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## **A Children's Observatory of Television: «Observar TV», a Space for Dialogue between Children**

**Observatorio infantil de Televisión: «Observar TV»: Un espacio para la interlocución de niñas y niños**

### **Abstract**

This paper presents the results of work on «Observar TV», a children's observatory of television launched in the city of Barranquilla (Colombia) in which children participated as protagonists in research, training and spaces for dialogue centred on their observations of television broadcasts. The goals of the project included: 1) to ascertain the reflection and discussion of preferences and opinions (expressed by boys and girls) regarding television; 2) to identify and discuss their imagery around citizenship in relation to coexistence and peace, multiculturalism and democratic responsibility and participation; 3) to understand the development processes that contribute to the construction of their critical thinking abilities regarding television and its consumption; and 4) to increase the visibility of children as active participants in setting the public agenda of their city. This study was developed using a participatory action research approach that employed qualitative methods, including focus groups, workshops, and observations for the simultaneous execution of three components: research, training, and visibility/interaction. The results demonstrate that the child participants displayed a critical attitude toward television and expressed their likes and dislikes regarding television content. The participants took up the challenge to discuss, transform, or reaffirm their imagery relating to citizenship and strengthened their capacities in language and communication. The children expressed the opinions and reflections that came up in the work of the observatory by participating in the television program «Aprender a ver TV» (Learning to watch television), that was produced by the regional station Telecaribe.

### **Resumen**

Este artículo presenta los resultados de «Observar TV», un observatorio infantil de televisión puesto en marcha en la ciudad de Barranquilla (Colombia) en el que los niños y niñas participantes actuaron como protagonistas de los procesos de investigación, formación e interlocución llevados a cabo. El proyecto apuntó a: 1) la reflexión y discusión de las preferencias y opiniones que niños presentaron en relación con la televisión; 2) la identificación e interpelación de sus imaginarios de ciudadanía alrededor de la convivencia y paz, la interculturalidad y la participación-responsabilidad democrática; 3) el desarrollo de procesos de formación que contribuyeran a cualificar su capacidad crítica en torno a la televisión y su consumo; y 4) la visibilización de los niños como interlocutores en la agenda pública de su ciudad. El proceso se desarrolló desde la investigación-acción participativa utilizando técnicas cualitativas, entre ellas grupos focales, talleres y observación, para la ejecución de tres componentes simultáneos: investigación, formación y visibilización/interacción. Los resultados permitieron constatar que los chicos se presentaron críticos hacia la televisión, dando a conocer sus gustos y disgustos en relación con los contenidos. También que ellos y ellas asumieron el reto de discutir, transformar o reafirmar sus imaginarios de ciudadanía, y fortalecieron su capacidad expresiva al vincular las opiniones y reflexiones surgidas en el observatorio dentro del programa «Aprender a ver TV», del canal regional Telecaribe.

### **Keywords / Palabras clave**

Children, television, media literacy, interactivity, critical capacity, imagery of citizenship, school. Niños, televisión, educación en medios, interactividad, capacidad crítica, imaginarios de ciudadanía, escuela.

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## 1. Introduction

For many years, research exploring the relationship between television and children has considered the noxious effects of television in terms of passive, easily influenced audiences, which has been supported by a number of studies (Rodríguez, 2005).

However, some researchers have investigated the active and critical capacity of children, viewing them as citizens capable of interpreting and redefining the messages of the media (Ferrés, 1994; López de la Roche & al., 1998; Aguaded, 1999; 2005). Charles and Orozco (1990) maintain that the child viewer is made, not born, which is why it is necessary to generate a critical, reflective and creative attitude in the child that sustains their dynamic role of participating in communication processes through active intervention.

A third approach, which appears to coincide with the research focusing on the critical capacities of children, considers audiences as active citizens and prioritizes efforts to strengthen the visibility of this critical capability in order to generate actions in the public sphere (Alfaro and Quezada, 2006).

