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## ABSTRACT

Television plays an important role in the lives of American children today. In addition to providing entertainment for children, television has an impact on children's learning both in school and outside of school. In November 1993, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting acquired data about children's viewpoints about television usage for classroom learning from the 1993 Youth Monitor, a study of 1,200 children ages 6-17 through an in-home interview of randomly selected households in the United States. Results indicate: (1) television and video is used frequently in schools--nearly 40% of all children see television or video at least once per week in school, with even higher usage in rural areas; (2) students who view a lot of television are more likely to report lower grades; (3) the group of students who are most likely to want to go to college are those with the lightest television viewing; (4) television is the number one source for children for news and current events; (5) 72.4% of children cited television as a source of information about new breakfast cereals; (6) public television was mentioned by students as the second most frequently viewed channel in schools, and dominated the list of teachers' most frequently used programs; and (7) whether viewing public television at home or at school, kids have connected public television with education. (SWC)

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# Research Notes

No. 65, November 1993

## How Television Impacts Kids and Learning

### Lessons from the Youth Monitor

Television plays an important role in the lives of American children today.<sup>1</sup> In addition to providing entertainment for children, television has an impact on children's learning both in school and outside of school. Prior surveys of teachers and school administrators have examined how television is used in schools. How do children respond to television in the classroom? What are their perceptions about television usage and learning? To answer these questions CPB acquired data about children's viewpoints from the 1993 Youth Monitor.<sup>2</sup>

#### Television and video in the schools

Students report that television and video is used frequently in their schools. In the Youth Monitor survey 73.3 percent of students indicated some classroom use of television or video. *Nearly forty percent of all children see television or video at least once per week in school.* In rural areas the usage is even higher. Fifty-two percent of students in rural areas reported classroom use of television or video at least once per week.

Students report that video tape is more often used than broadcast channels or cable. The channels viewed most frequently are Channel One (especially in the rural areas) and PBS.

These findings are similar to the findings in the Study of School Uses of Television and Video.<sup>3</sup> Videocassettes are available in nine out of ten schools, and lead the

<sup>1</sup> See Research Note No. 64, "Kids and Television in the Nineties."

<sup>2</sup> The 1993 Youth Monitor is a study of 1,200 children ages 6-17 through an in-home interview of randomly selected households in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Study of School Uses of Television and Video, 1990-1991, commissioned by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This study surveyed 6,000 educators throughout the United States regarding the availability, use, and support of school television.

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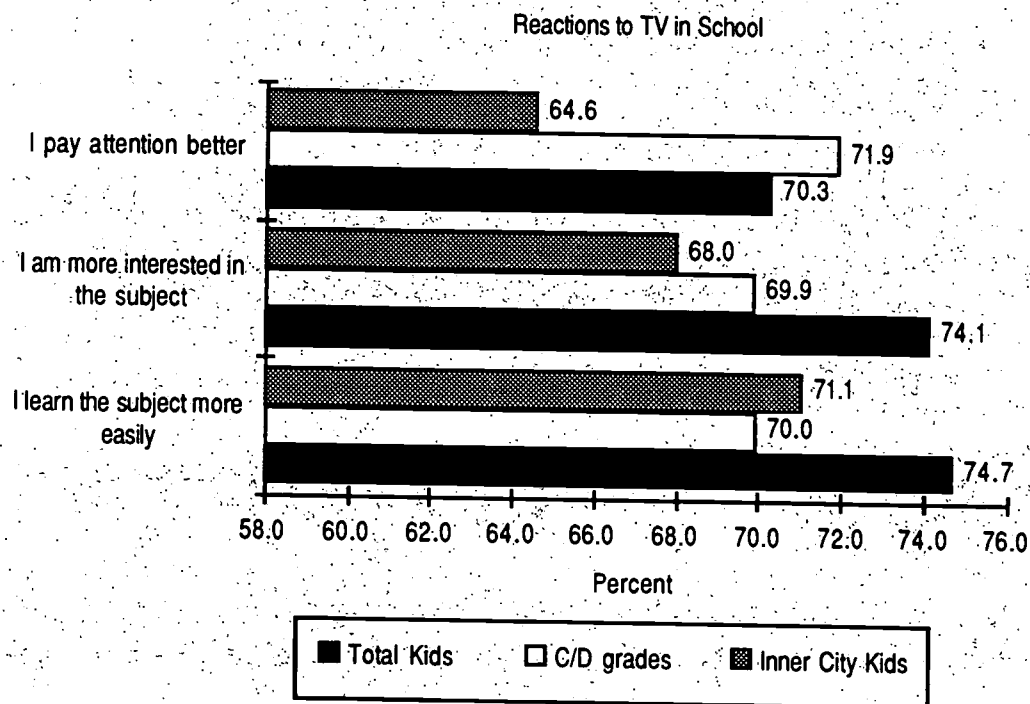
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second most cited source for programs, live broadcast via public television, by almost a third. Also, this study showed that 54 percent of teachers used classroom television or video in the past month. Most teachers believe instructional television and video helps them to teach more effectively and creatively. When asked about observed outcomes attributable to instructional television for their students, 72 percent of all teachers indicated students showed a new interest in topics, and more than half of the teachers said that students learned more. While the School Use of Television Study showed that teachers had favorable attitudes toward the use of TV in schools, the Youth Monitor looked at the students' own perspectives.<sup>4</sup> Students had a positive reaction to the use of television and video. Eighty-seven percent of all kids in the survey responded positively to one or more of these statements:

I learn the subject more easily,  
I am more interested in the subject, and  
I pay attention better.

