

# Prosocial Learning

## Northwest Ohio Sixth Graders Participating in a Local Television Newscast

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*Abstract: The impact of television on children has been analyzed from various perspectives. The social cognitive theory of mass communication explicates the mechanism of children's social learning from television. The premise of this study is that television may have positive effects on youngsters by exploring prosocial themes and developing community-oriented content. A distinctive example of prosocial television or programming that promotes positive values and fosters socially desired behaviors, the News Six series (WBGU-TV, Bowling Green, Ohio) covers school news, community traditions, local landmarks, people, and events. Children involved with the program research a topic, interview a subject, write a story, and participate in the field and studio production. The present study examined (a) whether there was a relationship between student participation in News Six and student learning about the community, (b) whether the News Six prosocial message was actually received by the sixth graders, and (c) whether student participation in the News Six production played a role in the impact of the program. The research was organized in two phases. Participating in the first phase were 580 sixth grade students from 16 northwest Ohio schools. For the second part of the study the data were obtained from audience surveys of News Six participants and non-participants. Responses of two groups of sixth grade students (N = 81) were analyzed. The results suggest that an interactive model of television, which is partially created by the viewers, can contribute to children's social learning and can successfully bring together family, school, and community. Television should be viewed as a participatory medium and actively involve students, parents, teachers, and communities in the production process. An inquiry into the effects of this local program provided empirical data and insights that may stimulate further research of prosocial TV programming and assist in the development of new programs.*

Keywords: Children, Learning, Prosocial, Television, Local, Newscast, Citizens

### Introduction

A FAIR AMOUNT of scholarly research has investigated various aspects of television, a powerful medium that provides mass entertainment, information, and education. Scholars have explored television's uses and functions in society, its content, audiences, and effects. Over the years, a significant body of mass communication research has emerged from the continuing concern of both the public and the academia over the undesirable outcomes of television viewing. More specifically, scientists have revealed potential antisocial effects of children's exposure to televised representations of violence, resulting in aggressive attitudes and behaviour (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Comstock & Rubinstein, 1972; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003; Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, & Huesmann, 1972; Paik & Comstock, 1994).

While media scholars have demonstrated that television may negatively affect young viewers, there is a relative lack of research interest in the positive social influences of television on children. Although research has shown that television can teach prosocial ways of thinking and behaviour (Greenberg, 1980;

Huston & Wright, 1996; Johnston & Ettema, 1982; Liebert & Sprafkin, 1988; Lovelace & Huston, 1983; Singer & Singer, 1994; Singhal, & Rogers, 2001; Stein, Friedrich & Vondracek, 1972), there is still little empirical evidence (Calvert & Kotler, 2003; Hearold, 1986; Paik, 1995) and the paucity of theorizing (Buckingham, 2004; Harris, 2004; Himmelweit, 1980; Rushton, 1980, 1995; Stein & Friedrich, 1975; Van Evra, 2004) on how to communicate non-violence, adherence to social rules and norms, tolerance, cooperation, and moral values to youth.

For instance, very little is known about the role of television in children's and teens' interest in information and news other than that associated with war, crime, or natural disasters. Past research has focused predominantly on the negative news (see, Hoffner & Haefner, 1993, 1994; Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003; Walma van der Molen, 2004; Walma van der Molen & de Vries, 2003) and such subsequent emotional reactions as fear, anxiety, and depression (Cantor & Nathanson, 1996; Smith & Wilson, 2002; Wilson, Martins, & Marske, 2005). Children's reactions to positive messages in the news have been practically ignored. The prevailing scholarly emphasis on the negative aspects of television results in a one-sided view of the impact of this influential agent of children's socialization. Consequently,



television's role as a medium providing positive viewpoints and communicating constructive and socially valued information to young viewers has been underestimated.

