

Institution: King's College London		
Unit of Assessment: 34 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Children's Screen Content in an Age of Disruptions: Changing Approaches to Funding and Representation		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 01/09/2016 – 31/07/2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Jeanette Steemers	Professor of Culture, Media and Creative Industries	From 01/09/2016
Christine Singer	Post-Doctoral Researcher	09/10/2017 – 08/10/2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2017 – July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Changes in UK media policy and new patterns of migration across Europe raise urgent questions about how children's screen content is funded and who it represents. Addressing these issues, King's research has informed debates and decisions about how public service content for children in the UK should be funded and how producers represent children affected by forced migration. King's research on funding practices in North America, Australasia and Europe has influenced the policy positions of leading advocacy organisations – the Children's Media Foundation and Voice of the Listener and Viewer – and shaped funding criteria adopted by the British Film Institute for its new Young Audiences Content Fund. King's research on European screen content about and for Arab children in an era of forced migration has changed how producers represent Arab and other under-represented children: impacting commissioning, production and funding.

2. Underpinning research

The impact presented in this case study derives from two closely interrelated strands of research: Funding Children's Screen Content and Developing Screen Content about and for Arabic-Speaking Children in Europe.

Funding children's screen content

The 2003 Communications Act removed children's screen content quotas on commercial public service broadcasting (PSB) in the UK. This led to a decline in commissions and funding by the BBC and commercial PSBs (ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5), raising doubts about the continued availability of UK-originated children's content. In this context, the launch of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) *Public Service Broadcasting Contestable Fund Consultation* (20/12/2016 – 19/10/2018) meant a range of industry stakeholders had an urgent need for research to inform their responses. This particularly concerned 'contestable funding', where producers apply for public funds from independent bodies that operate separately from broadcasting institutions. Responding to this situation, King's research investigated alternative funding arrangements for supporting public service children's content internationally, to provide new perspectives with which to inform media policy and practice in the UK. Based on industry interviews and policy analysis, King's research on funding children's screen content demonstrated:

- The distinctive market failure characteristics of domestically-produced children's screen content in six countries in North America, Australasia and Europe, each of which necessitate policy interventions. [1,2]
- Key aspects of best practice for operating a specific fund supporting children's screen content, by comparing and contrasting the different organisational procedures and criteria for funds of this kind in six countries. [1]
- That to be effective, separate funds to support children's content in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland and New Zealand almost always require other interventions – including output and investment quotas, industry levies and tax breaks – and do not

necessarily lead to greater diversity of provision or a greater range of content for children. [1,3]

Developing screen content for Arabic-speaking children in Europe

As part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project led by King's (PI, Post-Doc) with the University of Westminster (Co-investigator), the team's research on children's media in the Arab world [5] was used as the focus for discussions with European screen practitioners and children's media advocates about the media needs, wants and experiences of Arabic-speaking migrant children. The project created a space for dialogue with Arab experts, resulting in new research findings generated via co-produced insights from three workshops in Manchester, Copenhagen and Munich between December 2017 and May 2018. In these workshops, participants discussed 35 examples of European children's content featuring Arab children and issues concerning diversity and migration. The findings are published in a report [4], book [6] and journal article [7]. The research:

- Demonstrated the distinctive children's media landscape that young Arab migrants in Europe have grown up with, where they rarely see other Arab children on screen. [4,5,6]
- Identified the ethical considerations involved in enabling children with migration backgrounds to identify with children on screen, without being intrusive. [4,6,7]
- Revealed the advantages of weaving diversity issues into engaging storytelling. [4,6,7]
- Demonstrated ways to avoid tokenism and victimhood through attention to scripting, casting and exploring experiences that children from all backgrounds can relate to. [4,6,7]
- Documented the value of foregrounding children's perspectives in the development of screen content, where children with migration backgrounds are consulted about their representation and speak for themselves. [4,7]

