

It's all a question of form: Exploring how professional ideas and practices shape the language and visuals of the children's news programme.

Julian Matthews

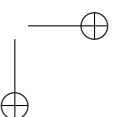
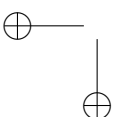
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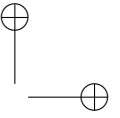
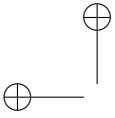
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THIS paper reports on a production based study into one of the longest running children's news programmes – BBC1's *Newsround* (UK). It deliberately focuses on the programme's construction of children's news stories as a way of both exploring and explaining how the 'professional visualisation' (Cottle 1993) of this children's news form shapes the nature of its output. These insights are important not only because they address the under-researched form of children's news but also because they provide a deeper understanding of how differentiated news forms condition and constrain the language of television news in different ways – a finding that has theoretical relevance for our understanding of how news production shapes and conditions democratic representation and processes of citizenship. A central concern here is the professionals' understanding of the news form.

News as “form”

Although a prominent concern within this paper, the differentiated nature of news programmes has been generally overlooked within news production scholarship. For instance, the emerging theoretical focus within the substantive production studies and later within political economic studies of news has discussed the general influences that shape the news programme as a homogeneous form. These describe how the production routines (Tuchman 1978; Fishman 1980; Schlesinger 1978) and the economic dynamics of production (Golding and Murdock 1991; McManus 1994) of high profile news organisations condition their relatively standardised outputs. The theoretical focus of this work offers then no explanation for the vast array of different news forms in the larger ecology of news. Recognising this absence within journa-

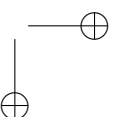
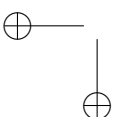


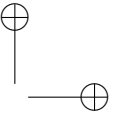
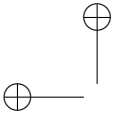


lism scholarship and the general importance of the news form, Cottle argues simply that:

The internally differentiated nature of news journalism(s) across the field of news demands to be taken seriously and explored empirically in different production domains, and with respect to differing journalist practices. How differentiated news forms are professionally reproduced and inscribed into the selections and inflections of news are important matters; they have not only had a bearing on the ecology of news but also on representations [...] (Cottle 2000: 33).

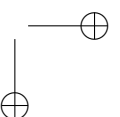
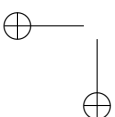
Above, it is reasoned that academic discussions of news production should now consider the importance of the differentiated nature of news programmes. As the comments explain, this approach recognises the diverse news ecology as well as brings into view the culturally differentiated production process where considerations of form are used to shape the production of news representations. In a similar way, it also casts light on the variety of news representations produced and how these offer different dialogic possibilities. As Cottle (2000: 30) suggests, the study of news forms shows how news programmes do more than transmit information or ideology by offering a range of dialogic possibilities including the potential to 'affirm certain values and endorse shared aspirations and ways of life'. The textual variations common to 'popular' journalism, for example, have already been discussed in this way. Studies of the historical press (Conboy 2002), the contemporary popular press (Dahlgren and Sparks 1992), and popular news programmes (Bird 1990, Langer 1998) have highlighted the implications of the important features of these forms. However, notwithstanding the insights developed from discussions of news content, we know less about the professional motivations that manufacture these characteristics and appeals in the first place. At present, the available scholarship captures only some of the features of the culturally differentiated production process including the featured conflicts over the 'informing' and 'entertaining' aspects of news output (Bantz 1985) as well as the importance of particular production cultures (Harrison 2000) and professionally imagined audiences (Cottle 1993). What is lacking, then, within the literature is a clear sense of the role that professionals' views of the news form play within this process. This paper seeks to address this absence by reporting on a study that applies the idea of form to the production of the children's news programme

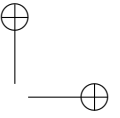
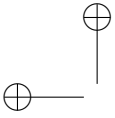




Within this article I use the term genre - a French word meaning type or kind –as a starting point to understand the ‘repertoire of elements’ (Lacey 2000) that group news texts together. News, then, can be seen as a communicative repertoire of ‘narrative, visualisation and talk’ (Corner 1995), and it is these elements in combination that help us to understand the various types or sub-genres of news on offer (Harrison 2000). The problem with approaching news entirely as genre, however, is that it tends to conceal the forces that go into shaping news behind the scenes, and it also provides little by way of explaining how the different forms of news are produced and change through time. It is important, therefore, to operationalise a term that recognises the elements of the news genre but which can also be applied to the production environment. This paper prefers the term ‘news form’ to that of ‘genre’, and through the account of the production of children’s news that follows it will demonstrate how a ‘professional visualisation’ of form decisively shapes the production of news language and visuals particular to the programme. Further, this will build on the recent insights offered by studies of the production of the children’s programme, which we can discuss now.

