
'OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES AND EXPERTS': CHILDREN'S NEWS AND WHAT IT CAN TEACH US ABOUT NEWS ACCESS AND PROFESSIONAL MEDIATION

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Abstract:

Based on a participant observation study of the British children's news programme *Newsround*, this article explores how professional ideas of form and target audience condition and shape both the range of accessed news voices as well as the opportunities that these are granted on the news stage to elaborate their views, experiences and feelings. This case study approach not only helps to map a hitherto unexplored form of television journalism but also throws into sharp relief professional news practices that inform the production of television news more generally. As such, it addresses an important silence in the conventional theorisation of news access and invites a more complex and culturally differentiated understanding of, and future approach to, news production and processes of professional mediation.

Key words: News forms, imagined audiences, professional mediation, news access

Introduction

Theorises of news access go to the heart of contemporary discussion and debate about the power of the news. As Cottle (2003) summarises: ‘Questions of media source involvement raise fundamental concerns about who is delegated to speak or pronounce on social affairs and wider conflicts, of how exactly this communicative entitlement is conducted, and by whom it has been authorised’ (Cottle, 2003: 5). Based on an in-depth ethnographic study of the production of a particular television news form, the children’s news programme *Newsround*ⁱ, I will argue that influential theories of news access do not exhaust the complexities and determinants of news access opportunities that are made available to news voices by news producers. On close examination, children’s news and its professional production has much to tell us about how news producers conceive and professionally enact processes of source involvement and how, in turn, this impacts on the public representation and elaboration of major issues and concerns. Contrary to widely held assumptions about elite dominance and authority skew, the study reported here will show how news workers are not always subserviently bound to their news source but in fact actively and purposefully culturally mediate access opportunities with an overriding sense of the needs and requirements of their news form and its inscribed ‘imagined audience’. The understanding of the news form and how this structures the activities of news workers, developed here, thus provides a theoretical framework with which to understand the shaping of dialogic possibilities of TV news programmes in general. What follows will help to empirically ground these theoretical claims. First, though, it is useful to review influential positions on news access and then contextualise the specific nature and appeals of children’s television news and consider its possible contribution to these wider debates. With these planks in place we can move to our case study and its illumination of important processes of news production and the professional mediation of news access.

Theorising news access

When approached from established findings from studies of news production news access opportunities are invariably seen as tied by the professional ideologies of objectivity and impartiality (Tuchman 1972), the operation of time constraints (Schlesinger 1978) as well as the social connections that can inform relationships between sources and journalists (Ericson et al 1987; Gans 1979). Together these generally help to produce a situation in which elite voices come to predominate in news discourse and effectively become primary definers of reality (Hall et al. 1978). A contrasting source-centric, approach, on the other hand, has

sought better to acknowledge the vast array of news sources that struggle and compete for news access and how they do so within unequal source fields and with varying resources, social prestige and communication strategies (Anderson 1991; Deacon 2003; Miller & Williams 1993; Schlesinger 1990). A third, more culturalist approach to news access recognises the importance of the news text as itself exerting determining influence on news access and representation whether in terms of story and narrative (Jacobs 1996), myth (Bird and Dardenne 1988) or ritual (Ettema 1990). Collectively, this body of work undoubtedly helps to explain the important features and dynamics of news access. It nonetheless overlooks how different access opportunities are in fact produced, particularised, and deliberately differentiated within news programmes. As a recent article by Cottle explains:

How news producers daily enact and reproduce their distinctive cultural forms of news in interaction with other news producers and news sources and how, in turn, these condition the discursive and symbolic entry of "news actors" remains largely unexplored (2000b: 443).

The focus on the professional construction of news access opportunities opens up research questions about how voices are professionally mediated according to conventions of particular news forms. These can be researched with a production approach that is sensitive to the particular features and established appeals of different news forms and how these are inscribed within their 'textual nature'. Incorporating ideas of news as genre within production research builds on studies that have already variously recognised how news can be seen as having distinctive form (Corner 1995), particular content (cf. Galtung and Ruge 1973; GUMG 1980) and style (cf. Brunsdon and Morley 1978; Goddard et al 2001; Hartley 1982; Jensen 1986; Fiske 1987). Studying its generic features helps us to understand the differences in presentation among the emerging 'sub genres' of news (Harrison 2000) and how these are often related to - or defined in contrast to - other news programmes. However, an emphasis on the news features alone will say little about the reasons why the children's news programme adopts the form that it does and so a more 'productive analysis' is developed here when ideas of the 'news programme as genre' are pursued inside the news production domain and granted a degree of analytical priority.