The least favorable reactions came from the C/D students and inner city students. However, even the C/D students felt that they paid attention better when video or television was used.



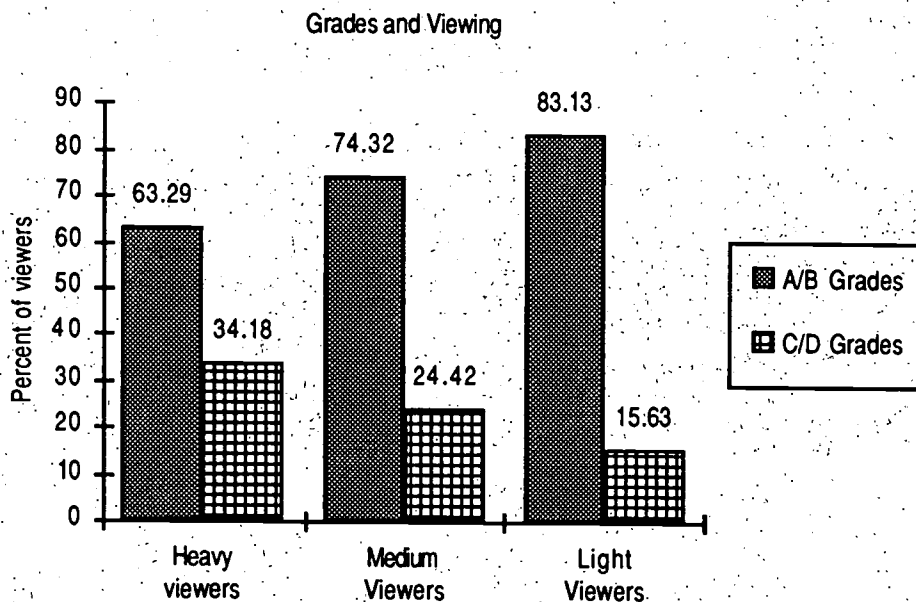
<sup>4</sup>This question was asked only of children ages 9-17.

In general, kids have positive attitudes toward school. Nearly ninety percent of all kids like school. Inner city kids especially report liking school *a lot*. Students with C/D averages are less likely to like school; only 75 percent of them reported positive attitudes.

The study also asked about whether TV in school was "boring" or "a waste of time." Fewer kids responded negatively than positively. Although nearly 25 percent reported being bored, only 14 percent considered classroom TV a waste of time. The most negative students were those with C/D averages: over one-third were bored and 18 percent thought it was a waste of time. Television in the classroom did not appear to engender a more positive attitude toward school in the less academic students. Kids in the rural areas, where a greater amount of school TV was used, were also more likely to report being bored by the classroom television. Thirty percent of them indicated a "bored" reaction. Least likely to be "bored" by classroom TV were the inner city kids who were also least likely to be exposed to classroom TV as often. Quantity viewing of television in the classroom may be worth examining in terms of value.

### Grades and TV viewing

Student's grades have an effect on their attitudes toward school, including the use of video in school. How does their use of television outside of the classroom affect their grades? *Students who view a lot of television are more likely to report lower grades.* While 34 percent of heavy TV viewers have C/D averages, only 16 percent of light TV viewers have C/D averages. In fact, C/D students reported an average of 24.52 hours of TV viewing per week, while the A/B students reported 21.91 hours of TV viewing per week.



As one might expect, kids with C/D averages spend slightly less time doing homework than kids with A/B/ averages. Kids with lower grade averages and kids

who are heavy TV viewers are also more likely to say that their teachers give too much homework.

### College aspirations

How do kids think about their future educational opportunities? Viewing TV in school seems to have little effect on whether they want to go to college or think they will get in. Factors that seem to influence college aspirations the most are grades and whether or not their parents went to college. C/D students have less interest in college and are least likely to think they could get into college. Kids with college educated parents are more likely to want to attend college. Family income is also a factor. Interest in college increases as income increases. While viewing TV in school does not seem to affect interest in college, the amount of viewing at home does correlate to college interest. *The group of students who are most likely to want to go to college are those with the lightest TV viewing.*