Given the currently dominant one-way approach to the socializing role of television in children's lives, it is important to evaluate the positive effects that television—especially local television programming—may have on youngsters. A closer look at local programming produced by WBGU-TV (PBS), Bowling Green, Ohio and Northwest Ohio Educational Technology Foundation (NWOET) suggests that television may contribute to stimulating children's interest in local communities, events, and people of their area. Even more so, local programming may help increase students' knowledge about the rules and norms valued in their communities and ultimately prepare them to become better citizens. In a local ten-minute weekly series called *News Six* (news for sixth graders), students from northwest Ohio towns and villages tell stories of their school and neighborhood and participate in the production of the newscast. Analyzing student involvement with the program and their learning experiences associated with the newscast may not only help broaden the overall effectiveness of this program, but also contribute to the greater body of scholarly research in the area of prosocial effects of television on children.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study is the result of a two-year project (Dumova, 2001). The purpose of the first phase (Spring 2000) was to identify whether student participation in *News Six* and student learning about the community were related. The second phase (Fall 2000 and Spring 2001) of the project explored the character of the relationship between student participation in *News Six* and the level of perceived student learning about the community, including the analysis of the direction and the strength of the association.

### **Program Format**

Along with other nationally and regionally distributed children's programs such as *Reading Rainbow* and *News Depth* (WVIZ-TV, Cleveland), *News Six* is currently aired as part of a weekly afternoon instructional and enrichment block listed in the WBGU preview guide under "In-School Programming." Area teachers use *News Six* for various learning projects in language arts, social studies, and media studies units. However, the definition of an instructional television program intended to supplement or extend the traditional classroom curriculum cannot be fully

applied to *News Six*; it is rather a prosocial program designed to promote positive values and to further socially desirable attitudes in children.

The current *News Six* program is as follows. All students research a topic, conduct an interview with the subject of their news story, and finally, write the story. The producer of the show decides which two or three stories will be selected for the production. Several additional stories that are not aired are published on the *News Six* website.<sup>1</sup> Besides working on a news story, students videotape footage of their school for the "Our School" segment of the show using a home video camera provided by the TV station. The footage is then edited at WBGU and included in the show. Other elements of the show include a "Kid's View" and a "Pop Quiz," as well as information about the geographical location and the population of the students' local community.

The *News Six* field trip is an important part of the program, when students go on a field shoot with the production crew to videotape material for the feature stories. And finally, each class participates in the studio production at WBGU. In the studio, students get acquainted with the production process in greater detail. They record introductions to the features, stay on the set, get a chance to operate studio cameras, and observe the work of the production crew while the final show is put together and recorded on tape. After the studio production is over, the whole class gets a tour of the facilities of the TV station, which includes production areas and non-linear editing suites.

The show follows a magazine format and covers "soft news" such as community events, school news, interesting people, local traditions, and historical landmarks in nineteen northwest Ohio counties. Whether there is a feature story about a volunteer firefighter, city mayor, glassblowing business or football factory, a sixth-grade boy and his dad who make remote control airplanes or a sixth-grade girl who strives to become an Olympic champion in gymnastics, *News Six* teaches the youth viewpoints and ideals that are valued in the community and society at large.

### **Review of Literature**

A great amount of communication research efforts have contributed to the understanding of issues surrounding television's impact on children. Since the emergence of television, over seven thousand works have been published in this area (Buckingham, 1998). The effects of television on youngsters have been analysed from a variety of perspectives. The latter include uses of television programs and gratifications obtained by children, effects of television's formal

<sup>1</sup> The *News Six* website can be found at <<http://www.nwoet.org/newsix>>

features on children's attention and comprehension of content, the impact of educational programming on cognitive development and school achievement, and children's perceptions of television reality, to name just a few. Most of the analyses of children's learning from television, however, have been directed at preschool and elementary school children and thus focused primarily on learning letters and numbers. Consequently, since the majority of existing educational programs that integrate prosocial content target young children, middle school children's learning of social skills has not received substantial scholarly attention.

Although there is certainly a considerable degree of diversity in the scholarly accounts of children's relationship with the medium, the vast majority of research into the social implications of exposure to televised messages has concentrated on the negative effects of television on children such as violence, aggression, and social stereotypes. With only a few studies focused on social learning from everyday television (see Christenson & Roberts, 1984; Noble, 1984), the positive social learning aspect of the relationship has been largely overlooked. The present investigation viewed prosocial learning as the learning of positive outlooks and standards of behaviour that contribute to children's general socialization.<sup>2</sup>

### **Children and News**

Children usually start watching the news while they are in grade school and their interest in TV news increases as they progress through their school years (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). One survey reported that 65% of children in the 11-12 age group watch the news on television (Children Now, 1994). According to another study, only 7% of 8 to 13 year-olds (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999, p. 46) said that they watched a news program the previous day, while 35% watched an educational program. A recent report indicates that most parents (84%) realize their children may be in the same room as they watch the news, while 61% of parents are concerned about the graphicness of televised representations of violence and crime in the news stories on television (Rideout, 2004, p. 11, 19).

