



RESEARCH BRIEF

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Measuring Social and Emotional Content in Children's Television

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Purpose

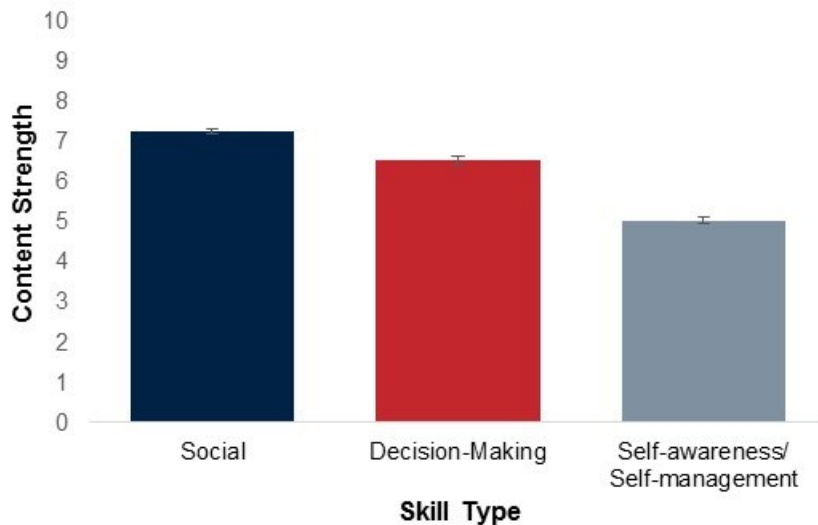
Television can promote children's social-emotional competence. Positive social-emotional TV content can improve children's social interactions, increase helping behaviors, decrease stereotyping, and reduce aggression.

We developed a system for rating positive social-emotional TV content, the Social Emotional Learning in Educational Children's Television (SELECT) rating instrument. The SELECT may help parents and teachers choose TV programs for children. It may also help researchers determine which types of social-emotional TV content are most educational. This study investigates whether the SELECT works, then describes the social-emotional content of 20 educational children's TV programs.

Method

We selected 20 educational children's television series that aired on broadcast networks (e.g., ABC, CBS, NBC) in 2010. Three raters used the SELECT to code four episodes from each series. The SELECT contains 30 items, covering six social-emotional skills and five techniques for teaching those skills.

Social-Emotional Content in Children's TV



Key Points

- The SELECT is a new tool for rating positive social-emotional content in children's television.
- Researchers used the SELECT to code children's programs on broadcast TV networks.
- Episodes emphasized social skills strongly, decision-making moderately, and self-related skills weakly.
- Characters tended to use social-emotional skills, rather than talk about them.
- The SELECT may help parents and educators choose TV programs tailored to the child's social-emotional needs.



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Results

Results from a multi-facet Rasch measurement analysis indicated that the SELECT functions as intended. It is a reliable measure suitable for further use. Episodes placed strongest emphasis on social skills; moderate emphasis on decision-making skills; and weakest emphasis on self-awareness and self-management skills. Characters tended to model social-emotional skills by using them; they were less likely to explicitly discuss social-emotional skills.

Implications

Parents and Educators

We found that social-emotional content varies by episode. Thus SELECT scores may help parents and educators select episodes with strong social-emotional content overall, or with content targeted to specific social-emotional competencies.

Television Creators

Television creators could use the SELECT formatively, to assess episodes' social-emotional content and make improvements. For example, explicit on-screen discussion of social-emotional content may strengthen many episodes.

Researchers

Future research should investigate whether episodes' SELECT scores correspond to their effects on children. Researchers should also explore whether decision-making TV content, which is fairly common, is educational for children.



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