When applied to the BBC children's news programme *Newsround*, my approach reveals the professional choices that are deliberately enacted when constructing its distinct form. These include observing the professional motivation to personalise news for the audience and deliberately steering a course between serious and popular approaches to adult news (Matthews 2003). By this means, we can see how professional ideas of the news audience are entwined with the daily formation of a particular and distinctive news programme and how news

voices are selected to meet assumed needs and interests of the imagined audience. In this context, then, we see how news workers produce a 'hierarchy' of credible news sources, which is very different to those described and mapped within previous news studies (Becker 1967; GUMG 1980; Hall et al 1978). As part of a growing literature that addresses the interplay between form and access (Bell 1991; Cottle 1993 & 2000a; van Dijk 1988), the investigation that follows traces the way that the children's news programme form awards a particular status only to those voices that can supply a simplified and personalised account in keeping with producers expectations and their professional view of the perceived needs of the programme's audience. More specifically, it discusses how by inserting such voices within either an analytic or experiential roleⁱⁱ, news workers manage a tight control on the dialogic possibilities of news stories. But why examine children's news particularly?

Why children's news?

Studying children's news does reveal a great deal about the dialogic possibilities of the news programme. When comparing, for example, the reporting of an oil spill in the Galapagos Islands made by a children's news programme and an adult news programme we see a similarity in their coverage.

Presenter:

The president of Ecuador has declared a state of emergency in the Galapagos Islands where the authorities are battling to minimise the effects of a massive oil spill. They'll try to stem the spill from the tanker that went aground off San Cristobal last week. A hundred and seventy thousands gallons have poured from the tanker. It's feared that the oil may now threatened the islands of Santa Fe and Santa Cruz. Our Environment correspondent Richard Bilton is one of the few western broadcast journalists on the Galapagos Islands.

Environment Correspondent:

US coast guards who are leading the cleanup operating in San Cristobal say most of the tankers two hundred and fifty thousand gallons of oil and diesel now appeared to have drained into the sea. It is a week since the Jessica ran a ground and four days since her tanks ruptured and started polluting these unique waters. The islands are home to dozens of rare species: from sea lions to the finches studied by Darwin. It is the threat to this environment that has lead to the present declaration of a state of emergency. That has been welcomed by environmentalists who say any large-scale pollution in this area is a disaster. So far the effects of the slick have not a dramatic effect on the wildlife. Strong winds and currents have dragged the oil spill out to sea - limiting the damage along the shoreline. But a change in the weather could radically alter the situation.

US Coastguard:

Most of this is gonna evaporate and go out to water and disperse. The swells are getting worse out there. There's a bog, there's a gale up north that's gonna create a big swell by Wednesday

(Oil Spill, BBC 1 O'Clock News, 22 January 2001)

Presenter:

Hi, first to some of the world's rarest animals whose lives have been threatened by a massive oil spill have been saved by the good weather. Thousands of gallons of fuel poured into the sea after a tanker crashed into rocks in the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador. [Reporter]'s got the latest

Reporter:

The tanker, the Jessica was carrying oil to other ships in the area when it hit rocks. It turned on its side and its cargo poisoned the sea for miles around. Experts were worried that strong winds would push the fuel on to beaches; killing species that aren't found anywhere else in the world. But a spell of good weather has taken the slick further out into the ocean instead. Some are still frightened that winds may change:

US Coastguard:

The swells are getting worse out there. There's a gale up north that's gonna create a big swell by Wednesday.

(‘Oil Spill’ BBC *Newsround*, 22 January 2001)

With the exception of the differences in language use within the children's news story, the descriptions of the event and the news access opportunity offered by the programmes closely match. This comparison would seem to lend support to an argument that the ideologically closed news story (Elliott et al. 1986) enacts tight editorial controls on news voices (Cottle 2000c). But, on the contrary it reveals much more, in particular how a difference in approach between the programmes impacts on the mediation of the coastguard's words, an observation that invites a more complex and culturally differentiated understanding of the production of these stories. The edited version of the coastguard's statement that appears within the children's news story, in contrast to that within the adult news story, emphasises the seriousness of the developing weather conditions and risks of pollution to the island's wildlife by purposefully omitting the coastguard's view

that most oil will disperse. While the adult news extract focuses on the human reaction to oil spill, the children's news extract emphasises the oil spill's potential threat to wildlife and shapes the coastguard's statement to reflect this stance. Studying the children's news story thus shows how news professionals conceive and enact source involvement differently.