3. References to the research

1. Steemers, J. (2017). International perspectives on the funding of public service media content for children. *Media International Australia*, 163(1), 42–55. doi:10.1177/1329878X17693934.
2. Steemers, J. (2017). Public service broadcasting, children's television, and market failure: the case of the United Kingdom. *International Journal on Media Management*, 19(4), 298–314. doi:10.1080/14241277.2017.1402182.
3. Steemers, J. (2017). Industry engagement with policy on public service television for children. *Media Industries Journal*, 4(1), 1–16. doi:10.3998/mij.15031809.0004.107.
4. Steemers, J., Sakr, N. and Singer, C. (2018). *Facilitating Arab-European Dialogue: Consolidated Report on an AHRC Project for Impact and Engagement: Children's Screen Content in an Era of Forced Migration*. London: King's College London.
5. Sakr, N. and Steemers J. (Eds.) (2017). *Children's TV and Digital Media in the Arab World: Childhood, Screen Culture and Education*. London/New York: IB Tauris.
6. Sakr, N. and Steemers, J. (2019). *Screen Media for Arab and European Children: Production and Policy Encounters in the Multiplatform Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-25658-6.
7. Singer, C., Steemers, J. and Sakr, N. (2019). Representing childhood and forced migration: narratives of borders and belonging in European screen content for children. *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 11(2), 202–224. doi:10.1353/jeu.2019.0023.

4. Details of the impact

King's research has informed how public service content for children in the UK is funded

Since 2017, King's research has influenced debate on how UK public service content for children should be funded. This culminated in directly informing the funding criteria adopted by the British Film Institute's (BFI) Young Audiences Content Fund (YACF). Launched in April 2019, the YACF is now a major contributor to the funding of children's content in the UK, responsible for £57 million of funding over three years. In its first year it awarded £12.5 million to 17 productions and 59 development projects in accordance with guidelines that were directly influenced by King's research. At its launch, Steemers was appointed as Chair of the YACF Steering Group of content producers, in recognition of the centrality of her research to YACF and its development.

King's research on the best practices for operating a fund – comparing and contrasting organisational procedures and funding criteria in other countries [1,2] – directly informed the BFI's 2019 draft guidelines for running the YACF as a three-year pilot fund to stimulate the provision

and plurality of programming for children. BFI's Head of Operations, Partners and Projects explains that the research made *"a critical difference to the BFI's knowledge and approach to the YACF guidelines in taking account of market failure and experiences in other countries, along with the operational set up of the fund"* [A]. Further explaining the impact on the establishment of the Fund, she states, *"King's research about how contestable funds operate in Ireland, New Zealand and Denmark, in particular gave the BFI real insights into what would work for a specialised children's fund in the UK. The research was really helpful in pinpointing what didn't work in these countries, and this allowed the BFI to shape our funding priorities and the YACF guidelines more clearly around quality, innovation, diverse representation, new voices, and plurality of provision in ways that were not always reflected in other funds, but met the YACF's public service obligations, including for content that the market would not otherwise support – such as content for older children, drama and factual shows."* In these ways, the research was *"immeasurably influential in our setting up the Young Audiences Content Fund."* [A]

In the years leading up to the creation of the YACF, King's research directly influenced leading advocacy organisations feeding into policy debates over the funding of children's content: the Children's Media Foundation (CMF) and Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV). Steemers acted as an expert advisor to both. Key research findings – on how contestable funding without clear criteria does not guarantee greater diversity in provision or greater programme range [1,3] – were used by the CMF and VLV in their submissions to the DCMS Public Service Broadcasting Contestable Fund Consultation [B]. This directly influenced the creation and design of the BFI's YACF. Using King's findings about the distinctive market failure characteristics of children's content and the efficacy of contestable funds in Ireland and New Zealand [1,2], VLV's DCMS submission argued that any potential fund in the UK should concentrate on *"less established producers, non-animated content and content for older children to promote more diverse content for children, which would not otherwise be commissioned"* [B]. VLV's Chair explains that the research was vital in *"helping to formulate VLV's arguments, which were later adopted as priorities for the YACF's eventual operation."* Without King's research, the VLV *"would not have been able to assess funding in other countries, and its recommendations to the DCMS and British Film Institute would have been less effective in helping to shape the YACF's eventual framework"* [B].

