

Cartoon!!! And It's Effects on Socio-Emotional Development of Preschoolers

Deepika Rajawat¹

¹(Department of Education, the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India)

Abstract: *When a child is born s/he is like a plain paper. It's what we write on the paper that shapes his/her future. So it's totally on us- parents, teachers and environment to mould the child into a better person and a holistic one. The children between the age group 3-6 yrs are too small and it is our responsibility to expose these children to a safe, loving and caring environment. An environment which provides enough opportunities to them for their social and emotional development which would help them in attaining a balanced personality in future. In today's world the electronic media is something which is unavoidable by any age group of children. It has become a part and parcel of our life. The amount of time today's kids spent in front of television has increased many folds due to various reasons. For the age group 3-6 yrs who are preschoolers there are numbers of cartoon series being shown on various channels like discovery kids, pogo, cartoon network etc? These also include various indigenous cartoon shows. The global research indicates that 85 percent of a child's core brain structure is already complete in the early years. Hence these are the years where extra care needs to be taken regarding what we are showing our kids, how we are behaving in front of them, giving them enough opportunities of in hand experiences etc. It becomes very important that the environment in which we are upbringing them is happy, healthy, safe and filled with love and is far- far away from violence. Thus care needs to be taken of what we are showing these kids in these cartoons where these children are spending a lot of time. But is media responsible enough in showing the content which leads to an appropriate social and emotional development of these children? This paper focuses on the content that various cartoon channels are showing and the various social and emotional tenets that these children are taking from these programmes.*

Key Words: *Cartoon, Electronic media, Preschoolers, Social and emotional development, tenets*

I. Introduction

Watson wrote in 1930, "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist—regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors" Such is the effect of environment on the children. The children between the age of 3-6 yrs are the children whose flesh and bones are still being formed. Their brain is still building synaptic connections, so making changes once the structure of building is complete is difficult rather than making changes during the construction. Similarly it is better to provide the best environment and opportunities to these kids while their brain formation and development is taking place. Thus these 3-6 yrs of age is very crucial which can change the future of the child if not taken care off. This age or stage is also called preschool age and the children as preschoolers as from this age they start getting ready for school.

1.1 The Important Characteristics of Preschool Children (3-6)

- **They are growing rapidly and are active all the time- mentally and physically.**
- Their attention span is short.
- They do not like to sit in one place for a long time.
- They are very lovable and want affection.
- **They are very energetic and curious.**
- **Their absorption ability is very good.**
- They like to learn lessons outside classrooms and in formal situations.
- They remember difficult concepts with concrete object like number, spellings, words, and sentences by using simple teaching aids.
- They like to sing, paint, innovate, dramatize and dance.
- They eat well and like variety in the food offered.
- **They copy elders and learn good or bad ways from copying them.**
- They hold elders in great regard and obey instructions and orders if they are reasonable.
- They like orderliness and discipline.
- **They want to know about their rights and the roles they are supposed to play very clearly.**
- They understand reasons if explained properly and can often discipline themselves.

- They like to observe rules if they are reasonable and properly explained.
- They have a sizeable ego which should be respected.
- They want respect and immediate appreciation when they do well.
- **They love to listen stories and when able to read, they want to read fairy tales and simple books.**

They love to work with their hands- manipulating puppets, paper cutting, making sand cokes etc. So when we see some of these above characteristics (in bold), like they are mentally active all the time, so they can take anything at anyplace at anytime. Thus the people around should also be alert so as to what environment they are providing. Especially when the elders are watching television. They are curious for everything that they come across and want to know more about them. Their absorption ability is very high, people think that the children don't understand but they understand far high. They copy the elders, they are masters at imitation, the parents and teachers are the role models they copy them and want to become like them. They want to know about their rights and the roles they are supposed to play very clearly. The confusion in the roles, they are supposed to play may lead to their identity crisis. They love to listen to stories and read simple books. Thus seeing these characteristics it becomes very much evident that the environment plays a pivotal role in preschooler's life and in shaping their future.