However, as argued by Rincón (2008), few investigations of audiences affect the production of media and therefore do not go beyond the identification of the audience/consumer to move towards their transformation to audience/producers.

With respect to the relationships between children, television and citizenship, the results of some studies demonstrate that children tend to use a moralistic discourse, often directly adopted from the family or school environments, when contemplating the notion of being a citizen or evaluating the value of television content as being either good or bad (Vega & Castro, 2006).

Taking this into account, it is argued that space must be provided for the expression, questioning and dialogue of children's imagery around citizenship and that the institutions that influence these values and concepts must be included in the process. In this regard, the design of «Observar TV» was proposed as a children's observatory of television in the city of Barranquilla, Colombia, in which children act as protagonists of research and training processes. This is in direct contrast to observatories of children's television in which adults discuss and criticize the programming and content of television made for children.

The objectives of the «Observar TV» project were: 1) to identify the preferences and opinions of children in relation to television programming; 2) to ascertain the imagery identified by children that they have of citizenship regarding areas such as coexistence and peace, multiculturalism and democratic responsibility and participation; 3) to develop activities for the questioning of this imagery around the concept of citizenship; 4) to develop training processes that develop children's critical abilities with regard to television and its consumption; and 5) to create spaces and networks that foster dialogue and meaningful interaction among children regarding television content and to raise awareness of children as active citizens in the public agenda of their city.

### 1.1. Questioning of imagery around citizenship

A review of the literature reveals few studies involving children's imagery of citizenship and even fewer that prioritize research on how children develop these concepts or emphasise the child population in this area. The few studies identified suggest that these concepts play a key role in defining coexistence and citizenship. For children, the collective images that they construct of what it means to be a citizen constitute a reference for their individual actions. These studies emphasize the role that television and other media play in the configuration of imagery around citizenship (Vega & García, 2008).

This interpretation is based on the concept(s) of imagery developed by Pintos (2000), who describes these imagery as 'socially constructed schemas that allow us to perceive something as real, explain it and to actively intervene in what each social system considers as reality'. It is also based on discussions regarding the meaning of citizenship presented by Pineda (1999), who con-

siders the roles of individuals and communities versus the roles of power, the State, and development. Based on the classical formulation introduced by Hobbes, the citizen is identified as a subject or beneficiary who uncritically assumes the determinations of the State and the government on understanding that he or she, by yielding to governmental power without question, will receive the benefits of being a citizen of the State. From the liberal point of view, the main proponent of which is John Locke, citizenship is recognized as the participation of citizens on equal terms under the law, which grants them rights and responsibilities; the citizen participates in governmental decisions, while the rulers are subject to the control, judgment, and approval of the citizens. The empowerment approach, classically defended by Rousseau, criticizes the alleged equality of citizens before the law and the conditions of their participation. Therefore this approach argues that individuals must be turned into subjects of power (Mouffe, 1999).

Regarding the questioning of imagery, Buenfil (Vega & Mendivil, 2012: 447) argues that in the practice of questioning, the agent becomes an active subject, capable of incorporating new evaluative, behavioural or conceptual elements to radically transform their daily practice or make a more fundamental reassertion. In specific work carried out with young people, these authors defined the questioning of their imagery as 'the discussion of the assumptions, in the formulation of the question or statement that gives visibility to that hidden behind what is conceived as the truth'. As such, they promoted the questioning of this imagery and their implications through collective dialogical processes.

In «Observar TV», imagery regarding citizenship were considered in relation to the following citizenship competencies defined by the Ministry of National Education of Colombia (2004): coexistence and peace, interculturality, and democratic participation and responsibility. Competencies in coexistence and peace proposed the need to assess citizenship in terms of coexistence with and acceptance of the differences of others, exercising freedom of choice and assuming individual and collective responsibilities. The intercultural competencies were based on understanding pluralistic societies in which differences are celebrated positively as an element in the affirmation of identities (Mouffe, 1999). The competencies required for democratic participation and responsibility were related to the model for the construction of citizenship, which is based on empowerment derived from the creation and strengthening of scenarios for debate and discussion.