CMF's Director explains that King's research on funding in other markets *"helped CMF thinking on alternative funding, and what needed to be prioritised"* [C]. Based on King's insights into market failure and contestable funding in other countries, CMF's submission to the DCMS also *"took the position that the fund shouldn't just benefit large scale international animation series and that there was a strong argument for addressing market failure, for example in underserved genres, in content for older children and encouraging new players to enter the market."* CMF highlighted these priorities, which were *"reflected in the YACF's guidelines as developed at the BFI."* [C] CMF's Director adds that without King's findings, *"CMF would not have had the overview of public funding mechanisms in other countries, and its evidence to the DCMS would have been less convincing in helping to frame how the YACF should operate to ensure engagement from broadcasters"* [C]. For CMF, the findings *"significantly assisted in delivering the priorities of plurality of supply and a diverse range of content."* [C]

King's research has influenced how producers of screen content portray under-represented children: enabling new approaches to challenging harmful stereotypes

Due to King's research, six production companies/broadcasters based in the UK, Germany and the US have each adopted new approaches to ethics, diversity, children's perspectives and the avoidance of stereotypes – reshaping screen content reaching children and families across Europe and Arabic-speaking countries on multiple platforms.

These producers have directly used King's research to inform their work for children, impacting current and recent productions, development work, new commissions and funding applications. The six companies/broadcasters include experienced independent producers working for the BBC (Adastra Development, Three Stones Media) and Channel 5 (Adastra Development), German public broadcasters ZDF and KiKa (Imago TV), internationally active content providers seeking to reach young Arab audiences (BBC Media Action) and children in conflict areas (Sesame Workshop). The ultimate research beneficiaries are the many children who watch and engage with these companies' content in Europe and the Arab world.

Each of these six companies/broadcasters attended one or more of the workshops held in Manchester (2017), Copenhagen (2018) and Munich (2018) as part of the King's led AHRC-

funded project on screen content for migration-experienced Arab children. Initial impact was signalled in surveys of 76 participants at the workshops, with 75% stating that the workshops definitely changed their minds about content addressing Arabic-speaking children [D]. According to the Managing Director of Adastra Development, a Cambridgeshire production company established in 2005, King's findings on ethical considerations, children's perspectives and avoiding tokenism (4, 6, 7) *"clearly influenced our decision-making in terms of voices used for development, but also the characters, stories and the nature of the world we presented in our work. The fact that refugee children rarely see anything of their experiences reflected in work designed for their age group was something we very much took on board and will take with us in all future work"* [E].

Adastra, who have scripted and produced content for all the UK's children's channels, used King's research (4, 6, 7) to inform an Arts Council England project in 2018 with Peterborough Museum, Peterborough Syrian Refugee Action Group and Peterborough Asylum and Refugee Community Association. The findings were used to address diversity and inclusion in drama/puppetry workshops for ethnically diverse children aged 4–7 in Peterborough schools. This successful approach was then carried forward in 2019 into development of a new Channel 5 commission, *Mimi's World* (in production), a 52-episode pre-school soap. According to Adastra, King's research directly influenced their plans to work with children with forced migration experience, *"to feed their ideas into development"*, and informed and extended the company's view that *"aspiration, not victimhood was an important part"* of what children should see represented on screen [E].

London-based production company Three Stones Media used King's research on diversity and representation in children's screen content, and the importance of children's perspectives (4, 6, 7), to inform production. According to its company director, the casting process of series three of ethnically diverse pre-school soap *Apple Tree House* *"benefited hugely from concerns about the underrepresentation of Arab characters"* with the research bringing *"more formal rigour to explore aspects of diversity and inclusion that previously we had only been able to study in an informal manner"* [F]. The research *"strengthened our resolve and also provide[d] substantial evidence to support our approaches to inclusion and diversity"* – in this case for a show that first launched on the BBC's CBeebies pre-school channel and BBC iPlayer in 2017 and is still being repeated, reaching thousands of UK pre-schoolers. The company continues to use King's research on children's perspectives and storytelling for a new project in development for BBC Children's, with *"a complete new approach to story development, scripting and casting that focuses even more on the youth voice"* [F].