TV news is a starting point for children's political socialization: it motivates interest in national and foreign topics and stimulates further information seeking (Atkin & Gantz, 1978). Interest is considered a critical factor in children's learning from the media (Evard, 1996). Students are interested in the news when they can link local news with the wider society or can identify places that they care about and people they know (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991). Several

analyses of young viewers' exposure to news media have concluded that children remember information from TV news stories better than from print news (Gunter, Furnham, & Griffiths, 2000; Walma van der Molen & van der Voort, 2000a, 2000b). Other research has demonstrated that learning from television news depends on children's understanding of the function of the story, liking the story, and believing the story (Drew & Reeves, 1980).

### **Children's Learning from a TV News Story**

Drew and Reeves (1980) were among the first to address the issue of children's learning from television news. The purpose of their study was to analyse the process by which children learn from a television news story by focusing on the relationship between children's perceptions and learning. Based on the assumption that learning is dependent on interpretation and perception, the article explored the impact of four perceptual variables, namely, liking the program, liking the news story, believing the story, and understanding the function of the story, as well as the impact of age on the ability of children to learn from the television news. The study applied correlational research design using a non-random convenience sampling of 435 students from grades three through seven in Janesville, Wisconsin.

During the first phase, the participants were shown a videotape of a television newscast. The researchers used hierarchical regression analysis to measure the relationship between learning from the news and children's perception of the news. The analysis showed that there was a significant relationship between all four of the perceptual variables (measured at a 3- and 4-point scale) and learning (measured with a 10-item factual quiz where students were given one point for each correct answer). Taken together, the perceptual variables accounted for 37% of the variance in learning from a news story. Specifically, story function was found to be the best predictor of learning while believability accounted for the least amount of variance in the independent variable.

During the second phase, the effect of age on children's learning from the news was examined. Age predicted only two of the perceptual variables, i.e., liking the program and story function. Older children were found more likely to understand the news story function. However, the older students liked the program less than the younger students. Finally, the results of the study by Drew and Reeves (1980) suggested that the more children understood about the information function of television news,

<sup>2</sup> Rosengren (2000) defined socialization as transferring society's ideas and culture to new members of society and from one generation to another.

the more they liked the news and believed the news, and also the more information they retained from the stories.

Another study by Drew and Reeves (1984) similarly tackled the issue of learning from a television news show but focused on different factors. This quasi-experimental research explored the impact of news film on learning by children of different ages and on children's ranking the importance of the stories. Researchers used convenience sampling of 198 fifth, seventh, ninth, and eleventh grade students from a small Wisconsin community who were randomly assigned into groups of 20 to 28 students. In each grade, the groups viewed a 10-11 minute videotaped newscast made of six stories that either contained or did not contain film. A professional newscaster read the no-film newscast. The verbal content of both versions of the newscast was nearly identical.

Learning from the news stories was measured in terms of aided and unaided story recall. Both remembering and story understanding were first measured through content analysis, with an interobserver agreement among coders reaching 98%. Secondly, analysis of variance showed significant differences in children's remembering and understanding the news between the students in the film and no-film condition. Students in film condition remembered more stories both through aided and unaided recall. In addition, students who viewed the newscast with film understood more than those in the no-film condition. The effect of film was found consistent across all ages. An analysis of the means showed that younger students understood fewer stories than older children, but even the young children made distinctions between what they liked and what they thought was important about television news stories. The ranking by liking was almost reverse of the ranking by importance. The researchers concluded that producers of news stories for children need to be aware of the children's audience for news programming and present the material in a manner suitable for a child.

Yet, there is a lack of evidence about the relationship between participation in the production of a local news program and middle childhood audience's learning.

### **Hypothesis and Research Questions**

The present study aimed to investigate whether there was a relationship between student participation in *News Six* and student learning about the community and was organized into two phases. The study hypothesized that participation in the process of creating a prosocial message<sup>3</sup> would reinforce its overall

impact on children. The null hypothesis, on the opposite, stated that the two variables were independent.