Recent academic discussions of the children’s news programme have introduced new insights into how professionals’ views shape news content. Studies of European, US and Israeli children’s news programmes have observed how, when compared to adult news programmes, children’s news programmes offer a greater explanation and contextualization of issues, different stances and linguistic addresses and news agendas (Bourne, 1985; Buckingham, 1999; Davies, 2007). Further, studies attribute the observed differences within the programme to the professionals’ prominent views of the programme form and its young news audience. Such views are also introduced as informing professionals’ use of consolidation strategies to deal with troubling subjects (Walha Van der Molen and De Vries, 2003) as well as their efforts made to mediate representations of conflict (Strohmaier 2007) and the features of online space (Carter & Allan, 2005). In the same way, these feature as important within insider accounts and their discussions of the decisions that professionals face when producing memorable news events (Home, 1993) and the justifications for these (Price, 2001; Prince, 2004). However, what such studies do not do adequately is discuss the formation of such professionals’ views or describe the process where these shape the production of the news story. Thus, this paper based on a case study of the production of the BBC programme *News-*





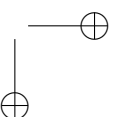
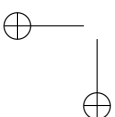
round will explore the production process where news practices informed by such knowledge shape and condition the programme's news language and visuals. This includes insights taken from an observational study of the BBC children's news programme that will be introduced next.

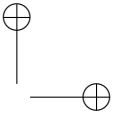
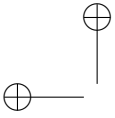
Methodology and case study:

The production study that informs this discussion, included observations of news practice, interviews with past and present members of the news team, analysis of news documentation and quantitative and qualitative analysis of news output (1997-2001). In addition to observations, the project used data from 34 in-depth interviews to explore how professionals' view of the children's news programme informs their news practices. This was collected and analysed in a meticulous way. For example, the author personally transcribed the interviews and then sub divided the written data into common descriptions of the production process. Following their preparation, the insights were then cross-referenced for validity with observations of news practices and also with the recorded morning meeting discussions to produce an accurate account of professionals' understanding of the news making process. This is reproduced in the discussion that follows. But before we discuss how professionals view their programme it is important to introduce the case study.

BBC Newsround

As a successful children's news programme, *BBC Newsround* has been broadcast on the BBC for over 35 years. It was launched first on a six week trial in 1972 as *John Craven's Newsround*. After shortening its name to *Newsround*, subsequent to a successful run to 1989, the programme has become a mainstay within the BBC children's programme schedules. Throughout this time, its eight and a half minute news bulletin has broadcast an agenda of international, national and child-centred news events for its young audience. Although stories within this resemble traditional story formats and are voiced by adult news presenters (like adult programmes), these are inscribed with a news stance and style that is unique to the children's news form. Further, these unique characteristics are produced in accordance with professionals' preferred view of the children's news form as we shall see next.



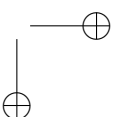
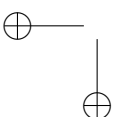


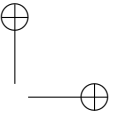
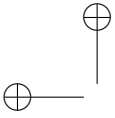
A professionals' view of BBC *Newsround*

My research has uncovered how professionals view their news programme. For example, in interview, children's news producers maintain that to work on *Newsround*, the journalist must fully understand both the rules of news in general as well as the particular requirements of their distinctive form of children's news. This underscores the claim that journalists invariably work to a developed sense of the particular news form that they are producing. In the context of the research literature, this finding qualifies two contradictory claims made in earlier studies of news production: the view that journalists are either relatively autonomous and battle against organisational imperatives and editorial impositions, or that they are relatively passive and unconsciously conform to bureaucratic structures and routines. My study, as documented elsewhere (Matthews, 2003, 2005, 2007), suggests that news workers are in fact knowledgeable about, and actively reproduce, a professional visualisation of their particular form (Cottle 1993). In the case of children's news production a shared 'programme visualisation' was reinforced by processes of multi-skilling in which boundaries between roles of researcher, journalist and producer became blurred and required each member of the team to fully understand the nature and core elements of the children's news programme. Observations of news practice also revealed how their 'programme visualisation' was reinforced through such 'production rituals' as morning meetings, newsgathering discussions and other daily practices of making news reaffirming the norms and values of this particular news form. In such ways, then, the professional visualisation of children's news informs the shaping of news representations.