Furthermore, examining how news practices impact on the representation and elaboration of major issues offers an insight into the democratic potential of the children's news programme. In theoretical terms, we can describe the relationship between child and programme with the term 'cultural citizenship', where media audiences as cultural citizens have 'cultural rights' to mediated information, experience, knowledge and participation (Murdock 1999). According to this view, then, an audience of 'would-be citizens' (Messenger-Davis 2001) would require the children's news programme to represent contested social issues, including the many voices and positions that inform them as well as provide a platform for children to speak on the news stage. However, although we can agree on the obligations of the news programme we know very little about the actual nature and content of these special news programmes. A review of available literature reveals how most writing on children and news provision focuses upon the adult news programme, with studies documenting its treatment of the young in news reports, its impact on young audiences or potential to politically socialise this constitution of society (see Buckingham 2000). Of the commentaries by academics and news professionals that do discuss the children's news programme (Craven 1978; Craven & Rowan 1984; Home 1993; Prince 2004; Snow 1996), few consider its contribution to debates within journalism research. Also we are made aware that recent studies of the children's news programme (Buckingham 2000; Carter 2004) examine its audience not its production and thus say little about how journalists shape the democratic potential of the children's news programme. It is, therefore, with an aim to discuss how news professionals conceive and enact source involvement and shape the dialogic possibilities of the children's news programme that the following will report on a two-year empirical study of the BBC programme *Newsround*ⁱⁱⁱ.

Producing news access opportunities within children's news

Researching the production of *Newsround* reveals how news professionals construct a unique style of news programme to present accounts of news happenings to an audience of children. Working with the aim to elucidate news events for this unusual news audience (BBC 1997), journalists simplify the adult news story, creating a version that emphasises a children's news style, as this reflexive account proposes:

When we are given a story, we do not do enough of our own digging. I suppose it is because of time constraints and that it takes all day to get on top of a story and you don't want to further confuse it by talking to three thousand different experts who have three thousand different explanations. (*Newsround Journalist 2*)

The comments suggest that time constraints on news writing is less important an explanation than the demands imposed on the process by an imagined news audience who require news presented within a simple and straightforward 'news format' (Cottle 1995) without arguments and too many news voices. In addition observations of newsroom activities do confirm how on the basis of visualising the children's news story, journalists make important judgements on the appropriateness of news voices, particularly over voices that feature regularly within adult news.

Mediating news voices: The adult news source

Thus, we are made aware that an understanding of the simplified style of the children's news story informs professional decisions on who should comment on news events, ensuring, for example, that potential adult news voices deliver intelligible and unambiguous descriptions of news events as is explained here:

If you have got a good interviewee you do not have to say to them beforehand or even half way through the interview: "please remember this is for a twelve year old audience" because actually a good interviewee will come across clearly. (*Newsround Journalist 3*)

As is shown above, a developed sense of the 'ideal' news voice helps the journalist to recognise the inadequacy of most adult news voices and a need in response to pressures to produce news stories popular with the child audience, to:

... seek out interviewees who are child friendly and ignore the bastards in suits, as politicians [...] just don't enthuse young people. (*Newsround Journalist 9*)

As is suggested here the distinction made between news voices guarantees access for child friendly voices but not to those that feature regularly within adult news like politicians and grey suited experts. However, the distinction made above applies to the mediation of the adult news voice rather than children's news voice, as we will see next.

Mediating the child news source

Journalists view children's voices, in contrast to adult's voices, as an important element of the children's news programme and believe that news workers have a professional responsibility to help children to contribute to the news story. However, they also bemoan the professional difficulties experienced when interviewing children as is represented in the following morning meeting discussion:

Assistant Producer 7: I asked all kinds of questions, but the two girls that you saw were the only two who could be interviewed

Assistant Producer 4: They could hardly speak

Producer: If you vox and they only say, four or five words...

Assistant Producer 4: They were so bad they couldn't speak. He asked a hundred questions!