## 1.2. Media education for children

Discussions surrounding media literacy date back to the 1960s, from which time there has been a strong protectionist element, linked to the need to counter undesirable attitudes or behaviors promoted by mass media, comparing its lack of cultural values with those promoted by art or classical literature. The media was believed to exert negative influences on children and young people, who were vulnerable to being manipulated. Teachers who were considered to be safe from the unhealthy influence of the media and were aware of its intentions were thus called upon to provide tools that protected and liberated their students.

More recent perspectives have warned about the limitations of such protectionist concepts and have chosen to see the different types of media as complex cultural entities that are relevant for audiences that possess autonomy, critical thinking, capacity to make decisions and engage in participation (Buckingham, 2005). This perspective views media education as a process implies the critical comprehension of texts in the wider social context and the factors involved in the production of content.

Buckingham also notes that criticism should not be limited to discovering deficiencies in the media, as this line of reasoning would degenerate into an exercise of mechanically repeating the politically correct opinions of those possessing the knowledge of ideological and economic mechanisms. In other words, criticism should not be considered as «cultural capital» (Bourdieu, 1984), which differentiates between people considered capable of revealing the bad intentions of the media (teachers, parents, adults, gifted students) and those deemed to be incapable of realizing the detrimental effects of the media (regular students). Instead, it is argued that critical training should start from the presumption that children are aware of the role that the media plays in their daily existence.

Therefore, as experienced users of media and technologies, children possess the experience, knowledge, and enjoyment necessary for the comprehension, critical assessment and creative

production through their participation in educational models in which the various forms of media are understood as spaces of cultural expression.

### 1.3 Children as audiences and interactivity

Since the beginning of this century, when children and young people were identified as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), several assumptions have been made concerning children and young people's use of media and the relationships they form with these technologies. These include a greater willingness to use and interact and be active within the participation options provided by the media and technology.

However, some authors have warned against such widespread optimism and advise that it is worth considering that complete access to technology is far from desirable to all sectors of society. Even more importantly, these authors insist that participating as an active and proactive audience within the digital culture is still not a generalized situation. There are different explanations for this idea, including that 1) time is required for a such a cultural change to occur; 2) audiences are used to being timid and do not express opinions as a consequence of the privileged vertical position that the mass media has held for many decades; and 3) that the educational system has focussed more on developing reading competencies than writing skills, a practice that can translate into the supremacy of training for reception over training in the capacity for self-expression (Orozco & al., 2012).

Koolstra & Bos (2009) note that research on interactivity, which has been popular since the 1980s, has been characterized by the identification of interactive properties in the media and communication processes as well as the study of perceptions of audiences and producers in relation to interactivity. This has placed emphasis on a technological perspective that focuses on the analysis of interactive communication processes and their implications. In the area of research with children and young people, interactivity has been mainly viewed as a component of communication that supports the achievement of specific goals (Masterman & Rogers, 2002; Chang & al., 2010; Dezuanni & Monroy-Hernández, 2012), or as a particular category within the generic consumption of media. This focus has observed the children and young people's development in carrying out concrete actions: sending emails, voting online, exchanging information and ideas, creating content, etc. (Livingstone & al., 2005; Aikat, 2005).

In this sense, considering the possibilities of interactivity implies differentiating the widened, dispersed and pre-recorded consumption promoted by today's media and digital technologies (i.e., the ability to download materials at will and the resulting freedom of choice regarding when, how, and where to watch content and react, chat, play, etc.) from the productive, innovative, and transcendent processes through which recipients can actually place themselves as broadcasters/producers of content, representing a distinct form of dialogue based on reflection and discussion (Orozco & al., 2012).

