn't realise that it is being influenced by television until their early teens it means that a child has been subconsciously under the influence of television for over a decade which is why it is so important that positive morals and values are choreographed into children's television programmes.

It was through research that I found 'The Children's Television Charter'. This charter is a set of rules and guidelines by which all children's television programmes must be made by. The following statement was made by Moira Rayner, former Victorian Equal Opportunity Commissioner. (World summit on television and children in 1995)

"As those responsible for the world's most powerful and widespread medium, and its services to children, we accept our obligation to entertain, inform, engage and enlighten young people in accord with these principles."

As part of my presentation I will be analysing a children's television programme, firstly comparing the morals presented in the content to the theories I have referred to in my survey and secondly observing its content to see if the ethical content has a positive effect on children's morals, gender evaluation and communication skills.