1.2 Role of media in Preschoolers life

Media today is everywhere, the television, video games, mobiles, computers, laptops etc. No children are left out of this enigma. Preschoolers are very curious when they watch television specially cartoons. Cartoons have become an important part of their lives. Today when both the parents are working and they have very less time for each other, the chances of kids exposure to television increases. Even when the kids are unhappy or crying or the elders have other tasks at their hands they switch on the television or cartoon channels for the kids so that they remain busy in it. Then television has become a must during dinner timings where the whole family watches family dramas in front of these preschool kids. Thus **television**, of all is having the greatest impact on these children because as mentioned earlier it is what surrounds them that affect the most and the duration of this exposure matters.

In one of the studies a nationally representative telephone survey of more than 1,000 parents of American children ages 6 months through 6 years, was conducted in Spring 2003. The study was Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers by Ride out, Victoria, Vandewater, Elizabeth, Wartella & Ellen (2003)^[1]. It was found : (1) children six and under spend an average of 2 hours daily with screen media, mostly TV and videos; (2) TV watching begins at very early ages, well before the medical community recommends; (3) a high proportion of very young children are using new digital media, including 50 percent of 4- to 6-year-olds who have played video games and 70 percent who have used computers; (4) two out of three 6-year-olds and under live in homes where the TV is left on at least half the time, even without viewers present, and one-third live in homes where the TV is on "almost all" or "most" of the time-- children in the latter group appear to read less than other children and to be slower to learn to read; (5) many parents see media as an important educational tool, beneficial to their children's intellectual development, and parents' attitudes on this issue appear to be related to the amount of time their children spend using each medium; and (6) parents clearly perceive that their children's TV watching has a direct effect on their behavior, and are more likely to see positive rather than negative behaviors being copied.

This study easily proves that our children are heavily exposed to television and it is having effects on their behaviours. It is quite ironical that the children these days in preschools get only 20 minutes for free play and in some only thrice a week and they get 2 hours for watching television? There is no denial that a preschooler learns more with audio visuals- the rhymes, stories, alphabets etc and the cartoons shown on the channels have a very good audio and visual effects with which they very easily catch the attention of the preschoolers and unknowingly influence their various aspects of development specially social and emotional. Thus it is important to check the content that is being shown to these kids through television.

1.3 Social development of preschoolers:

Freeman and Showel write: "Social development is the process of learning to conform to group standards".

Preschool years are important years for social development in young children. The most important forms of social skills necessary for successful adjustment appear to begin to develop in this stage. At this stage the basic social attitudes establish in young children. Social skills gained by the children during preschool years are important in determining what sort of adult they will become. Pleasant social experiences encourage children to repeat the experiences and in contrast, unpleasant experiences tend to discourage the children to repeat the same. Pleasant experiences develop good social behaviour like curiosity, sympathy, cooperation,

sharing etc. unpleasant experiences develop unsocial behaviour like negativism, aggression, quarreling, teasing, prejudice, generosity.

1.3.1 Social behaviour patterns (Hurlock, 1981)^[2]

Social patterns:

Imitation

To identify themselves with the group, children imitate the attitudes and behaviour of a person whom they especially admire and want to be like.

Rivalry

The desire to excel or outdo others is apparent as early as the fourth year. It begins at home and later develops in play with children outside the home.

Cooperation

By the end of the third year, cooperative play and group activities begin to develop and increase in both frequency and duration as the child's opportunities for play with other children increase.

Sympathy

Because sympathy requires an understanding of the feelings and emotions of others, it appears only occasionally before the third year. The more play contacts the child has, the sooner sympathy will develop.

Empathy

Like sympathy, empathy requires an understanding of the feelings and emotions of others but in addition, it requires the ability to imagine one-self in the place of the other person. Relatively few children are able to do this until early childhood ends.

Social approval

As early childhood draws to a close, peer approval becomes more important than adult approval. Young children find that naughty and disturbing behaviour is a way of winning peer approval.

Sharing

Young children discover, from experiences with others, that one way to win social approval is to share what they have- especially toys-with others. Generosity then gradually replaces selfishness.