This latter context accommodates the concept of human agency introduced by Guiddens and cited by Muñoz and Muñoz (2008), which states that all individuals have the potential to self-manage their own existence, contributing to their socialization and finding of meaning in the living world through their own individual creativity and cultural production. Thus, human agency is a fundamental axis in the configuration of the cultural citizenship of different groups, including children and young people, whose presence results in being highly significant within cultural entities such as the mass media.

## 2. Material and methods

«Observar TV»<sup>i</sup> was developed in 2008 in five public and private schools from upper, middle and lower socioeconomic levels in the city of Barranquilla and involved the participation of 80 fourth and fifth grade children of both gender<sup>ii</sup> aged between 7 and 11 years as well as 5 teachers, one from each school. Through participatory action research approach that employed qualitative techniques, three simultaneous components were implemented: research, training, and socialization. The research component first involved collecting, through focus groups, children's opinions on television, specifically regarding quality and their preferences for consumption. To identify the children's imagery concerning citizenship in the areas coexistence and peace, interculturality and democratic participation and responsibility, a baseline was established at the beginning of the



process with a final evaluation carried out eight months later. The evaluation process was carried out using a memory reconstruction exercise known as 'patchwork quilt'. This technique involves participants drawing pictures in response to an inquiry about a particular life situation or an image based on that experience. According to Riaño (2000), this process allows researchers to go beyond simple opinions because it enables specific situations to be constructed and interpreted by individuals as well as collectively by the group.

The training component was developed via analysis of the research around the opinions and preferences regarding television consumption and the imagery around citizenship through the use of workshops on media education (critical reading, regulations, scripts, production, and postproduction). These sessions supported participants to develop skills in the reflection, discussion, and questioning of imagery concerning citizenship, violence, conflict, power and authority, gender, the stereotypes of different population groups and sexual orientation. The development of these processes allowed the children to consolidate positions from which they can interact with their media based on their own perspective as child citizens. Children had the opportunity to create scripts for their own audiovisual stories related to each group of competencies.

The socialization and interaction component permitted the dissemination of the outcomes of the processes, making children valid spokespeople in the public agenda of the city. Their opinions were included in 'Aprender a ver TV' (Learning to Watch TV), a program that creates a space for the expression of audience opinions for the Telecaribe regional television channel<sup>iii</sup>. Five videos were created in which children shared the reflections and discussions that were expressed by participants in the observatory<sup>iv</sup>.

### **3. Results**

The main results are summarized below. First, the opinions and preferences that children formed regarding their consumption of television are discussed. Subsequently, the initial imagery expressed by the children are described, as well as the questioning of this imagery relating to citizenship competencies in the areas of coexistence and peace, interculturality, and democratic participation and responsibility.

#### **3.1. Opinions and preferences**

In regards to the opinions and preferences expressed by the students who participated in the study, both boys and girls demanded quality television characterized by the following elements: a) inclusive programming in which multiple formats for the child audience are explored, given that the children perceived a lack of quality programming in this area and also that they were saturated with imported cartoons and series); b) proper construction of characters, as the children stated that they became bored with characters who remain good or bad throughout the storyline and preferred characters more closely related to themselves with daily problems and capable of making mistakes); c) a combination of content and style in which education is combined with entertainment as the children felt many programs containing educational content were boring; and d) an adaptation of schedules given that the children felt that current programming did not consider their school, leisure, and extra-curricular activities and schedules as relevant programs were broadcasted at times when they were not available to watch television).

Regarding regulations around their television-watching, the children stated that their parents forbade them to watch programs that were considered violent<sup>v</sup>. However, regarding some of these restrictions the children stated that they would like their parents to view these programs with them and explain the reasons why the parents feel that these programs are not appropriate. This desire stemmed from the children's beliefs that they were being prohibited from watching something without the parents actually knowing the content of the program. The children also expressed their desire to engage in more dialogue when they watch television and to negotiate who has possession of the remote control in family spaces.