When thinking reflexively about their experiences many suggest that the problems with interviewees stem from the lack of time given to conducting the interview rather than an inadequacy common to children. They also voice a belief that children can produce appropriate responses when given time to do so, as is discussed here:

I know [journalist] went in and actually did interactive stuff with them and warmed them up. The difference you saw. Instead of someone rushing in with a camera, we actually worked with them and I think that it really showed. (*Newsround* Journalist 5)

However, the demands of news production make opportunities to prepare children to voice views prior to filming scarce and thus, it was observed, journalists employ practical measures, as described below, that will achieve appropriate results within interview:

I would ask simple questions that would not necessarily give the answer that I wanted but would make me realise where the child was in his own head on the subject. Then I would phrase the question in a way that would enable them to express the way they actually feel. So, I would never put words into children's mouths. I would never say - say this. So, after I had heard their opinion I would say: 'maybe you could say it this way. (*Newsround* Journalist 6)

We should be aware that interview techniques do not simply enhance children's responses within interview as is suggested by the journalist but they place words within children's mouths, words that are often drafted prior to interview as is explained here:

I ask questions that I know will get me the answers. I mean essentially I know what I want from a piece before I do it. Especially if it's a longer two-minute piece, I'll just go out and interview you. For instance, I did a *Newsround Extra* on children with AIDS. I had already written the thing before I went out and filmed it. [...] So I had my spaces for kid's voices and I asked them questions that would give the answers that I wanted. It is not fraud because they are still telling you. (*Newsround* Journalist 6)

The revelation that children are coached to repeat comments within interview that have been drafted previously thus brings an end to the introduction to the mediation of news access within the children's news programme. In sum, this section has shown how the visualised children's news story structures news worker's activities, particularly the professional effort to select news voices with an appropriate style. Next by examining a case study of the environmental news story we will explore how journalists manage the news access opportunity.

Mediating environmental voices: A case study

The production of the environmental news story serves as a useful case study of the professional mediation of news access. When producing the environmental story, as a two year sample of environmental coverage^{iv} (397 stories) shows, journalists give news voices access to a great number of news stories (203 stories, 51%) despite producing a significant amount as news summaries voiced by a news presenter (194 stories, 49%). They also manage news access opportunities within the environmental story to include the environmental news voice with an appropriate style as is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Children's news coverage: Environmental Voices

Voices	No.	%
Environmental Group	89	34
Individual Child	63	23
Scientist	27	10
Politician	20	8
Industry	17	6
Aid Agency	12	5
Individual Adult	12	5
Rescue Workers	7	3
BBC Correspondent	5	2
Police	2	1
Others*	9	3
Total	263	100

*Others: Royalty 1, Teacher 1, Army 1, Charity 1, Inventor 1, Animal helper 1, Economist 1, UN spokesperson 1 Pop star 1

As the table shows the environmental group and children appear frequently within the *Newsround* environmental story, achieving a level of access (52%) that overshadows that given to traditional voices like scientists, politicians and industrialists (24%), who dominate the environmental news story within other news programmes (see Molotoch and Lester 1974; Greenberg 1985; Hansen 1991). In addition to having an appropriate style, the access that voices achieve can be explained by the distinct dialogic roles they play within the environmental news story, as we will see next:

Informing the audience: Environmental groups presenting problems

It is an interest in the environment as a newsworthy story that maintains journalist's cordial relationship with environmental groups and a respect for their views on environmental matters. Groups have thus been given opportunities to describe environmental problems and have had their activities, aims and objectives discussed favourably within early programmes:

In the early seventies people like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were regarded by most of the adult media, as not to be taken too seriously. They were sort of guys in sandals and a bit outlandish. Whereas *Newsround* always took them seriously as they were dealing with issues that we were interested in. They became our heroes.

(Ex *Newsround* Presenter 1)

Although the presenter describes how a personalised view of groups, featuring tales of their activism court cases and as well as misfortunes and failures^v emerges as part of the *Newsround* environmental coverage within the 1970s and early 1980s, the representation of groups did later change. Subsequent news coverage and interviewee testimony does reveal how later news workers considered details about environmental groups as less than newsworthy, developing discussions of issues rather than groups within the environmental story, although continuing to provide news access for the environmental group to define the environmental problem.