In examining the professional visualisation more closely we find that journalists appropriate the elements of the general adult 'news genre' to produce their distinctive form of TV children's news and are aware of a need for pragmatism in so doing. A BBC *Newsround* journalist describes:

There wasn't a great debate about whether *Newsround* should primarily try and be funky and excite and be like every other children's programme, or whether it should be grown up and serious like any other (adult) news programme. We knew we were somewhere between the two and if we tried to be too serious and too newsy, we would lose our audience. But if we tried to be entertaining and too children's (department) oriented we would



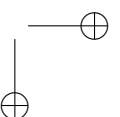
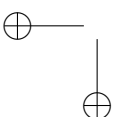


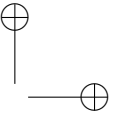
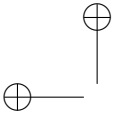
lose our credibility. So we knew we had to strike a balance.
BBC *Newsround* Journalist 6

The professional visualisation of the children's news form is thus informed by the tension between the perceived credibility of the adult news programme and the entertainment value of the children's programme. This blend is considered as the essential difference between children's news with its aim to produce a highly entertaining and visual news programme in contrast to the standard BBC public service news provision. Also incorporated into this mix are the professional views of the news audience. Observing this we find that the professional understanding of the 'imagined' news audience is based on an amalgam of two competing views: the 'ideal' and 'real' audience. Practically these serve as useful reference points in the production, selection and inflection of programme content. The professional conception of the 'ideal' child audience is described below:

I kind of think of having a kind of funky twelve year old who is not too funky but has aspirations to be funky. They are quite interested in the news agenda, quite good at school, you know all those sort of things; someone that comes from quite a stable background, whose family probably read newspapers and has general newsy things around in the house. They've got a little bit of willingness, and appreciate an explanation.
BBC *Newsround* Journalist 3

The journalist's construction of the 'ideal' child news audience as mature, academically able and middle class practically serves, therefore, to define the 'ideal' programme content and style of presentation. However, in practice this view of the audience competes with a further professional view of the 'real' audience. This will be elaborated further below, but essentially we can say that this professional view imagines the 'real' audience to have limited intellectual capabilities as well as attention span and that these inform the audience's preference for entertainment rather than information-based programmes. The imagined 'real' audience therefore shapes the production of the news programme in ways designed to attract and maintain a child audience. In practice, this process sugars the pill of information-led news with the production values of the entertainment programme; while the producers' wilful imagination of the more appreciative 'ideal' audience serves to bolster the





journalist's professional esteem as a serious news provider. With these general observations on children's news production in place we can now examine in more detail how the production of a characteristic news form impacts on the construction and representation of news.

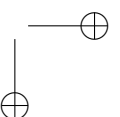
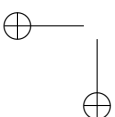
Producing the *Newsround* news style

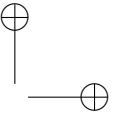
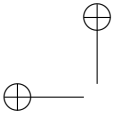
News professionals' have a detailed understanding of their news form including the conventionalised features of its news language and visuals. A view of the needs, understandings and sensibilities of their audience has been important in shaping these features of the news programme. This has underscored the personalised, simplified and popularised news coverage that is offered by BBC *Newsround*. Its presence within the production process will be introduced next within a discussion of the shaping of *Newsround* news language and visuals.

News Language

The norms and standards that are maintained within the production process ensure that news professionals produce stories that replicate the features of the news form. Within this process, sections of adult news copy become identified as appropriate to then transform into an overview of the news event. The *Newsround* version of the story is also written to include a news angle that is considered in terms of meaning and understanding acceptable for a young audience. This process contrasts starkly with that of adult news production that is commonly experienced by professionals who have worked on such programmes before arriving at *Newsround*. The following comment illustrates these differences. Here, a news professional reflects on experiences of working on BBC *News 24* when describing the news practices adopted by BBC *Newsround*:

Here you find the story, you work on it completely how you want to, and explore the angles that you think need to be explored. You get the pictures that you think you need to be filmed. It's solely yours; you are not restricted in anyway, whereas certainly at *News 24*, you were completely restricted because we had no resources. So you just turned other peoples' material





around to try and fit what you were doing. So it is about starting from scratch with a Newsround story
Newsround Journalist 8.