More specifically, the research question addressed during the first phase of this study was the following:

RQ1: Is the level of student participation in *News Six* related to the level of perceived learning about the community?

The premise of this study is that television may have positive effects on youngsters. By actively participating in the production of *News Six*, sixth grade students from northwest Ohio may become more interested in their local communities, the people and the history of their area.

The second phase of this study was designed to determine whether the *News Six* message was actually received by the sixth graders and whether the fact that students participated in the production of *News Six* played a role in the cognitive impact of the program. Therefore, the study posed two additional research questions:

RQ2: Are there any differences between participants and non-participants of *News Six* across the following variables: interest in community-related news, attitudes to writing for television and the Web, and student interest in careers as reporters?

RQ3: To what degree does the level of student participation predict student positive experience with the program, interest in community-related news, attitudes to writing for television and the Web, and interest in careers as reporters?

### **Theoretical Framework**

As Harold Lasswell (1948) stated, any process can be examined "in two frames of reference, namely, structure and function" (p. 38). The present study concentrated on the socialization function of communication as it relates to the transmission of social heritage from generation to generation. In order to understand the functional impact of *News Six* messages on the target audience, the study employed a theoretical framework of the social cognitive theory of mass communication as developed by Albert Bandura, Stanford University psychologist, past president of the American Psychological Association, and one of the most cited contemporary psychologists. Mass communication research has been "slow" (Perse, 2001, p. 131) in developing general theories about learning from the media. Filling this gap, the social cognitive theory of mass communication explicates the mechanism of mediated communication and its effects on human thoughts, emotions, and behaviours (Bandura, 2002).

It should be noted that Bandura's conceptualization of social learning is a product of a long, experi-

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed analysis of *News Six* prosocial content, see Dumova, 2004.

mental, and theoretical journey. It is grounded in the constructs developed within the boundaries of his earlier social learning model of aggression (1973a, 1973b, 1978), social learning theory (1977), and social cognitive theory (1986, 2001). In his social learning theory, Bandura (1977) introduced and experimentally proved a heuristic idea of observational learning based on modelling. The social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001), which is an extension of the social learning theory, stresses the importance of the observer's cognitive skills and self-regulatory system, individual behaviour, and the environment in the process of social learning.

Bandura's social learning theory maintains that people can gain new knowledge and skills through vicarious observational experiences. Therefore, a child can learn social skills and behaviours by consciously or unconsciously observing parents, peers, and teachers who serve as role models (Bandura, 1969, 1977). Thus, social learning is focused on the social mechanism through which a personality is shaped (Liebert & Liebert, 1998). The social cognitive theory explains how electronic representations of society and human relationships take part in the construction of everyday reality and consciousness.

The concepts of observational learning and symbolic modelling are central to the social learning theory. They distinguish social learning from both the cognitive approach that underscores thinking and reasoning in learning (Piaget, 1929/1997) and older traditional behavioural theories that emphasize stimulus-response learning (Skinner, 1938, 1974). Observational learning is a process in which children learn behaviour that they observe without actually experiencing it; modelling refers to children's subsequent adoption of observed actions and is seen as the primary mechanism of acquiring new behaviours (Bandura, 1967, 1969, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963).

Modelling can be an effective means of establishing rules and standards of conduct in a social setting (Bandura, 1977). In vicarious observation, children do not directly experience the negative outcomes of playing with fire or electricity but can learn from the observed outcomes of these behaviours (verbal, pictorial, etc.). Similarly, new social skills tend to be acquired by children and adolescents from symbolic representations of positive or negative outcomes of modelled behaviour, which include behavioural portrayals on television.

The idea of vicarious learning of social skills, or vicarious socialization, as Comstock (1982) called it, provides an important operational framework for understanding the mechanism of television's influence on viewers. Another important postulation of the social cognitive theory is that observational learning is a key mechanism in the acquisition of

both prosocial and antisocial behaviour (Gredler, 2001). Over the past several decades, the social cognitive theory of mass communication has served as a basis for a vast array of investigations into media effects, ranging from adverse effects of televised portrayals of violence and sex, cultivation effects, to positive effects of prosocial television message content, and media health communication campaigns.