The children indicated that their parents generated feelings of guilt associated with television viewing because their parents often associated television viewing with detrimental effects on the children's academic performance, thus presenting education and entertainment as two antagonistic components.

### 3.2. Imagery of citizenship in relation to television

Regarding the imagery that the children have around citizenship, the term 'Before' refers to the baseline at the beginning of participation in the Observatory and the term 'Redefinition' refers to information obtained after the processes of questioning imagery and media education.

#### 3.2.1. Imagery regarding coexistence and peace

In 'Before', boys and girls defined violent people according to character stereotypes propagated on television or news programs, including: 'burglars'; 'street kids'; 'guerrillas' and 'paramilitaries'<sup>vi</sup>. They associated violent spaces with images of danger seen on television, such as dark, lonely, and/or bad-smelling places inhabited by poor people where fights, robberies, murders and violence occur. The children also linked violence with the presence of weapons or physical aggression, classifying certain programs as violent, which they said they did not watch, following the regulations decreed by their teachers or guardians. In addition, the children considered conflict to be a negative situation that implies fights and violent acts. They stated that conflict could be resolved by eliminating contrary positions through agreements reached through the intervention of recognized authorities such as police or politicians.

Before	Redefinition of imagery
- Associating violence with characters considered bad in terms of the media's good versus bad stereotypes.	- Critical view of characters represented as stereotypically good or bad. - Non-stereotyped construction of these characters through their own stories.
- Associating violence with weapons and physical aggression. - Associating violent spaces with stereotypically dangerous places (dark, lonely, bad-smelling, and inhabited by poor people) where fights, robberies and murders occur. - Labeling programs as «violent» based on depictions of physical assaults, consumption of drugs or use of weapons.	- Recognition of different types of violence, such as verbal abuse instead of only defining it as physical violence exclusively related to armed conflict. - Recognition that violence occurs in many forms in non-stereotypical areas, such as in the home, at school, at work, etc.
- Associating conflict with negative situations (fights and violent acts) resulting from contrary positions.	- Assessment of conflict as something that is a part of having different opinions and that it is neither positive nor negative in itself. - Assessment of the presence of conflict in television programs in terms of what can be learned from them regarding negotiation and analysis of real-life situations.
- Resolving conflicts by agreements resulting from the interventions of public authorities such as police or politicians.	- Acceptance that conflict does not necessarily lead to agreement and that contrary positions may persist.

Table 1. Imagery Regarding Coexistence and Peace.

The activities carried out for the redefinition of this imagery revealed that the children involved in this study were critical of the news services for prioritizing violence in connection with armed conflicts. However, these same children did not refer to other types of violence (such as verbal abuse) that exist in different contexts of everyday life. The children also began to assess conflicts as expressions of contrary positions that do not necessarily require resolution through agreements. In addition, these children valued the depiction of conflicts between television characters as an opportunity to learn about negotiation and/or amicable resolutions in which the dissenters agree to disagree.

#### 3.2.2. Imagery pertaining to interculturality

In the 'Before' phase, the children mentioned that television often presents «cachacos» as hard working and intelligent, while «costeños» are presented as happy, irresponsible and «corronchas»<sup>vii</sup>. Colombia is also portrayed as a dangerous country that exports drugs and is inferior to countries such as the United States.

Regarding gender, the children felt that female television characters were portrayed as weak, vain, and generally working as housewives, while male characters were often working men who occu-

ped high powered jobs positions. Regarding sexual orientations, the children felt that television depicts gay people ridiculously, always in occupations relating to beauty (i.e., stylists or managers of beauty queens), and that lesbians are more often represented as ‘butches’ that act more like men than women.

