

EBU Lessons from Lockdown – Exploring Children’s Broadcasting

Transcript:

[Madiana Asseraf-Jacob, EBU Head of Children’s content (MAJ)] – Since the very beginning of the crisis, the Public Service Media Kids Community, the EBU kids community, has been exchanging information on what they were doing, how they were shaping the content for children during the crisis.

And it is my pleasure that today you will be able to hear from some of the representatives of the community. I have with me Hildri Gulliksen, Head of Kids with NRK in Norway. I have with me as well, Tiphaine De Ragueneil, Head of Kids and Youth for France Television. And I have with me also Luca Milano, the Head of Kids for RAI, in Italy. So welcome to the three of you as well, and thanks for being with us.

[Interviewees] - Thank you.

[MAJ] - Let's perhaps share with our audience today how this experience has been for you as well. I remember that the schools closure came quite unexpectedly and very fast. It was a question of on a Friday, we started hearing that it would happen and then by Monday, the following Monday, we already had to come up with new responses for children. What was in your mind with this when this happened? What were your key priorities? Perhaps I'll start with Luca in this case because Italy has been even for longer in the lockdown, it all started in Italy. How was it for you? How did you lead this?

[Luca Milano, Rai (LM)] - Well at the beginning, the problem was understanding the extent of the problem because very fastly, it started in a few small towns, then it became a regional problem with Lombardy. And then, one day after the other, like a domino effect we had a national lockdown, very, very strict. And also the first country in Europe and actually in the world to have a national lockdown with these characteristics.

And we had to go on broadcasting while, at the same time, we were obliged to the rules of lockdown, so we have to close some studios. At the beginning, the first issue was the safety for all the staff who was working for us and the families, and also safety for the audience. And so giving them information on how to stay at home and what to do at home during this lockdown. We had also medical doctors and paediatricians in rushly made the daily show that is still going on until now called Diario Di Casa in which, in 10 minutes every day, doctors, experts, some psychologists and also teachers give their advice together with a huge quantity of content from their homes.

What changed completely the way of offering for kids because everybody was at home and no more at schools and also the public usually in Italy on prime time there are in television, about 24, 25 million people. We arrived at 32, 33 so it means that really numbers also and the attention changed.

[MAJ] - One of the comments that we first heard from Hildri, when we started talking with the community about what was going on, I remember that you said, well

suddenly television is a priority again, linear television and radio. You actually also launched a radio programme, during the crisis. What were your key priorities or what did you have in mind when this all started to happen?

[Hildri Gulliksen NRK (HG)] - The first day when we had our first teams meeting and we were all laughing and saying, well this is funny, interesting to meet this way and to the next day where everything was kind of a new normal. That was a fascinating first two days. Our main priorities were first of all to give information to the kids and mainly to the older kids. So we built on the brand SuperNytt which is the news programme for kids in Norway and we thought it would be the quickest solution for us to make a radio version of the programme because it's quickly, it's flexible, it's interactive. So we haven't had that before, but that's the first thing we started doing.

And then secondly, we expanded the SuperNytt programmes on TV as well. And we also made a whole lot of new programmes actually. And it was about bringing information to the kids, but also about being a good friend to the kids, one that they can do different things together with. In a way to be companionship, to help them feel less alone.

And thirdly, our priority was to help with the schooling of the kids. But, that came after some days.

[MAJ] - Tiphaine, what did you have in mind at the very beginning? What were your key priorities? And actually France Television was one of the first public broadcasters to come up, very fast with the official somehow, education, on television.

[Tiphaine De Ragueneil, France Television (TDR)] - At the very beginning, during the first week, we think we need to launch live education programmes on TV with the brand Lumni which is the educational brand of France Television. Children out of school can watch daily classrooms, hosted by real teachers, which is very important because I think it's very relatable and very reassuring for parents and for kids to have their teacher there, in the TV screen. We focused on how to make the best educational content. So, at the end, it is half an hour classroom because one hour maybe too long. And with very specific grades and themes for each half hour. So that was the main priority. Because at the very beginning, you know, families, parents were with the school book and they don't know how to give their kids some education. So I think it was very excellent. It was very successful at the very beginning.

And the other priority was to respond with more entertainment content and to give children a place to answer their questions. And they have a lot of questions about the disease or being locked at home about, how can I play and have fun in this very stringent, weird situation. So to launch a daily programme, maybe it was in the third week of the crisis, we decided to launch a new show called Allo Okoo to answer the questions kids give to us by phone of course.