### Information beyond the classroom

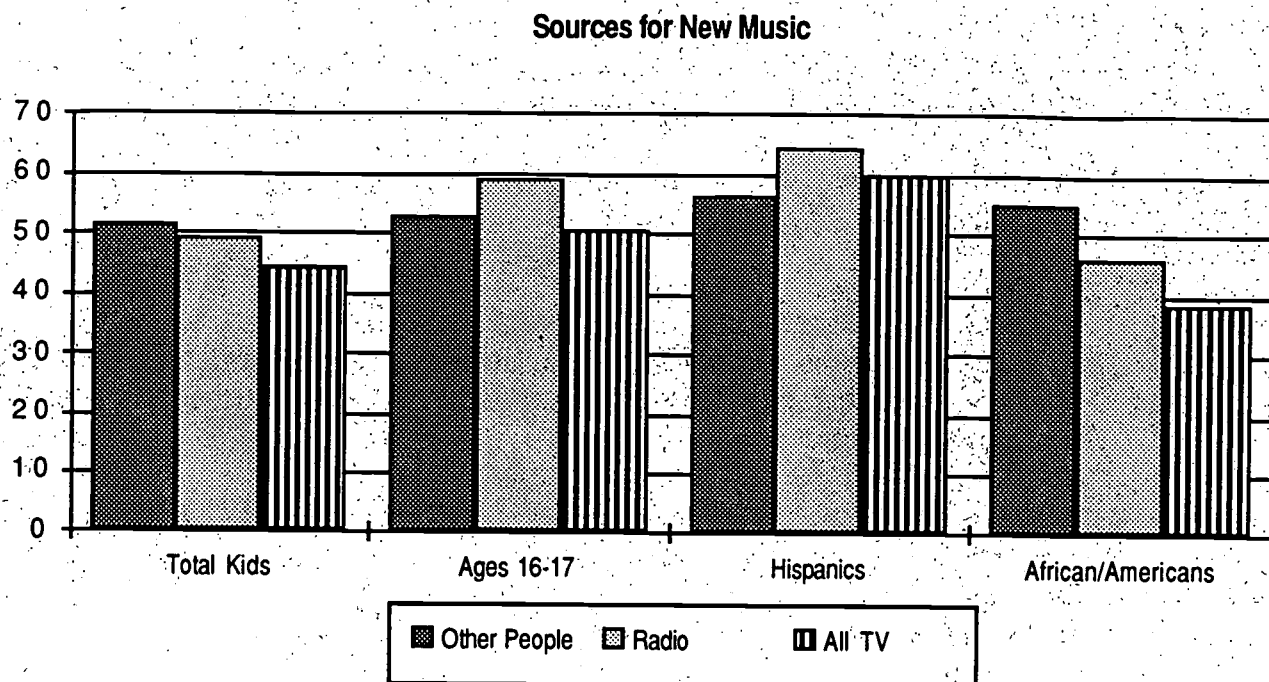
Television is the number one source for children for news and current events.<sup>5</sup> Nearly 75 percent of kids report using television for this information. The second most used source is school, but it trails behind TV with only 30.5 percent using this source. Television is especially noted as a news source for older kids, A/B students, kids from blue collar families, PBS viewers, kids who watch TV in school and the lowest household income group. Heavy TV viewers are slightly less likely to report TV as a source of news. The lightest viewers, however, are far more likely to use print media than any other group of kids for news sources.

Television is also an important source for information about new clothing styles and new songs or bands. Although other people are cited as the number-one source for new music overall, radio is number one with the oldest kids, and television sources are not far behind. Hispanics especially report a high use of radio for new music information.

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<sup>5</sup>This question was asked only of children ages 9-17.





While the source for new clothing styles most often cited is other people, particularly the peer group, nearly 50 percent of kids report television as a source to find out about new styles.

Finally, what about those commercials aimed at children? Even though the survey asked only 9-17 year-olds, an astounding 72.4 percent cited television as a source of information about new breakfast cereals. Among inner city kids, 81.5 percent cited television as a source to find out about cereal. Younger viewers were especially influenced by television commercials. While PBS stations are not selling cereal in the kids' block of programming, the PBS viewers were clearly seeing this elsewhere on their TV sets: 75 percent noted TV as a source of cereal information!

### Public television and educational image

Public television was mentioned by students as the second most frequently viewed channel in schools. Programming broadcast by public television dominated the list of teachers' most frequently used programs, according to the Study of School Uses of Television and Video. It is not surprising then that public television has a strong educational image. A number of surveys that CPB has commissioned show that public television is thought of as "educational";<sup>6</sup> in fact, many public TV stations are called "educational" television stations in their local markets instead of "public" television stations. More than half of the children surveyed in the Youth Monitor

<sup>6</sup>Annual Roper Organization surveys indicate that "educational" is the adjective used most often to describe public television. Additional focus group research indicates that people think of the channel as providing educational programming.

think of public TV as "a lot like school." In comparison less than ten percent of the kids found Fox or Nickelodeon to be "a lot like school."

*Whether viewing public television at home or at school, kids have connected public television and education.* Public television serves children with programming that meets the educational goals of public broadcasting. While public television can do more to reach children, both in and out of the classroom, public television's impact on youth is firmly rooted in the educational arena.

If you have questions about these data, please refer them to Janice Jones at (202) 879-9677. We also welcome any comments and recommendations about how to make the data more useful to you.



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