Based on the above propositions of the social cognitive theory, this study viewed children's social learning as a function of prosocial messages conveyed in *News Six*. The study applied the conceptual framework of the social cognitive theory to the examination of students' perceived learning from participation in *News Six* and the impact of this prosocial television program on children's attitudes.

## Method

### Participants

Participating in the first phase of the study were 580 sixth grade students from 16 schools involved in *News Six* during one academic year, 1999-2000. Most of the schools were from rural areas or small towns in northwest Ohio, with 13 public and 3 private schools participating in the program. The participants included 248 boys and 295 girls of age 11 to 12 years (37 respondents did not specify their gender). The majority of the students (90%) indicated that they had hardly seen stories about their communities on television. In addition, for practically all of the participants, *News Six* was their first exposure to a television news production. All students filled out an evaluation survey after taking part in the program.

For the second phase the data were obtained from the 2000-2001 NWOET audience survey. Two existing groups were selected for this quasi-experimental study. Participants were sixth grade students of Lincolnview Elementary, Lincolnview, OH ( $N = 41$ ) while non-participants were sixth graders in Franklin Elementary, Van Wert, OH ( $N = 40$ ). Both towns have less than 15,000 people of population and are similar in terms of the overall socio-economic situation.

### Procedures

Surveys of 580 sixth grade students from 16 participating member-schools of NWOET were conducted as part of the first phase of the project. Each school received copies of questionnaires by mail at the end of the academic year. Surveys were administered by teachers at schools during classroom time and mailed back to NWOET in pre-paid envelopes. The students were asked to mark all types of activities in which they were involved with *News Six* besides writing a story. The list of activities included several items

such as conducting an interview, recording reporter stand-up and voiceover narration, appearing in story features or on the studio set, designing an opening graphic, asking or answering the Kids' View segment question, operating the teleprompter, observing the director-crew communications, and hosting the show. Students were also asked to indicate whether they had learned anything new about their communities as a result of their participation in the *News Six* program.

During the next broadcast season, NWOET conducted surveys of participating as well as non-participating students by mail at the end of the school year. Both groups received identical sets of questions regarding student interest in community news, writing, and careers in broadcasting.

### Assumptions

The study was based on the assumption that all the students had treated the surveys seriously and completed them to the best of their ability. It also assumed that student self-evaluation is an accurate measure of learning about the community. A *News Six* teacher, a program coordinator, and a television producer each reviewed a draft copy of the questionnaire.

### Data Analysis

In order to establish whether there was a relationship between the level of student participation in *News Six* and student learning about the community, the present study applied a non-parametric research design methodology, namely chi-square analysis. The chi-square test is an inferential procedure used to evaluate the relationship between two categorical variables. In the present study, student participation in *News Six* was treated as a categorical variable and was measured at three levels: not active, active, or very active. Student learning about the community was also considered a categorical variable. It was measured at the following levels: did not learn, learned something new, or learned a lot. The chi-square analysis determined whether the distribution of values in learning about the community depended on which category of student participation was examined.

The results of the chi-square analysis were considered tentative, as they could not provide a basis for comparison with non-participants and were not sufficient to make inferences about the cause and effect relationships. The next step included a *t* test designed to explore whether or not there were differences in how the *News Six* messages were acquired by participants and non-participants (viewers) from the same age group. Finally, a correlation analysis aimed to identify the impact of student participation

in *News Six* on student learning and student attitudes by examining the direction and the strength of associations.

### Data Transformation

Before proceeding with the chi-square analysis, several data transformations were made. Twelve students responded that they were not sure whether they have increased their knowledge about the community by participating in the program. These values were deleted from the data set. In addition, the pre-analysis data screening showed that learning about the community had 16 missing values. These cases were excluded from the subsequent analysis using the pairwise method. The same procedure was used for the 28 missing values of the student participation variable. As a result of the above transformations, the final data set contained 531 records.

After the initial data were processed, the student participation scores were transformed into three categories: not active (scores of 1 and 2), active (from 3 to 5), and very active (6 to 12) participation. An index of student positive experiences with the program was calculated based on the responses to several questionnaire items measured at the 5-point scale, such as "I was glad to work in teams, make new friends and to get to know other sixth graders better" or "My family was proud of my participation in *News Six*." The survey also included a number of statements evaluating student negative experiences, such as "I didn't understand what was happening during the studio production," which were intended to reduce the response bias.