Inserting the environmental group voice in the environmental story

A two year sample of the children's news programme reveals how environmental groups appear within a range of the environmental stories (see Table 2).

Table 2: Children's news coverage: Environmental group voices by story

Story type	No. of stories with environmental group voice	%
Animal exploitation and habitat	31	35
Animal conservation	19	21
Natural disaster and event	13	15
Air, water, land pollution	10	11
Green lifestyle, education and policy	7	8
Global warming	4	4
GM food	3	3
Land conservation	3	3
Total	89	100

Inside the newsroom journalists will manage the access opportunities that environmental groups receive, editing their views into small sections ready to insert into the news story, as is shown in following example:

We have to act now. Basically, we got some species of parrots, which are clawing on – they are on the brink of extinction. One spikes macaw left in the wild. We have a handful of parrot species, which are under fifty. If action is not taken now these species, may become extinct in the next five or ten years. (Environmental News Source 1)

We can also see how even conflicting viewpoints within controversial issues such as the debate over genetically modified foods are mediated similarly:

(Graphic - GM Food - Why?)

(EASIER AND QUICKER)

Scientists in favour of it say it's a good thing because they can make food easier and quicker to grow - which will be particularly useful in developing countries

(FLAVOUR AND QUALITY)

They can improve the flavour and the quality.

(FRESHER)

And they can make it stay fresher for longer once it gets on the supermarket shelf

(VO - Picture of Campaign Launch)

The government has carried out research into GM foods and says they are safe to eat. But more than 20 groups want a five-year ban on them while more work is carried out. They call it "Frankenstein Food"

(Graphic - GM Food Why Not?)

(DAMAGE HEALTH)

They believe it can damage your health. Research on rats fed genetically modified potatoes found they didn't grow properly and their resistance to germs was affected. They fear by mixing up different species we're in danger of developing new diseases by accident.

(SUPER PLANTS)

And we could create super plants and weeds that can't be controlled - with terrible effects for the future.

The only genetically modified crops we grow at the moment are for experiment. But the first ones for food are supposed to be planted next year. At least they were until this outcry. (GM Food Explainer, not screened)

The above *Newsround* explainer was prepared from an online BBC discussion document,^{vi} and produced with the aim to represent the complex and

intricate debate between the scientists in a simplified way. Observing the production of the explainer revealed how the journalist did purposefully reduce the opposition between the news voices and include what were assumed to be the key points of argument. By allowing only limited opportunities for the news voices to articulate views, the above explainer is representative of the detrimental outcome that the mediation process has on the dialogic possibilities of the children's news story, a point that is also observed of the news treatment of children's voices.

Access for the audience: Children news voices

In addition to the professional desire to mediate the voice of the environmental group, journalists also closely manage news access opportunities given to children. For instance, less serious news topics are selected when children report within the news programme as part of the *Newsround Presspack*^{vii}. The club's architect reveals why this is do below:

The *Presspack* was designed as a vehicle for children to get involved in a real way in reporting the news, and being a part of the news. That is not at the exclusion though of doing what is your primary job, which is to report the news of the world to your audience in a way that they can understand. So this is a balance, and it is a difficult balance to get all of these ingredients to come together in the right way. (Ex *Newsround* Editor 2)

When describing how the programme must achieve a balance between news voices, the ex editor refers to a professional understanding that the *Newsround* journalist, in contrast to children, should report the serious news story. Furthermore, the comments reveal how professional concerns over children's onscreen role lie at the centre of news policy and practices to mediate children's news access opportunities.

Inserting the voices of children

Thus, in deciding whether children should contribute to the news story an evaluation is made about the appropriateness and ability of children to comment and the audience's interest generated by children appearing within news. Nevertheless, it is the size of the news story format that predetermines decisions made by journalists, with the largest news story formats providing greater opportunities to include children than the smaller news story formats. Comments on the production of a documentary on pollution in Romania describe how the largest news format is used in this way:

In the environmental story about pollution we found a family and we found out how this family had been affected by the pollution. We just tried to do that so that kids would try and identify. So we found kids that were the same age as *Newsround* viewers in Britain so that we could say look they are like you, but have to wash three times day because their faces get dirty and look like Victorian street urchins. (Ex *Newsround* Journalist 4)

In contrast to the documentary, the environmental news story limits the available news access opportunities to include mostly children involved within environmental events who voice short reaction pieces. Alongside these, a collection of other stories provides opportunities for children without firsthand experience of the environmental event as is demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Children's news coverage: Children's voices by story

Story type	No. of stories with child voice	%
Natural disasters & events	29	52
Animal habitat, exploitation and conservation	9	16
Green energy, lifestyle and politics	9	16
Air, Water, Land Pollution	6	10
Land conservation	2	4
GM foods	1	2
Total	56	100

Journalists shape children's contributions to reflect a children's news style, asking first that they voice an 'experiential' or 'analytical' reaction to environmental events within interview.