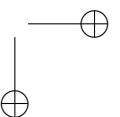
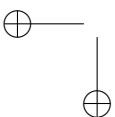
Above we learn of the differences that exist between news practices used to produce the programmes. However, the comment made about the autonomy of the *Newsround* news professional should not be taken at face value. Although my observations concur with the view that news professionals make selections over material that are perhaps unavailable to them when working on News 24, these reveal also how professionals are required to follow preferred guidelines when preparing the *Newsround* news story. As a matter of fact, writing stories for the BBC children's news programme involves a strict adherence on their part to particularised writing and production strategies which reproduce the BBC *Newsround* news style. These ensure that consistency is maintained in the production of a personalised, simplified and popularised news output, as will be explained in more detail in the following discussion of the personalising of news.

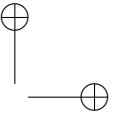
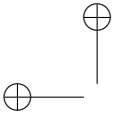
Personalising news language:

Again, observations of programme production offer rich insights into the professional writing process and in this case uncover the way that 'relevant' news accounts are produced for the *Newsround* audience. The comments below, for example, reveal much about the production of BBC children news, including the common practice used to personalise the general presentation of the 'relevant' news event:

You have to consider what is relevant about this story for children, and how to get that across. It is all too easy to forget the basic thing that is going to be of interest to children. So you have to hold on to what is interesting about the story and what has to be explained and how it be presented
Newsround Journalist 4

This introduces the principles that inform the professional transformation of the children's news story. A glance into the newsroom here reveals how it is these principles that guide the essential news writing practice to produce 'interesting' news events which have within them strong connections forged with





the lives and experiences of the audience. This also shows how their influence on the production of the children's story is considerable as is demonstrated in the following example of a children's account of the UK government's campaign to pledge money to improve road safety.

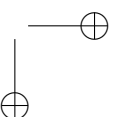
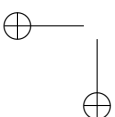
My research into the production of *Newsround* brings into focus how professionals construct personalised versions of news copy in a routine way. On one occasion, for example, I observed how a journalist worked busily to transform the news copy of a story about road safety into a personalised account for a young audience. This endeavour produced a new version which emphasised the 'campaign' for children's road safety, having developed an opening line that was changed from '*a new million pound campaign to make our roads safer*' within the original news copy to appear in the children's story as '*more than six thousand cyclists were killed or seriously injured last year - two thousand of them were children...*' As a representative example of the production of the children's news story, this introduces the considerable effort made to refocus news copy into an acceptable form within the news writing process.

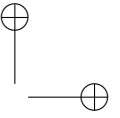
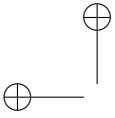
Further to this, the strategy to personalise news requires a produced story to include written parallels between events and the lived experience of children, as the series producer outlines below:

You know, the adult news story may not explain what children need to know and there may be more interesting other factors that you might pull into it. A good *Newsround* journalist would go beyond the news copy and will think what is really interesting about this story. Are there any other stories I can bring in? Any other parallels that I can draw in to give a proper background?

Newsround Series Producer 1

Thus, we begin to realise how relevant themes are introduced and developed within the news writing process to purposefully redirect the original focus of the adult news copy. The example that follows illustrates how professionals mediate the news focus of news copy and shows further the outcome of such a practice. On this occasion, a discussion of the government's announcement to lower pollution within adult news is taken and personalised within a new account for the young audience. The newly produced *Newsround* story introduces a new news focus that discusses the link between pollution levels and the possible effects on children's health who suffer from chronic asthma. The finished version opens with the following:





An ordinary day in London, as usual it's raining and there's loads of traffic. Most of us never think about the air that we're breathing in areas like this. But for people with asthma it's a different story. They say that air pollution is one of the things that makes their asthma much, much worse
BBC Newsround, 8 June 1999

As the story continues the link between the quality of the air and asthma sufferers is made explicit:

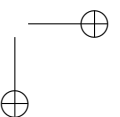
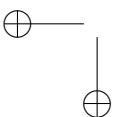
Asthma is causing breathing problems for more and more young people. A shocking one in four children suffers from asthma - a figure which has almost doubled since 1990. No-one knows why - but we do know pollution makes symptoms worse
BBC Newsround, 8 June 1999

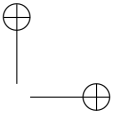
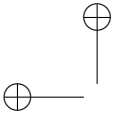
The rest of the story (below) outlines how a new emphasis placed on asthma sufferers and pollution further redirects the original news focus and news line. In this way the government announcement about the reduction of pollution and environmental groups' reactions appear as almost an afterthought at the end of the account.

