

Lesley Osborne, ABA Manager Standards, was among the twenty or so Australians who participated in the Third World Summit on Media for Children held in Thessaloniki, Greece, from 22 to 26 March 2001.

3rd World Summit on Media for Children

An international conference about media for children inevitably reveals differences in expectations and interests. This was apparent at the Third World Summit on Media for Children held in Thessaloniki, Greece, from 22 to 26 March 2001—a gathering of more than one thousand producers, researchers, broadcasters, academics, government and non-government organisations, and children. Hosted by the European Children's Television Commission (ECTC) the Summit was supported by the Greek Government as part of the Cultural Olympiad. The World Summit movement was initiated by Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) in Melbourne in 1995 and the Second World Summit on Television for Children held in London in 1998.

Previous summits focused strongly on the production, distribution and financing of children's programs, and sought to raise the status of children's television and media generally. With much larger participation by developing countries, the third summit considered broader policy issues underpinning the rights of children to a range of culturally appropriate quality media. These issues include the challenge of providing media access, particularly to new technology, and opportunities for young people to express their own ideas and creativity through media.

The conference also considered strategies for getting children's media onto the political agenda, with the spotlight on declarations and charters of children's media rights and monitoring their implementation.

Television was acknowledged to be the most important medium for children, but the Internet, mobile telephony, radio and

interactive television also figured strongly. There were presentations of multi-media projects that addressed pressing economic and social problems facing many children today. The Head of Education at the South African Broadcasting Corporation described an interactive educational service using five separate media: television, radio, email, mobile phone messaging and print, designed to support young people dealing with issues such as HIV, unemployment and access to education.

Summit participants were very positive about the opportunities offered by the Internet and other communications technologies. Government representatives from countries such as Egypt and Greece spoke enthusiastically of the Internet as a tremendous storehouse of knowledge and of the increased possibilities for cultural interchange between young people. While measures might be needed to ensure that new media is not mono-cultural, speakers expressed confidence in the strength of their own civilisations, and respect for young people's ability to use technology. There was also recognition that children and young people had views about media and its role that often differed from adults, and that research alone does not guarantee these views are heard. This was illustrated by a CNN project in which young people are provided with digital cameras (and training) to report on news of concern to them, for example, dating between Roman Catholic and Protestant teenagers in Northern Ireland.

The Children's Television Workshop now has 'localised' versions of 'Sesame Street' in South Africa, Egypt and Israel, excerpts of which were shown at the Summit. While there was some discussion about the cultural specificity of muppets the generally positive reaction to these initiatives reflected a fairly prag-

matic attitude amongst Summit delegates to 'compromises' that are struck to give children from very different cultures access to a program like 'Sesame Street'.

Ms Osborne, ABA Manager Standards, was asked to speak about the environment for children's television in Australia. The Australian Children's Television Foundation's Peter van den Hoorn convened the panel and illustrated the difference in perspective around the theme of quality television for children. Other organisations represented on the panel were China Central Television, Children's and Youth Program Centre, Cuba's Latin American Child's Audiovisual Universe, and the Greek National Council of Radiotelevision.

For a relatively small nation, Australia's achievements always stand out. Some of Australia's new media for children was also on show at the Summit, with two of the most popular exhibits in the technology playground the ACTF's KAHooTZ workshop, constantly busy with young conference delegates, and the ABC's World Link Up Youth Booth.



At the conference: (L-R: Lesley Osborne, ABA, Cherrie Bottger, Ten Netork, Helen Harris, Kids Like Us

For more information about the conference, including the conference papers, go to the summit web site: www.3rd-ws.org