### Results

#### RQ1: Is the Level of Student Participation in News Six Related to the Level of Perceived Learning about the Community?

The cross tabulation presented in Table 1 displays the distribution of values of the categories of student participation in the *News Six* broadcast and student learning about the community. From the row percentages, it can be seen that 57.9% of active *News Six* participants as well as 29% of very active students believed that they had learned a lot about their communities. At the same time, 44.1% of students who were not actively involved in the program did not think they had learned much about the community. Overall, 59.1% of *News Six* students were actively involved in the production of the newscast and 12.5% were very active in the program. Furthermore, 48.4% of all students believed that they had learned something new about their communities and 35.8% said they learned much about their communities by participating in the program.

Results of the chi-square test rejected the null hypothesis that the two variables were independent in the population. Since the value of the obtained chi-square of 14.12 was larger than the critical value of chi-square which is 13.28 at  $p = 0.01$  and  $df = 4$ , the chi-square was significant at the 1% level. The observed frequencies for the categories of student

learning about the community and student participation in *News Six* were too unlikely for the null hypothesis of independence to be accepted. There was a significant relationship between the level of student participation in the program and the level of perceived learning about the community.

**Table 1: Cross tabulation of Student Perceived Learning about the Community and Student Participation in the Program**

Perceived Learning about the Community	Count Row pct	Student Participation			Row total
		Very Active	Active	Not Active	
Learned a Lot	29 15.3%	110 57.9%	51 26.8%	190 35.8%	
Learned Something	30 11.7%	164 63.8%	63 24.5%	257 48.4%	
Didn't Learn	7 8.3%	40 47.6%	37 44.1%	84 15.8%	
Column total	66 12.5%	314 59.1%	151 28.4%	531 100%	

$N = 531$   
Missing values = 0

**RQ2: Are there any Differences between Participants and Non-Participants in their Interest in Community-Related News, Attitudes to Writing for Television and the Web, and Interest in Careers as Reporters?**

A preview of descriptive statistics showed that on average student interest in community-related news, as well as attitude to writing for television and for the Web, was higher among the students in the participating group than among non-participants. The independent samples  $t$  test was conducted during the second stage of the study. A  $t$  test is a statistical measure that allows scientists to assess how likely the observed differences in means are due to an error

or chance. The  $t$  test revealed significant difference for one independent variable (Table 2): participants expressed significantly higher interest in writing news stories about their community for television in the future ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) than non-participants ( $t(79) = -2.29$ ,  $p < .05$ , two-tailed). The  $t$  value for writing for the Web nearly reached significance at the 5% level ( $t(79) = -1.94$ ,  $p = .056$ , two-tailed). Although interest in community news on average was higher among participants than non-participants, the test did not show a significant difference. These outcomes could be related to a relatively short exposure of children to the broadcast news production process as well as to the small size of the student groups analyzed.

**Table 2 : Independent Samples t Test: A Comparison of the Means for Student Interest in Community News, Writing for Television, and Writing for the Web among Participants (N = 41) and Non-Participants (N = 40)**

Groups	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Interest in community news Participants	2.83	1.05	-1.7	.093
Non-participants	2.33	1.56		
Writing for television Participants	3.59	1.75	-2.3	.025*
Non-participants	2.63	2.02		
Writing for the Web Participants	3.54	1.78	-1.9	.056
Non-participants	2.73	1.99		
* $p < .05$ (two-tailed)				

**RQ3: To what Degree does the Level of Student Participation Predict Student Positive Experience with the Program, Interest in Community-Related News, Attitudes to Writing for Television and the Web, and Interest in Careers as Reporters?**

The study hypothesized that participation in the process of creating a television program would reinforce its impact on children. Results of the correlation analysis (Table 3) partially confirmed the hypothesis. The level of student participation in *News Six* was found positively and significantly associated with the student positive experiences with the program ( $r(41) = .37, p < .01$ ). That is, the level of student participation predicted 14% ( $r^2 = .14$ ) of the variation in student positive experiences associated with the program. Other variables did not yield statistically significant coefficients. This can be attributed to the fact that *News Six* provides sixth graders with only a one-time exposure to broadcast news. The results could be different if student participation in the production of this community-oriented newscast was ongoing and spanned over the entire school year. Although based on a quasi-experimental design and limited in overall generalizability, the results of the study demonstrated that student experiences with the program were significantly related to their interest in community news ( $r(41) = .39, p < .01$ ), writing for television ( $r(41) = .31, p < .05$ ), writing for the Web ( $r(41) = .28, p < .05$ ), and pursuing reporters' careers in the future ( $r(41) = .31, p < .05$ ).