Because the third main challenge was how to make TV when the studios are closed. And how to make TV when everything is closed and it's very difficult to have a team. So for the Lumni content, we decided to have only one studio with all the rules

regarding health and social distancing in only one place for all the content. And for the rest we decided to be on a remote basis only performing the Skype using the best of the digital devices we can add.

[MAJ] - And actually you touched upon on it Tiphaine, you said information, part of it was actually to answer specifically to the questions that kids needs had. It is about making sure that everything is taught in a language that they understand and with stories that they can relate to. I know that you've been very active the three of you on social media. You've been increasing almost the capacity to respond to kids' questions on an almost 24/7 basis. What are the key questions that children have been sending you? What are their main concerns when it comes to the crisis and what was happening? What are the key topics they want to know about?

[HG] - I think from other programmes and from the radio shows where kids have questions, it seems like they're asking about everything, all kinds of different questions. In the beginning everything was changing so quickly, so there was new information all the time. But now we have more or less gotten used to this and the kids know that the most important thing is to wash your hands and to not be close to each other. So, you know, it's already a part of their daily lives. So I think the questions are not as many now as they were in the beginning. And are you actually, as I said at the beginning, not only on social media, but you thought of those kids who are not yet on social media because they are too young and you launched this radio show so that they could basically call, and ask the questions to the presenters and to experts. Yes, we did.

And so, it has to do with age, but it has also to do with that not all kids in Norway have enough digital things. You know they might have, one or two iPads but they also have siblings and they have parents who are using the computer and maybe the wifi isn't strong enough. So we, actually made a point of going back to the more traditional platforms. So we saw that linear TV increased enormously, and we thought that linear TV in Norway was almost dead for kids. But all of a sudden that was very important. And radio was not that important, but still we thought it was a good social initiative to take. And also we thought a desktop, which is not very popular by kids normally, increased very much during the first weeks. So we tried to see all kinds of kids in all kinds of ages, in all kinds of social settings and families. And to help them to get the information that they needed. And so that's why we did all different kinds of initiatives in the first couple of weeks.

[MAJ] - You, Luca, for example, one of the things I remember you did, you said at the beginning was also to ask some people that the kids could relate to, to tell the stories of their lives. For example athletes, telling how they do workouts so the kids could learn or how they wash their hands, what they do while they're in lockdown, some of the characters of the shows as well. How was this?

[LM] - Yes, it was great responses since the beginning of younger athletes. We tried to look for people who are almost of the same age, of the kids that they have known and start with something of that, with the message of stay at home or wash your hands. At the end we have to say we received so many variation of the themes on wash your hands that at the end I said, no, stop [laughs]. We cannot continue to go on saying wash your hands showing how to do. But it is a sign of the need of

interaction even with the public national television that we discovered.

Of course we have in social media on the Instagram page of the channels and so. But also on TV, the two shows that we have now new. The 10 minutes daily more information and entertainment show has put, since the beginning, a WhatsApp number for video and an email for drawings. And there was a flood of materials. We are, watching week after week how the quality of the homemade videos are increasing. Now at the beginning it was just a child doing that. Now they see what they are sending, the others send, we receive video that the beginning of being a good quality in ideas and so. And also drawings. I think that these will remain as sort of, can be an exposition of how families and the country lived these phases. And we are keeping it also for documentary and the studies that can be done later because it is a real archive of materials.

Then the other programmes which is our daily school educational programme. It started one week later than Tiphaine's Lumni and we also took some ideas because I liked how the Lumni studio was put. It is live and so the children can interact on social media live, something that it is rare for a children's channel. And we found that there is a real need of interaction, of communication which we'll have to keep in mind also for the future. They arrived to make questions. At the beginning the questions were more technical. What can I do? what I can't do? Then, when we will finish? But also precise, maybe families with the parents are separated, can I go to see these? Now in this period that we are in, the second phase is where some interaction in families is allowed. How can I meet my grandparents without having a hug with them? This sort of information and advice that is important, but the sign is that we should find more and more ways to communicate between programmes and the audiences.

[MAJ] - And actually as you're saying, it's also about connecting with the kids in different ways. We've talked a little bit about information and we've talked a little bit about education, which were clearly two of the key priorities for the whole community. But then as we said initially as well, making sure that kids were okay from a mental perspective was also a priority. So it meant that they had to talk about other things that were not just coronavirus and the crisis. They also had to be given possibilities to think about completely different things. And it's a period which is challenging for production as we know.

So for example Tiphaine, how did you do it with entertainment slots? Did you put more of animation products? Did you take them from your archives? How did you find more of engaging and more hours of content for children?