Before	Redefinition of imagery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the context of national television, associating people from the centre of the country with mostly positive stereotypes and those from the regions with negative stereotypes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening of arguments regarding the unfair and stereotypical representation of characters on television, particularly that the people living in the interior of the country are not necessarily intelligent workers and that those from the coast are not all irresponsible and illiterate.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internationally, Colombia is associated with negative stereotypes (depicted as a dangerous country and an exporter of drugs), while the United States is associated with positive stereotypes (as a country of superior value).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reinforcement of criticism regarding Hollywood and Colombian movie stereotypes with respect to the international reputations of the United States and Colombia.</li> <li>- Affirmation of a desire for national programming/stories that are closer to the children's own context rather than those predominantly related to U.S. society.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying women as weak, vain and often as domestic housewives and identifying men as workers who occupy important roles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disagreement with the portrayal of women on television as superficial, interested, submissive and obedient.</li> <li>- Manifestation of the children's preference for soap operas in which the stereotypical roles of women are redefined, such as in 'Ugly Betty'.</li> <li>- Questioning of why men are not represented as weak or unemployed as is evident in everyday life.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying television stereotypes of gay people as ridiculous or effeminate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Redefinition of the homosexual men as men who like other men, criticising television programs in which gay men are ridiculed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Associating lesbians with the 'butch' stereotype, that they display gruff and manly behaviour and desire other women.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There were no references to the redefinition of lesbians.</li> </ul>

Table 2. Imagery Regarding Interculturality.

The redefinition of imagery pertaining to multiculturalism revealed well-founded critical positions expressed by the children. For example, they noted that the racial differences presented on television increase the division between white and black people and that gender and sexual orientation are strongly stereotyped by television characters that are not necessarily representative of these identities.

Some scripts proposed by boys and girls demonstrated an interest in stories in which the characters are far removed from existing stereotypes and fight to be recognized based on their real-life differences. For instance, some girls proposed having overweight television presenters.

### 3.2.3. Imagery regarding democratic participation and responsibility

During the «Before» phase, children associated good citizens with characters that have strong moral values such as solidarity, respect, obedience, responsibility, kindness, tolerance and environmental sensitivity. In contrast, the children associated bad citizens with characters who appeared to antagonize good citizens by being rude, rebellious, aggressive, violent, irresponsible, and/or greedy. Citizen participation was conceived as the ability to vote in an electoral process or attend protest marches.

Before	Redefinition of imagery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Associating good citizens with obedient characters who have high moral values and bad citizens with behaviours that are antagonistic to good citizens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Valuing good citizens based on qualities such as empowerment, criticism, intelligence, questioning, and the ability to argue.</li> <li>- Valuing the existence of 'real' characters, meaning people who make mistakes, reflect or are vulnerable, rather than characters</li> </ul>

	who are either extremely 'good' or 'bad'.
- Believing that those responsible for resolving problems are the people in positions of authority and power (police, government officials, bosses, etc.).	- Believing that all citizens can participate in solving their own problems.
- Associating citizen participation with the electoral processes (voting) and attendance at protest marches organized through the mass media.	- Considering citizens as agents that can take action based on their own convictions.

Table 3. Imagery Regarding Democratic Participation and Responsibility.

Regarding the redefinition of imagery, it was observed that the children began to value other attributes of citizenship, such as empowerment, criticism, and the ability to argue after participating in the Observatory processes. They also began to question those characters that represent authority. Although some programs often show policemen as heroes, policemen can also behave badly toward citizens. Children began to consider the concept that policemen may take action according to their personal interests and convictions instead of working for the good of society on the whole.

#### 4. Discussion

The results of the «Observar TV» project demonstrate that boys and girls are critical of television programming and are willing to express their likes, dislikes, opinions, and preferences in this regard. However, the mediation provided by families and schools for children's television viewing are either absent, limited, or counterproductive because they rely on prohibitions, threats, and punishments. Regarding such restrictive mediation of their television viewing habits, these children say they would like to watch television with their parents (accompanied mediation) and engage in dialogue with their parents regarding the content that they can or can't watch (active mediation) (Potter, 1998).