**Discussion**

In contrast to the wealth of research studies on television's portrayals of violence and their effects on young viewers, which are measured in hundreds of publications (see, e.g., annotated bibliographies by Kelly, 1999; Murray, 1980), significantly less scholarly attention has been devoted to examining television messages that positively affect children's behaviour. Despite the results of multiple experiments conducted in the 1970s (Collins & Getz, 1976; Friedrich & Stein, 1973, 1975; Liebert, 1972; Liebert & Poulos, 1976; Poulos, Rubinstein & Liebert, 1975; Rubinstein, Liebert, Neale, & Poulos, 1974; Rushton, 1975, 1979; Stein & Friedrich, 1975; Stein, Friedrich, & Vondracek, 1972), and attempts to put them into a theoretical perspective (Hearold, 1986; Johnston & Ettema, 1986; Liebert, Sprafkin, & Davidson, 1982; Rushton, 1980, 1982; Rushton & Sorrentino, 1981), children's prosocial learning from television has not been a subject of a major scholarly investigation.

This study supports Klapper's (1960) view that under certain circumstances, for instance, with children participating in the production of a local television newscast, and within specific topics such as community-oriented context, participation in the process of creating a prosocial message may reinforce its impact on viewers. In addition, the study is congruent with the conclusion of a qualitative analysis of student perceptions by Barnhurst and Wartella (1991) who argued that news appeal to young adults when they can translate them into the contexts of their lives and connect their own lives with the larger public discourse.

**Table 3 : Correlational Study: Correlations between Student Participation in News Six, Positive Experiences, Interest in Community News, Attitude to Writing for Television and for the Web, and Careers as Reporters (N = 41)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. PARTICIPATION</b>	–	.37**	.19	.18	-.15	.11
<b>2. POSITIVE INDEX</b>		–	.39**	.31*	.28*	.31*
<b>3. NEWS INTREST</b>			–	.48**	.48**	.43**
<b>4. TV WRITING</b>				–	.74**	.44**
<b>5. WEB WRITING</b>					–	.37**
<b>6. REPORTERS</b>						–
* $p < .05$ (one-tailed)						
** $p < .01$ (one-tailed)						

The study found that young people tend to internalize the news and prefer “soft news” to “hard news.” Seeing themselves as participants of public life stimulates student interest in the news, political, civic, and public affairs, and creates a foundation for informed citizenry (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991).

Research by Buckingham (2000, 2004) similarly concluded that programs like *Nick News* and *Channel One* in the United States and *First Edition* and *Wise Up* in Britain make the news accessible to young audiences and attempt to perform the important societal mission: to educate and to inform. Although these programs may not be considered traditional news, they appeal to young viewers and enable them to relate their everyday experiences to the world around them. Buckingham (2004) calls for a radically new approach to bringing news to young citizens and to reawakening their interest in civic and political discourse.

The results of the present analysis suggest that an interactive model of television partially created by the viewers, can contribute to young people’s social learning and can bring together family, school, and local community. Television should be viewed as a participatory medium and should actively involve children, parents, teachers, and communities in the production process. The *News Six* example demonstrates how a new model of “teen-produced TV” (Ai-

Leen, 1999, p. 334) can be successfully implemented at the community level. The accessibility of digital video production technologies (Buckingham, 1999) and the elimination of channel scarcity associated with the transition to digital television broadcasting open new possibilities for implementing this television model.

Broadcast television retains the untapped capacity to deliver programming specifically designed to help young viewers become valuable members of their communities. In partnership with families, schools, libraries, and museums, prosocial TV programs can assist in educating youth about social relationships, socially valued behaviour, and positive attitudes. A fine example of a prosocial television program, *News Six* contributes to children’s social learning and creates a foundation for their further growth. Despite the limitations, an inquiry into the effects of this local newscast provides empirical data and insights that may stimulate further research of children’s learning from prosocial television programming and may assist in the development of new programs.

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