[TDR] - We don't have more hours of entertaining content, but we stay with a lot of that content on France Four, also on France Three and France Five. And also we continue to increase the content we launch on Okoo on the digital service. And especially new show for the older kids because it was a main challenge for the Okoo brand. And we launched a new live action show which is ASKIP which was based in a middle school, in the South of France and which was very successful. Maybe it was a way for the kids to see what they could live if school were open. So it's really a huge success for us and it's more entertaining of course than the educational TV show like that. Of course there is a lot of animation show and they are very

successful at this moment because I think for kids, it's really important to be entertained and to have this small moment in the day.

And maybe what is quite new is that maybe they have shared some of that content with their parents and their family. I think usually kids channels are very dedicated to kids and parents doesn't know very well. They know how long kids the times kids spend in fact in front of the TV with this kid's channel. But they don't know very well the content. I think they have discovered some very interesting things during the lockdown. So maybe it's one key takeaway we can have after the lockdown is that there is maybe something we can offer to parents on the kids channel.

[MAJ] - That's good, thank you Tiphaine also for starting with the key takeaways. And Hildri I wanted to go to you because in order to also entertain kids and make sure that they were still connected to some reality and also that they had fun things to do and to think about. You launched your daily challenges as well?

[HG] - We had both one show a daily challenges that was about drawing with one of the most loved and famous characters in our universe. But also, I think we had a great success and it was wonderful to see how the hosts, of our profiles in NRK Super made content from home every day where they activated kids, challenged them to do different experiments or gymnastics or whatever.

And as a lesson learned I would say that if you have profiles, that kids in all different ages, like and love you are just five minutes away from your next show or your next programme. Because all it takes is that mobile phone and the profile and a lot of creativity and you have great content. And that's at least our experience for last weeks because this we called it a Home Team, this show and it's been on top 10, on our top 10 list every week in our VOD service since the corona time started. So it's been cheap, it's been flexible and it's great content. And it's like these past few weeks sorry past few months, we've set a new standard on quality so it's the pre-corona quality and it's the corona quality. And this is great quality in corona times.

[MAJ] - That's great, and thank you Hildri for that as well because as we all know from old crises and from all bad periods, good things also come up. Some of the lessons learned for us, some of the good things are we heard from Tiphaine, why not more family content on kids channels. From Hildri, why not a new mentality, a new mindset and a new way of doing things because quality is not the only thing that matters and we can perhaps sometimes expect less from the quality and be more creative and more agile in order to be engaging with kids. Luca, your lesson learned or how are you planning to now go back to the normality, now go to the new normality?

[LM] - I would say new normality because our idea and problem is how to represent and being contemporary in a situation that is changing so fastly. So we are doing that maybe on magazines, on a weekly magazine that you can, and we are making shows from the houses with the kids today. But when you go for instance, to fiction to kids drama, what to represent? Because if we are present the old normality, you risk to be obsolete. And to show what's happening is difficult. We are trying in these days and weeks to make an instant series. That is a series that we started filming in Rome, this week and we think to have on air in three weeks' time. It's a series of a

five episodes of half an hour in which our protagonist, the actors are 13 year olds, of a school series that we have already so people know them, are recording in seven separate sets in their homes with a crew of a one person and remote direction. With a story that is completely written on how they are living this period of quarantine. The problem is to imagine how the world for kids will be in December, in January because in fiction we have to think now to the next season. And of course this is a task but the idea is that we have to keep this idea of being contemporary and being interactive with the kids needs that at the end only public service television have been able to do, while the other side have been going on with the usual offer.

[MAJ] - Thank you, so we have some key lessons learned from the crisis, not all of them, but we have some. We said more experiments perhaps with family content, more experiments with more of agile and flexibility and faster creative ways to producing content. To engage with kids. And also new stories and rewriting the way we were telling stories and new topics. And reflecting the new reality for kids also on our live action.

For me, one of the lessons learned has been that public service media is always relevant but during this crisis they've proven to be at its best with really adapting to the new needs for kids and being there when they most needed their public broadcasters.

If you're still hearing us, then please know that on ebu.ch you can find more information about all of the cases that have been mentioned during this video, but then also get best practice examples from all of the EBU Kids community. You also have a summary of the key priorities and the key things that our Members think we need to take into account in order to connect with children during the crisis. And then also information on how to adapt to this new normality when it comes to producing content for children. I hope you enjoyed it and thank you for staying with us. Speak very soon, thanks all.