Attachment behaviour

Young children, who, as babies, discovered the satisfaction that comes from warm, close, personal associations with others, gradually attach their affection to people outside the home, such as a nursery school teacher, or to some inanimate object, such as a favorite toy or even a blanket. These then become what are known as attachments objects.

Now these days the various programmes shown on various cartoon channels are:

1.4 Emotional development among preschoolers

According to Crow & Crow (1913), an emotion "is an affective experience that accompanies generalized inner adjustment and mental and psychological stirred up states in the individual, and that shows itself in his own behaviour."(Aggarwal, 2005)^[3]

The role of emotions is very vital in the personal and social development of an individual.

An emotionally stable individual leads a happy, healthy and peaceful life. He is at ease with himself and his surroundings. On the other hand an individual who is emotionally disturbed becomes a problem for himself as well as for others. Continuous emotional disturbance affects the individual's growth and development. Therefore the development of emotions is extremely important for the harmonious development of the personality of an individual.

1.4.1 Some of the common emotions found in children are:

Anger

The most common cause of anger in young children is conflicts over playthings, the thwarting of wishes, and vigorous attacks from another child. Children express anger through temper tantrums, characterized by crying, screaming, stamping, kicking, jumping up and down, or striking.

Fear

Conditioning, imitation, and memories of unpleasant experiences play important roles in arousing fears, as do stories, pictures, radio and television programs, and movies with frightening elements. At first, a child's response to fear is panic; later, responses become more specific and includes running away and hiding, crying, and avoiding frightening situations.

Jealousy

Young children become jealous when they think parental interest and attention are shifting towards someone else in the family, usually a new sibling. Young children may openly express their jealousy or they may show it by reverting to infantile behaviour, such as bed wetting, pretending to be ill, or being generally naughty. All such behaviour is a bid for attention.

Curiosity

Children are curious about anything new that they see and also about their own bodies and the bodies of others. Their first responses to curiosity take the form of sensory motor exploration; later, as a result of social pressures and punishment, they respond by asking questions.

Envy

Young children often become envious of the abilities or material possessions of another child. They express their envy in different ways, the most common of which is complaining about what they themselves have, by verbalizing wishes to have what the other has or by appropriating the objects they envy.

Joy

Young children derive joy from such things as a sense of physical well being, incongruous situations, sudden or unexpected noises, slight calamities, playing pranks on others, and accomplishing what seem to them to be difficult tasks. They express their joy by smiling and laughing, clapping their hands, jumping up and down, or hugging the object or person that has made them happy.

Grief

Young children are saddened by the loss of anything they love or that is important to them, whether it be a person, a pet, or an inanimate object, such as a toy. Typically, they express their grief by crying and by losing interest in their normal activities, including eating.

Affection

Young children learn to love the things- people, pets, or objects-that give them pleasure. They express their affection verbally as they grow older but, while they are still young they express it physically by hugging, patting, and kissing the object of their affection ^[2].

1.5 The common social and emotional tenets seen in cartoons and their effects on preschoolers:

One of the first skills of emotional competence is the ability to recognize emotions in others. The various Researches done by Deutsch (1974)^[4] and Wilson & Cantor (1985)^[5] indicate that preschoolers are able to identify and differentiate basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, and fear experienced by television characters. The researcher surveyed the preschoolers about their most commonly watched cartoon programmes. These programmes shown on various cartoon channels show various social and emotional tenets. Some of these shows which were famous among these children are as follows:

Programmes	Channels	Description	Emotional tenets taken by children	Social tenets taken by children
Transformers Prime	Discovery kids	A race to occupy earth	Aggression, fear, violence, envy, jealousy, anxiety, good wins over evil	Rivalry, imitation
1001 nights	Discovery kids	Mother does story telling from book and every story solves some problem of the children.	Joy, affection, curiosity	Attachment, problem solving
Chota Bheem	Pogo	Stories of bheem from mahabharat	Joy, affection	Friendship, differentiate between Good and bad
Doremon	Disney channel	Life of Nobita with his friend Doremon	Family affection, joy	Concept of Rewards and punishment, Parents as Role model, imitation
Pirates of the Caribbean	Disney channel	Fights between the pirates	Aggression, fear, envy, jealousy, anxiety and violence,	Imitation
Ben10	Cartoon Network	Fight with aliens with special gadgets	Violence, aggression and fear	Imitation
Sinchan	Hungama	Life of a 5yr old boy with his family	Fun, joy, sadness, envy, grief	Bravery, family always unhappy
Chatur Chetan	Pogo	Fights between chatur and chetan	Aggression, grief, envy, jealousy, joy	Non cooperation, rivalry, Differentiate between Good and evil
Tom and Jerry	Cartoon	Fights between tom and	Aggression, grief, envy,	Non cooperation, rivalry,

	network	jerry	jealousy, joy	selfish
Shawn the Sheep	Nick	Life of shawn with his friends(animals)	Joy and fun	Friendship, cooperation, sharing, sympathy, attachment, problem solving

Thus the emotional tenets seen in these programmes are Aggression, anger, violence, envy, jealousy, anxiety, grief, good wins over evil, joy and fun. The social tenets seen are Friendship, cooperation, competition, sharing, sympathy, attachment, bravery, problem solving Concept of Rewards and punishment, Parents as Role model, imitation and many unsocial patterns too like selfishness, non cooperation, not sharing, rivalry etc. So both the aspects are there the good and the bad. But if we see the above table, then out of nine programmes, five show unsocial and violent behaviours, which is becoming a trend these days. We are the adults and we have the ability to think and decide which show is good for the children? The preschoolers don't have that.

Thus is it not our responsibility to watch what is being shown in these cartoon programs? How can it affect the child? Whether it is good content for the children? Will there be learning? Will it lead to their appropriate development? The parents, grandparents need to ask these questions to themselves. The programmes like transformers prime, pirates of the Caribbean, Ben 10, and GI Joe etc are heavily loaded with action and fights. Such shows may increase the violent nature of kids. We can see the preschoolers imitating these fights or doing fantasy fights with their friends or doing role play with one of these characters. These shows depict aggression as typically justified and rarely punished and this for sure is taken by children. Then we have shows like Tom and Jerry, chatur chetan where the characters are always fighting, it is fun and entertaining to watch them fight but it is possible that it may unknowingly giving wrong message to preschoolers that it is okay to beat each other. Ultimately these too encourage the violence in a humorous way making situation light. One of the child said “ Sinchan’s mother hates her. She is always scolding her” this was the view taken by the child when he saw the show and he also said that her mother is also scolding her all the time. So we cannot even imagine what goes in the minds of these little kids and how they interpret any event. Thus a lot of care should be taken while making choice for the cartoon viewing.

The experimental evidence by Weiss and Wilson (1996)^[6] research involving a randomly assigned control group- demonstrates that children can transfer to real life the emotional lessons they learn from TV. In another study by List, Collins & Westby (1983)^[7], elementary school children from two age groups (kindergarten through second grade and third through fifth grade) watched a popular family sitcom whose main plot featured one of two negative emotions: the fear felt by a young character about earthquakes or the anger felt by a young character who fell while trying to learn how to ride a bicycle. Half the children in the study (the control group) watched the main plot only, and half watched a version where the main plot was accompanied by a humorous subplot. The presence of the subplot interfered with the ability of younger children to understand the emotional event in the main plot, but not with the ability of older children. This finding is consistent with other researchers' insights into developmental differences in children's ability to draw inferences across scenes that are disconnected in time. No matter what their age, children who viewed the humorous subplot tended to minimize the seriousness of the negative emotion. It may be, then, that the humor in situation comedies impairs children's ability to learn about negative emotional issues from such content. The humorous subplot also affected the children's perceptions of emotion in real life. Children who viewed the earthquake episode with the humorous subplot judged earthquakes in real life as less severe than did those who viewed the episode without the subplot. This pattern was particularly strong among those who perceived the family sitcom as highly realistic. The study demonstrates that a single exposure to a television episode can alter children's ideas about emotions in real life and is consistent with the idea that media portrayals can influence a child's mental representation, or schema, for emotional events. A schema is an organized structure of knowledge about a topic or event that is stored in memory and helps a person assimilate new information (Fiske & Taylor, 1996)^[8].