The Government's announcement today that they want to cut down on dangerous chemical from car exhausts ... but though that news has been welcomed by environmental groups, they say the real answer is to reduce the number of cars on our roads
BBC Newsround, 8 June 1999

In this process the details of the pollution issue is significantly shaped within a new news focus that places the government and environmental groups' comments behind the discussion of children, asthma and the rise of pollution. In effect, this particular arrangement renders the news topic apolitical by redirecting the discussion of government plans to the end of the item and offering an edited version that dislocates the pollution issue from any informing social context and political processes.

In sum, this section has outlined a professional strategy that is used to shape the children's news story. What follows next establishes another prominent professional strategy used by news workers within the production of *Newsround*. This will be introduced as 'simplification' - a process in which





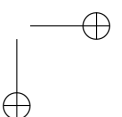
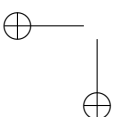
professionals shape news copy into the simplified ideas and narratives for the young audience which, it is assumed, allows this inexperienced audience to consume news with ease.

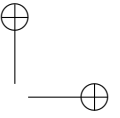
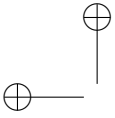
Simplifying news language

For *Newsround*, the simplification of news is considered essential to its more general goal of producing news that is 'intelligible to children' (BBC 2000). However, the programme's view of the process conceals the considerable effect that this news practice has on the overall shape of the news story. Informed by professionals' views of children's inability to understand news, these news making practices condition the selection and presentation of news material. Take, for example, the professional view outlined below of children's understanding of the causes of environment problems and the suggested way to present such a story that is reached on this basis:

The fact is, how do they [children] understand that we as nations have caused the infrastructure to be fucked anyway? ... So we have to do it in a way that is palatable
Newsround Journalist 4

News professionals describe the difficulties faced when making issues 'intelligible' to children. As is revealed within the above comments, they see the consistent reproduction of 'palatable' versions of news issues for children, which replace the context to issues with simple reporting of the event, as their agreed solution to this problem. Although the *Newsround* website is configured to offer valuable supporting explanations of key news issues, the programme, operating within strict tight time constraints, generally does not. Coincidentally, it is the presence of information about issues on the *Newsround* website that gives news workers the opportunity to avoid addressing issues that require detailed explanations within the programme. Also this choice allows them to maintain an upbeat and fast moving style of news that has become viewed as an essential part of presenting news issues to children. Furthermore, the practice of simplifying news involves more than news selection and can be viewed as present within the various stages of news story production.





Observing the production of BBC *Newsround* reveals how news accounts became simplified within an extended editing process. Within this process, first, sections of the news copy are highlighted that can be used within the new *Newsround* version. This is followed shortly after by practices to select inappropriate news language within the news copy and then to explain or substitute troublesome terms or phrases as is outlined below:

Working on the programme you actually get away from all the news jargon that bands about. Phrases like ‘arms to South Africa’ that is used all the time in main news and means nothing. People that work in news use these phrases to get around things. On *Newsround* you cannot use ‘Arms to Africa’ or a phrase like that. Here you must think about the story and how it can be told without using jargon and phrases that are meaningless
BBC *Newsround* Journalist 7

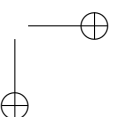
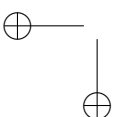
Further, the process of simplification involves another stage after the re-writing of selected words or phrases. This secondary procedure mediates the language used in the original copy into the *Newsround* news style, and is demonstrated in the following example of the production of a story about the failure of students to reach government standards in school maths.

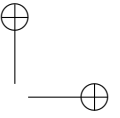
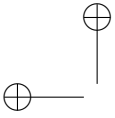
This particular example follows the professionals’ mediation of news copy over the news day and enters the production process shortly after a story has been selected for the bulletin. The story in question is about pass rates in school maths tests and is introduced by a producer in charge of the morning meeting with the following remark about the newsworthiness of the test results:

I don’t think it’s showing what they can do but rather showing them how they are performing. I suppose it does raise the question: is this going to widen? And is it going to be depressing to show children that they are failing?