The research constituted a particularly relevant process in that it supported children to develop an awareness of their own imagery regarding coexistence and peace, interculturality, and democratic participation and responsibility. Additionally, the questioning process amongst themselves generated reflection through which they substantiated or transformed their opinions. Along with knowledge of their preferences in relation to watching television, this created raw material for their interactions as producers and protagonists of content broadcast on the Telecaribe regional television channel.

Among the opinions defended in the videos produced in the «Aprender a Ver TV» programs, children expressed their likes and dislikes in relation to television, what should constitute quality television programming and the need to value conflict as an important part of peaceful coexistence and rejecting negotiated agreements as the only resolution available (Mouffe, 1999). They were also critical of the media's stereotypical representations regarding representations of urban and regional populations, the differences between men and women and characters with non-traditional sexual orientations. In addition, these children recognized criticism and argumentation as essential characteristics of citizen participation, suggesting a new understanding of citizenship coinciding with an empowerment-based perspective (Pineda, 1999).

Thus the boys and girls who participated in the «Observar TV» project appear well equipped to meet the challenge of interacting with television demonstrating their critical capacity as active audiences and their capacity for self-expression as content producers in contexts that enable a horizontal dialogue (Orozco & al. 2012). These children particularly value the spaces and processes that provide them with possibilities for reflection and the tools required for their development as interactive audiences. The fact that these children made their opinions public through participating in a television program implies that they can meet the challenge of being coherent (at least among themselves, their peers, their parents, and their teachers) in regards to the relationship they establish with television in their everyday lives, in which their criticism is expressed through



the television programs that they choose to watch. This equates to interactivity processes that affect the social fabric which go beyond how the individual interacts with technology.

The project had limitations related to its small sample size, which is why it is recommended that it be extended to other populations for comparative analyses. It is important to note that although a similar initiative was developed in the city of Montería (Colombia), it was not possible to establish comparisons in all of the categories. Another limitation of the present study is that it is not possible to obtain a complete comparison of the responses of other population groups (television producers, parents, and adults, in general) to the opinions expressed by the children who participated in «Observar TV» through their videos. As proposed by Ferber and others (2007), having a third party respond to messages publicly expressed by the interaction of two other parties guarantees interactivity. To improve the strategy of the present study, it is proposed that children can be engaged on a more profound level in the production of videos so that they can authentically integrate their own aesthetics and meanings. It is therefore proposed that this initiative be continued through the consolidation of commitments and alliances that place an emphasis on dialogue and debates between citizens that use children's opinions about television as a starting point.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> This observatory was not developed as a centralized organic structure; it was developed as a participatory research exercise designed to validate a methodology for the Children's Observatory of Television.

<sup>2</sup> The methodology of the present study precludes generalizations. References to 'children' refer to common outcomes for the entire set of boys and girls participating in the project, regardless of gender, education, socioeconomic status, and type of educational institution.

<sup>3</sup> Telecaribe was the first regional television channel in Colombia and Telecaribe has experience in implementing educational programs. One of its children's productions called 'El libro de Sofia' (Sofia's Book) won the India Catalina award for the best children's program in Colombia in 2007. As such, it became a priority to form an alliance with this channel for the «Observar TV» project.

<sup>4</sup> Access to the videos is available via <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-yypSII00unQd-ALOY8GAPw>.

<sup>5</sup> Among others, 'The Simpsons', 'Power Rangers', and 'Dragon Ball Z'.

<sup>6</sup> Definitions of terms are as follows: ratones = thieves; gamines = street children; guerrillas and paramilitaries = two of the armed forces in the Colombian conflict.

<sup>7</sup> The expressions used refer to the following: cachacos = inhabitants of the interior of the country, especially those living in the capital city of Bogotá; costeños = inhabitants of the Caribbean coast; and corronchos = people whose behavior is extroverted and happy.

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