German production company Imago TV and the largest German public service commissioner ZDF both testify that King's research on Arab children's media experiences, ethical considerations, inclusive casting and victimhood (4, 6, 7) influenced their approach to diversity in series three of *Berlin und Wir (Berlin and Us)*. This is a six-part factual series featuring friendships between migrant and German children, first broadcast on ZDF and German children's channel KiKa in 2019. They state that King's research findings – on the need to consult children and prioritise their perspectives to avoid stereotyping and victimisation – clarified and confirmed that to *"portray refugees in a positive light and consult them"* was the right approach [G]. The way that the research highlighted the complexities of depicting religious and cultural differences around the wearing of headscarves by girls, for example, *"influenced our approach in Series 3"* to *"other conflict lines"* – namely the case of a Jewish girl and a Palestinian boy, where the team decided to focus on the personal experience of each child, rather than using them *"in a secondary battlefield of the Middle East Conflict."* As a consequence of King's research, now other children's programmes professionals at ZDF *"want to take greater account of the perspective of migrant children"*, with the ZDF Children's Department launching *"an initiative to bring more diversity"* into its programmes and commissioning further series dealing with diversity (*Strong Kids – Strong Classes*) [G].

Beyond Europe, King's research informed US-based Sesame Workshop's successful USD100 million bid, in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee, to the MacArthur Foundation's 100&Change programme. This was a bid to fund *Ahlan Simsim (Welcome Sesame)*, an early childhood development programme for refugee families in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. According to Sesame Workshop's Senior Vice President for International Social Impact, King's research on the Arab media landscape for children (5) *"was significant in helping Sesame develop an informed approach during the 100&Change competition, which recognizes the complexities of the Arab media market along with the unique needs and experiences of Arabic-*

Impact case study (REF3)

speaking children and how they are impacted by forced migration. It allowed us to have an up to date and in-depth understanding of the media landscape in the Middle East to inform our winning proposal and meet the needs of children impacted by crisis and conflict across the region.” King’s research “provided key insights for Sesame Workshop to better understand the complex distribution of children’s media in the Arab world and importance of representation and locally relevant content” [H]. The Managing Producer of Ahlan Simsim, who attended the project workshops in Manchester and Munich, states that the research (4, 6) provided “ample insights” into the children’s media landscape in the Middle East, proving “very useful in the local creative talent bidding” and for the “framing of our initial creative development process.” The production team continue to refer to the research in developing and communicating “our continued mission” [H].

BBC international development charity BBC Media Action, which undertakes work in Lebanon, used King’s published research [4,5,6] to inform their approach to young audiences affected by forced migration in the Middle East. The research findings and recommendations were passed onto the BBC Media Action team and have “helped us redraft and review our approach” to Lebanon as well as providing insights on “ethical considerations” that are “key for the successful design of content that prioritises children’s perspectives over adults while also focusing on engaging, child-focused stories that avoid victimhood” [I].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. British Film Institute/Young Audiences Content Fund, UK. Testimonial.
- B. Voice of the Listener and Viewer, UK. Testimonial.
- C. Children’s Media Foundation, UK. Testimonial.
- D. Producers from several countries. Evidence bundle: feedback surveys from three workshops held in Manchester, Copenhagen and Munich.
- E. Adastra Development, UK. Testimonial.
- F. Three Stones Media, UK. Testimonial.
- G. Imago TV and ZDF, Germany. Testimonials.
- H. Sesame Workshop, US. Testimonials.
- I. BBC Media Action, UK. Testimonial.