Newsround Producer 2

Later with the concerns about children’s reaction to the potential issue forgotten, the story is placed within the provisional news bulletin. Soon after this, the news producer offers advice on how the story should be produced to a journalist who is allocated the role of writing the story. Part of the informal





conservation with the journalist involves discussing a page of news copy entitled 'primary school maths results worse'¹ as suitable to be transformed into the new *Newsround* version. In particular the following section is earmarked as particularly pertinent to the task:

Mr Blunkett put the decline in maths results down to a tough mental arithmetic test made compulsory this year for the first time for 11 and 14-year-olds - and acknowledged that these tests would make the numeracy target harder to meet

'This has made it harder to achieve the target we set, but we make no apology for this. This change is long overdue. Mental arithmetic skills are essential part of numeracy' he said.

Next September, a similar back-to -basics numeracy strategy emphasising mental arithmetic and whole-class teaching is to be introduced. Over the coming year, the government is to invest 60 million in preparing for the numeracy strategy, employing 300 numeracy advisers to work in schools and setting up 3000 numeracy summer schools

PA News 9 October 1998

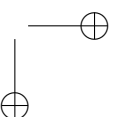
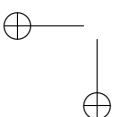
After reading the news copy, the journalist begins rewriting this section and producing a new *Newsround* version. Helping this effort is an internalised view of *Newsround's* news style which allows the professional to make quick decisions over which ideas and information should be used and which not in producing a story appropriate for a young news audience. Observing the process we see how the news copy used to develop the *Newsround* version is shaped to read in the new account as follows:

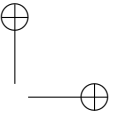
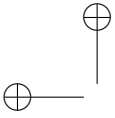
The result in maths may be slightly worse, but the government says THAT'S to be expected ... For the first time this year children were tested for mental arithmetic - the government says that's made things harder - and to make things worse new lessons designed to help still haven't been introduced in many schools

BBC Newsround 9 October 1998

This example reveals much about the simplification process in particular how the *Newsround news* version shapes the audiences' understanding of the

¹ Authored by Tim Miles Education Correspondent , PA News





issue. For instance, a prominent change made to the description of the test results in the *Newsround* story, was the paraphrasing of the Minister for Education's speech into the words 'government reaction' and the omission from the story of the criticism of the government's handling of education which appeared later within the news copy. Additionally, the phrase 'failing to meet political targets' is shaped to read as 'slightly worse' and this accompanies other changes. In sum, this brief analysis shows how the professionals' efforts to simplify news themes and language noticeably delimit the audience's understanding of the educational issue.

In the same way, professionals also seek to simplify the presentation of information and facts for the *Newsround* story. They view this practice as essential and in accordance with the principles of the *Newsround* news style rather than controversial in any way, as is discussed below:

You need to boil the story down to what you are going say and tell it in way that is truthful but gets the interesting things across. Obviously, as you do not have half an hour to tell the story, you have to really get back to first principles in order to explain it

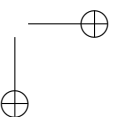
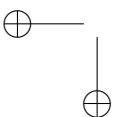
Newsround Journalist 5.

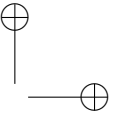
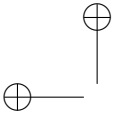
Here we are introduced to the news practices that produce the simplified *Newsround* story, how these work to locate the principal elements of an adult news story and then to use these elements to build a simplified account for children. A case study example of the professional production of the maths test story demonstrates this process in action. These observations of the process began when the news professional examined the following news copy (outlined below) for figures to use within a new news account:

The government's targets specify that 80% of 11 year-olds should hit the expected level of achievement in English by the year 2002, and 75% in Maths.

In this year's test, sat in May, only 65% of 11-year-olds achieved the expected level in English up to 63% last year. But the rate of increase has slowed significantly. In 1996, 58% of 11-year-olds hit the expected level, up to 48% the year before.

Achievement in science test for 11-year-olds remained static at 69%. In maths, only 59% of 11-year-olds achieved the expected level this year,



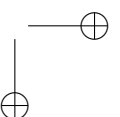
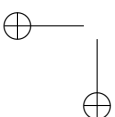


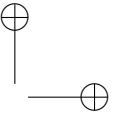
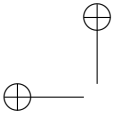
down from 62% last year, and again bucking a trend of continuous improvement
PA News 9 October 1998

Next, the news professional scans the copy for important facts and after simplifying these, uses the new simplified figures to produce a visual graphic of “Maths Target ... 3/4 by 2002”. This is later accompanied by a voiceover that explains how:

Three quarters of all children are supposed to reach standards set by the government for maths by the year 2002
BBC Newsround 9 October 1998