The mediated limits of experiential reactions

Children's experiential reactions to an environmental event are argued to be a common feature within the environmental story, and a unique facet of the children's news programme more generally, although within interview journalists often fail to mention that they mediate children's participation. A typical example is shown below:

Our coverage was quite different to the main news coverage because we went for [Reporter]'s piece. [Reporter]'s piece had four young people that said something different about the eclipse, and we used them as our case studies. There was one that was scared of

looking at it. Another one that was really disappointed. The main news had Patrick Moore and loads of astronomers. We didn't do any of that. We put music and graphics to it. Our package was completely over produced if it were compared to a news standard two minute package on the eclipse that wouldn't have any music and graphics. (*Newsround* Producer 2)

Evidence from news observations and a viewing of the story mentioned do confirm that the above comments exaggerate children's participation within the eclipse story, a characteristic common among descriptions of the programme made by *Newsround* journalists. Furthermore, much later the same producer when addressing a collection of colleagues offers a more accurate description of the story:

I thought that [Reporter's] report was really good and that both reports were more impressionistic and weren't the dispassionate "oh the sun goes over the moon". They were more like what it was like for [Reporters] to be there. The objective was to explain to children who were in Birmingham or Glasgow or Cardiff what it would have been like if they were there. I think they gave a real sense of atmosphere and occasion about it. (*Newsround* Producer 2)

This version describes the most significant aspect of the story to be the *Newsround* reporters and offers an insight into the way that children receive limited opportunities within the news story as the following example of a Turkish earthquake story shows:

Hello again. It's now more than a week since the horrify earthquake in Turkey which killed more than 13 thousand people and left mainly more homeless. But the effects of the tragedy have been felt the world over not least in Britain, where there are over a quarter of a million people in the Turkish community. I went to meet some of the children affected by the disaster. ('Earthquake', *BBC Newsround*, 27 August 1999)

Although the introduction describes the story as an investigation into the emotional impact of the earthquake on children's sense of being, the main report says little about the children affected by the disaster or their views:

Reporter: This week they have been meeting other Turkish children, all of whom know people caught up in the disaster. They want to get help to them. That's why the Turkish owner of this restaurant has set up a fund to raise some money.

And this how they can do something positive to help, because every penny raised today at this restaurant will go directly to towards helping the victims of the earthquake.

What's the mood amongst the Turkish people in Britain?

Restaurant Owner: They are really upset. Every day that's all that we are talking about in the newspapers, in the family gatherings, in the restaurants; everywhere we are talking but this. I think everybody's affected, all over Britain, all over the world.

Reporter: These sisters were so moved by the tragic stories they felt they had to do something. Jays donated all her savings - three thousand pounds.

Sister 1: I'm here in London and I can get help from my mum, and support from my family. But there everything's just gone

Sister 2: I think about it every day before I go to sleep and when I wake up

Reporter: This fund raising day was a one off. But other events will follow because the people here know that millions of pounds, and months if not years of effort are required
(*'Earthquake'*, BBC *Newsround*, 27 August 1999)

The extract illustrates how news access opportunities within onscreen investigations into the opinions of children do not differ from other news stories where children, in comparison to adults, receive only limited opportunities to speak. Having, thus revealed how experiential reactions become mediated in prescribed ways, it is perhaps no surprise that the analytical reactions of children are also shaped and inserted within the news story in a similar fashion.

Mediating the boundaries of analytic interpretations:

Assumptions that inform decisions to mediate children's analytic reactions become revealed when journalists plan the production of a news story. Within the following morning meeting discussion, for example, two journalists reveal their opinions on the appropriateness of children who live within a self-sufficient

community, situated within a Welsh national park, to describe their lifestyle onscreen:

Assistant Producer: We should be there I think

Producer: But every time we go cover these Eco warrior kids [they] are usually conditioned by their parents. They are just a mouthpiece for their parents, living this Eco warrior life style. Are we in the business of sort of reflecting reality and what kids can relate to or doing this kind of weird cult community?