Thus when a single programme can have such a huge effect on children then think about the hours and hours of cartoon watching on children? The concept introduced with humor lightens the negative emotions but still the negative emotion is being displayed again and again and what about the programs like transformers, Ben 10 etc where there is no humor and only fights. They are displaying the negative emotions of fear, anger, jealousy, anxiety etc and unsocial pattern (non cooperation, rivalry, not sharing, selfishness etc) which is being transformed to these preschoolers. These preschoolers are very good at imitation and they start absorbing, imitating and then enact it. Children can readily find stories about violence, sexual promiscuity, theft, and greed in these programmes. The society is already seeing a lot of violence and immoral acts being carried out. Doesn't all this goes back to their childhood? Thus whose responsibility is it to check the content being shown in the cartoons and whether it is developmentally appropriate for these kids or not?

II. Conclusion

- All of us together the media, family, parents, teachers have to take care of this. Where media should be responsible enough in showing cartoons with no violence, less negative emotions and less unsocial pattern and avoid the airing of such cartoons giving rise to Aggression, fear, violence, envy, jealousy, anxiety, rivalry, non cooperation etc.
- Media should also be responsible enough to get the content checked by the psychologists or the experts and then air the concerned show.
- The parents and family in their busy schedule should not forget to keep a check on their children so as to what they are watching?
- Parents should observe their behaviour. If too much of imitation of a violent cartoon character is seen, its a red flag. They should immediately check that behaviour.
- Again there are some indicators of a good social and emotional development, if those indicators are lacking, then parents should take teacher's or counselor's help.
- The duration of the television hours should be fixed and less than what has been medically recommended.
- More attention should be paid on the media designed for their development and learning rather than letting them watch anything on television.
- The cartoons telling them good and fulfilled stories with morals should be allowed to be watched.
- The developing characteristics (mentioned above) of preschoolers should be kept in mind while selecting a cartoon show for them.
- And last but not the least the teachers should give them the right exposure, opportunities, activities to develop a healthy social and emotional development. Then only we will be able to give the child a happy-healthy life in real sense and a better future.

References

- [1] Rideout, Victoria J., Vandewater, Elizabeth A., Wartella, & Ellen, A. (2003). *Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers*. CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Menlo Park, CA.
- [2] Hurlock, E.B. (1981). *Developmental psychology- A Life Span Approach*. New Delhi: Tata Mc Graw Hill.
- [3] Aggarwal, J.C. (2005). *Child Development and Processing of Learning*. Delhi: Shipra Publications.
- [4] Deutsch, F. (1974). Observational and Sociometric Measures of Peer Popularity and Their Relationship of Egocentric Communication in Female Preschoolers. *Developmental Psychology* 10(5), 745-47.
- [5] Wilson, B., & Cantor, J. (1985). Developmental Differences in Empathy with a Television Protagonist's Fear. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 39(2), 284-99.
- [6] Weiss, A., & Wilson, B. (1996). Emotional Portrayals in Family Television Series That Are Popular among Children. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 40, 1-29.
- [7] List, J., Collins, A., & Westby, S. (1983). Comprehension and Inferences from Traditional and Nontraditional Sex-Role Portrayals on Television. *Child Development* 54(2), 1579-87.
- [8] Fiske, S., & Taylor, S. (1996). *Social Cognition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Websites

- [9] [StateUniversity.com](http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2543/Watson-John-B-1878-1958.html#ixzz2wtcy22ll) <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2543/Watson-John-B-1878-1958.html#ixzz2wtcy22ll>
- [10] <http://futureofchildren.org/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=32&articleid=58§ionid=268>
- [11] <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2543/Watson-John-B-1878-1958.html>