Seeing the process in action we can now appreciate how the changes are made. It is clear, in this case, how the news professional works to simplify the representation of the students' achievement which as a result appears then as “3/4” within the story rather than the 75% that is outlined in the news copy. Further, talking to news professionals we realise that these changes are considered to be necessary and important to produce news that reflects the properties of the *Newsround* news style. The news professional involved in the production of this story explained how the changes made here would simply help those watching to better understand the ‘significance’ of the numbers. The commonsense appeal of this view, however, simply masks the impact of such a practice. For instance, my research shows that these practices routinely exclude rather than ‘make simple’ important information. The editing of the statistic that 59% of 11-year-olds that did not meet the government expected levels for maths is an excellent example in this case. Furthermore, this research shows that these routine omissions are made consciously. The simplification of news is a part of professionals' effort to satisfy the accepted norms of the programme's news presentation. The consequences of this restrict the information that is given to the audience over examination achievements and government policy in this example. Similar views and practices also shape the production of the news visuals that appear within the children's news programme.





Popularising presentation – the news visual

Within the newsroom, professionals spend time carefully shaping news visuals for the programme. They consider the use of news visuals to be appropriate, as they believe that the visual aspects of the news story can help to maintain the attention of the news audience during the programme. The following editor's description of the production of an imaginary earthquake story by *Newsround* reflects this thinking:

Take the Chinese earthquake as an example. Being aware that 5 million people are dead you must think how shall I cover this story? [...] You will have to dig up pictures from the library such as an earthquake that previously happened in that area, for example, to visually illustrate it. That is how you will spend your time at *Newsround*, whereas [adult] news would be happy to go with a story with very little in the way of coverage.

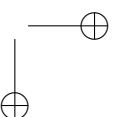
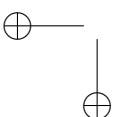
Ex *Newsround* Editor 1

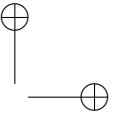
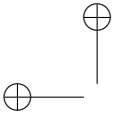
The ex-editor, comparing the decisions traditionally taken over the selection of news visuals in adult and children's news programmes, describes how the presentation of low-grade news visuals, such as those used within adult news, would be considered as unacceptable for the children's news programme. Like the ex-editor, news professionals presently working on the programme understand the professional requirement to include news pictures that will elucidate the news event as well as attract the attention of the news audience.

Censoring visuals

Additionally, news professionals consider the audience to be sensitive to viewing some news pictures and use this knowledge to select images that will accompany the voice over within a news story. These internalised guidelines help news professionals to make appropriate decisions over the suitability of scenes including those of human grief, death and the mistreatment of animals. An example of the mediation of a video news release (VNR) detailing the ill-treatment of caged bears in Japanese zoos, which was forwarded to the programme by the animal welfare group Wspa,² helps to illustrate this important process. When the VNR was considered for broadcast, I observed how

²World Society for the Protection of Animals.





the news professional used an internalised view of acceptable pictures to make quick judgements over which images could be used in the programme. The following thoughts on the process to select and prepare the news pictures for the story were collected from the news professional after the news story was completed:

They [Wspa] had taken some secret filming of zoos in and around Tokyo and found some horrific stuff. The information was already there really. It was just a case of filtering out stuff that wouldn't be suitable viewing for children, because some of the stuff was very horrific. It was just literally a case of censoring it if you like. There were really bad pictures that I would have never of used.

Newsround Journalist 10

Above the news professional describes how s/he sought to discard news pictures that were 'too horrific' for a young news audience within the VNR and work generally to achieve a sanitised visual account of the issue. As an illustration of everyday news practice, the example shows how visuals are self censored for matters of taste. Accompanying these decisions on news pictures are others that reflect the concern over their potential influence as well as the interest these would generate among the audience in the news story.

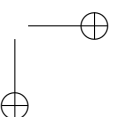
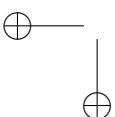
Recognising the power of pictures?

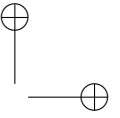
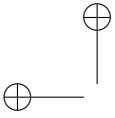
News professionals believe that news pictures that contain a powerfully inscribed view of a news issue will undoubtedly have an impact on the audience's understanding of the news issue. This is illustrated aptly in the following comments about animal stories:

It doesn't matter how much you explain the other side of some stories such as that animals may be pests, you have always to bear in mind that one image of a caught fox running across a field is the equivalent of a thousand words for the other side of the argument. You have to be incredibly careful.