Assistant Producer: It's not like wankers stuck in the middle of a field trying to stop a road being build. I hate doing that. But the fact is that they have a little community they've got fantastic little houses with turf roofs.

The thought that children involved in environmental lifestyles should have opportunities within the children's news programme fills the news workers with unease, as they assume children in these situations regurgitate the environmental ideology of guardians and would express onscreen thoughts and feelings incongruent to those of the majority of children watching the programme. Assumptions like these help to limit access opportunities for children, as do others, often voiced, about their inability to discuss issues. An example of the mediation of a story into a young person's interpretation of the beef crisis highlights the way that the latter assumption shapes a child's opportunity to speak:

Reporter: Catrine hopes to keep on farming after she leaves school - but there's a problem. Farming used to be seen as a job for life. Farms would be kept in the family for years and handed down from parents to child. But farmers now say they have serious problems that unless something is done the lives of thousands of children - like Catrine - are going to change.

Llanwrwst market sales hundreds of sheep and cattle a week and this is where Catrine and her dad bring me to find out why farmers finding it tough. They get poor prices for sheep and lambs. Catrine's got six sheep to sale.

Child: Twenty-two fifty for each sheep – it's not good really. Four years ago we had forty or more really. It's not enough, we can't live on these prices.
(‘Farm’, BBC *Newsround*, 6 September 1999)

The extract above reveals how news workers in underestimating the ability of children to comment on the relationship between issues and their own lives follow a professional strategy to use the voices of children within the news story in token ways.

Conclusion

This article has asked that we take account of the professional mediation of news access when discussing the dialogic possibilities of news programmes. News access opportunities, it has argued, are culturally mediated in accordance with particular conventions and appeals unique to the news programme. A case study of a BBC children's news programme has provided evidence of the mediation process, where the production of this hitherto unexplored news form invites access opportunities to untraditional news voices such as the environmental group and children within the environmental story. Examining the mediation of these voices, close up within the production context, we have seen the overriding professional imperative to simplify the news story shape their opportunities to speak. In this case, the mediation process limits the dialogic possibilities of the children's news story by sidelining arguments, discussion and debate about environmental degradation. Children's news thus has some way to go to meet children's cultural rights, though we must recognise that its study has revealed valuable insights into how news professionals conceive and enact source involvement. Aware, now, that an imagined view of news audiences and programmes does influence news access opportunities we should aim to research the professional mediation of dialogic opportunities within other news programmes.

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ⁱ Newsround is a BBC children's news programme. From first appearing twice weekly in 1972, the programme has developed into an established part of the BBC children's schedules, broadcast daily on terrestrial and digital channels and accompanied by a yearly series of twelve minute documentaries called *Newsround Extras*. Moving from a traditional slot of 5pm to 5.25 in 2000, the eight minute programme includes two or three main stories and a summary of others within a 'newsrap'. The programme consistently tries to cover news items that are considered relevant to children as well as those assume will interest and entertain them. Supporting the daily broadcasts is also a website that contains story summaries, background information on important stories and message boards.

ⁱⁱ A discussion of analytic and experiential roles given to news sources can be found in Cottle (2000c)

ⁱⁱⁱ This project involved field observation and interviews with thirty programme producers, both past and present, and a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of news programmes broadcast across the period 1973-2000.

^{iv} The two year sample of the programme was taken between 1/6/1998 to 1/6/2000 and included 2884 individual news stories

^v For instance, the programme covered the mysterious sinking of Greenpeace's ship 'The Rainbow Warrior' when demonstrating against nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean on the 11th July 1985.

^{vi} The explainer presents Dr Ian Taylor the Scientific Political Advisor for Greenpeace and Clive Rainbird - the Biotechnology Communications Managers for the manufacturers AgrEvo (BBC 1999).

^{vii} The presspack was developed to involve young journalists to make their TV reports. The competition involves anyone under 16, with the best submission gaining writers the chance to appear on air, see their work on CEEFAX or have it published in the Radio Times. At the end of each broadcasting year all presspack assignments are considered for the award of 'Press Packer of the year' (BBC 1997).