Newsround Series Producer 1

This account suggests that the audience's misunderstanding of issues is informed by an inability to distinguish between the view expressed by news visuals and that explained in the verbal soundtrack. It follows then, according





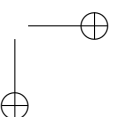
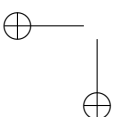
to the series producer, that BBC *Newsround* should always attempt to present the ‘real’ side of problems within the voice over, described in the example of fox hunting, as purposefully representing the fox as ‘pest’ rather than a hunted animal. However, this practice is easier said than done when producing news for children. The persuasive demands of the presentational style of the children’s news programme, for instance, ensures that the pictures produced stray purposefully away from objective and impartial visual accounts of news issues. Again using the example of the production of animal stories, it becomes clear how the *Newsround* news style informs the production of particular news pictures that shapes audience’s perceptions, as is explained:

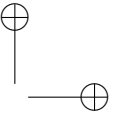
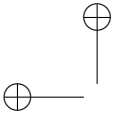
I have a big problem with the way that emotive pictures of animals can warp the argument. Often on those occasions, it does not matter what you put in your script, you know that environmental agencies are sat there signing up hundreds of new members because you put that on the tele at five o’clock
Newsround Journalist 8

The comments describe a necessity to produce standard news visuals that are congruent with the *Newsround* news style. I have also observed how news professionals when working to meet these requirements construct sequences of visuals that focus on the environmental character within the personalised news story. Often these visuals are produced purposefully to depict the threat to animals and thus appear to be communicating a separate view from that of the verbal sound track. A typical example would be a story that includes a sequence of pictures that introduce an animal as unaffected within their natural habitat and then starkly illustrate the threat that it faces with emotional overtones. In short, the practice of producing pictures to reflect the news style appears here to provoke the audience to think about issues (in this case animal issues) in particularised ways.

Conclusion

This paper, based on a case study of the production of the BBC children’s news programme *Newsround*, has traced the characteristics of the news form within the production process. This has recognised how professionals’ view of their audience as a mass of consumers uninterested in news has informed their

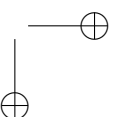
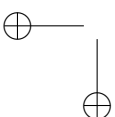


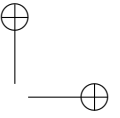
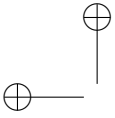


production of a simplified, personalised and popularised news programme. Further, by examining programme production it has been observed how this preferred content is produced through the application of particular news making practices.

For example, this has introduced how news representations become personalised for a young audience within the BBC children news programme. The application of the practice of personalisation ensures that the stories that can echo connections with the lives of the audience become selected and that these become transformed to further emphasise these characteristics later within the production process. Produced then to attract audiences' attention, these stories overlook the politics and general context that surrounds news events as well as restrict the scope of the news bulletin and the audience's access to discussions of adult news issues. A practice of simplification has also been discussed as operating within the newsroom. As has been outlined, this has been developed on the basis of professionals' views of children's limited cognitive abilities and is used to shape news that includes the basic details of the news event, simplified language and explanation as well as operates to limit the news voices that will appear. In a similar way, the discussion has outlined how professionals' concerns about the audience have also informed their selection and shaping of news visuals.

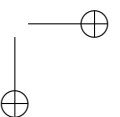
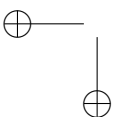
In addition to discussing the conditioning of news language, this discussion has revealed the importance of professional ideas in the shaping of news visuals. It has been recognised that although professionals' assumptions about children's sensibilities self censor the production of visuals, it is their concern with reproducing news that can attract and maintain an audiences' attention that chiefly informs their use of news pictures. This view shapes their selection and organisation of news pictures within the programme and on occasion seems to overwhelm their good sense to produce balanced and impartial accounts of (animal) stories. Thus, in sum, this discussion of BBC *Newsround* has revealed how this particular form shaped in accordance with a particularised view of children, informs the production of news language and visuals that appear to restrict children's access to a wider understanding of important news topics. This has also offered a complex and culturally differentiated understanding of news production that presents potential insights that can be taken forward and applied to the study of the production of other news forms and the professional mediation of news stories.

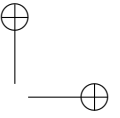
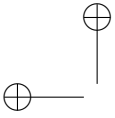




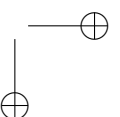
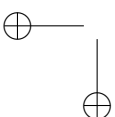
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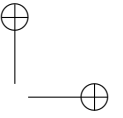
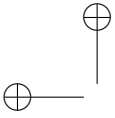
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