



Interpretations on Relations Between Functional Orientation of Animation Script for Toddlers and Preschool Education

MA Xiaona^{[a],*}

^[a]Ph.D. of Animation, the Communication University of China, Beijing China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Animation is the most intimate window for toddlers to learn and understand the world. As a result, having an accurate understanding of functional orientation of animation script for toddlers is beneficial for the sound development of animation for toddlers. With scientific understanding of status of physiological as well as mental development of toddlers, while artistry needs to be stressed during creation of animation script for toddlers, it is also necessary to pay enough attention to rational thinking about practicability (namely functionality).

Key words: Toddlers; Functional orientation of animation script; Education

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INTRODUCTION

Animations for toddlers have significant impacts on growth and education of toddlers and on shaping of their mentality and character as well as acquisition of knowledge. However, after a general survey of current market of animations for toddlers, it has been found that target audience for children's animation is vague: animations intended for children are not necessarily suitable for toddlers and there are few excellent animations for early education, especially for toddlers. Kurosawa, a famous film artist once said: "the destiny

of a film is largely dependent on its script." To solve the problem that animations for toddlers are inappropriate for toddlers, of course we have to start from "script of play"-script.

According to experiences of educators and research materials for psychology and based on children's psychological development, we regard children aged 1-3 years as toddlers. As for psychological education for toddlers of 1-3 years olds, aspects requiring attention as well as principles followed during creation of animation script are quite different from psychological education on people in different age groups and other types of film scripts. According to most of the script writing theories, story is the key to the script. "Almost all of the excellent films focus on progress of certain concrete event or activity which promotes the development of story". However, as for creation of animation script for toddlers, story has to be put in the second place. Then what is the most important thing? I believe it is functional. This idea might go against most of the arts interpretation theories; however, there is a different case for creation of animation for toddlers. As for toddlers, plot in the animation is not the key; instead, animations for toddlers focus on the actions of characters, the novelty of shapes, tension of color as well as settings and situation and a few factors of functionality.

Art, in itself, is functionality. Dewitt H. Parker proposed that "beauty is parallel to utility: the latter is not life itself but the imaginary realization of value in real life". "If one has never used a crock, cup or house, then he has no way to evaluate their beauty." Animation, with its special visual aesthetic perception, possesses high aesthetic value. As for creation of animation scripts for toddlers, their functionality is also the essential requirements. During the creation of animation scripts for toddlers, we shall be clear about functional orientation in these aspects: namely, functions of entertainment, emotional transfer and cognitive education.

1. ENTERTAINMENT FUNCTION

Education for toddlers is completed in the midst of games and entertainment. As the happiness that animation brings to toddlers is visual and simple, all of the elements shall be within the scope of their understanding ability during the creation of animation script. Real world created by adults is unacceptable to the special thinking habit of toddlers. However, on the basis of scientific grasp of toddlers' physical and mental habit and in combination of various aspects, animations suitable for toddlers can create their real entertainment space. During the creation of animation scripts for toddlers, entertainment in setting of character and frame of script and other aspects shall be stressed, including cognition of interest, games easy to imitate and straightforward humor, so as to form a special interaction relationship between animation and toddlers. If animations for toddlers want to win the favor of toddlers, then they have to attract their attention and interest and the animations should be interesting enough so that they will love it from their first glance and have enough interest to keep watching. In *Thomas and Friends*, colorful trains, round smiling faces and big eyes are like lovely children, which are easy to attract their interest.

In the process of creation of animation scripts for toddlers, we should have a scientific understanding of toddlers' physiological and mental characteristics and try to figure out their appreciation habit. Toddlers' thinking is concrete imaginal thinking, object-oriented, and with great mobility. Without perception on visual objects and action, their thinking tends to stop or shift. They usually turn tears into smiles and turn anger into delight, which is exactly the manifestation of this feature. Considering their characteristics of instability in thinking and vigorous mobility, highly attractive videos and immediacy of action language setting shall be preferred during the creation of animation scripts to tell the story in the midst of action presentation. Exaggerated and interesting, vivacious action of characters is usually important factors to attract the attention of target toddlers for animation. Walt Disney animation has a set of unique animation law and its success lie in the design of body language, such as anticipation, pressing, posing, sequential animation, following, arcuate motion and rhythm of action. Artful action design is to shape characters with better effect, display their characters in an exaggerated and humorous way, highlight their distinctive features and strength characters' toughness and vitality.

"Their attention to entire toddlerhood is mainly unconscious attention, and conscious attention begins to form." Generally speaking, the stability of attention is weak for toddlerhood. Sometimes they are able to play games of interest or listen to stories told by adults with great interest, but this kind of attention is so unstable that once there is sound around, their attention will be distracted. Therefore, considering the short attention

span of toddlers, when creating animation scripts, length estimation shall be performed and the length of an animation is better short. 10 minutes are appropriate. Excessively long (sub) episodes can neither attract the attention of toddlers nor achieve the expected effect. What is worse, it will cause visual fatigue and other negative influence. Each episode such successful animations for toddlers as *Thomas and Friends* is very short, normally 5-7 minutes, and has basically the same narrative mode.

Besides, factors affecting the safety of toddlers shall be avoided during the creation of scripts to ensure safety of toddlers. Children are usually highly curious and have strong imitative ability and tend to be influenced by behaviors in animation. As a result, the safety in content shall be ensured for children's animation with rare scenes of violence and horror. Stories in *Thomas and Friends* are fresh and harmonious: The island of Sodor encircled by blue sea and sky is like a beautiful courtyard and little trains are like children of different characters; they always have fun in this small courtyard. There are little adventures sometimes, but they have nothing to do with danger or violence and will not bring shadow of terror to children.

2. EMOTIONAL TRANSFER

An effective approach is needed to satisfy the toddlers' desire for cognition of object and emotional exchange. The characteristics of children that sensibility determines everything determines that satisfaction of emotional needs is always the most important information transferred to children with an excellent animation. Toddlers, in period of rapid growth, have no obvious value judgment capacity and rational appeals. The appreciation value of animations is reflected more in the awareness of emotion through modeling of characters, individuality and body language as well as the maintenance and improvement of their innate emotional awareness on the true, the good and the beautiful in toddlers. Animations, which quietly take on the responsibility as a tool to help toddlers to pursue ideal state of life, are a form of art suitable for children to express their ideal life.

The process of toddlers' appreciation of animation is actually a process of emotional exchange between toddlers and characters in animation. Emotional edification capability owned by excellent animations for toddlers brings operable requirements for the creation of scripts. Li Zhi of Ming Dynasty once proposed the famous "theory of preserving childlike innocence"; and Picasso, an influential western artist also had a similar theory. The spiritual core of "theory of preserving childlike innocence" is to feel the world with innocent heart of a child and recognizing the world in the eyes of a child. As a result, once restrictions by utilitarian and rational logic are shaken off, imagination could run riot and logic would have no restraint. Before the creation of scripts, we shall first learn to see the surroundings and relations between

objects in the eyes of children. For children, they see the surroundings in a sense of “animism”. Their understanding of world is based on tendency of personification: They always tend to personalize everything and are good at projecting their own consciousness upon objective objects. Children believe that everything in natural world has life, consciousness and sentiment. As toddlers have strong imagination and are usually innocent, unsophisticated and passionate in nature, the identification of values of emotions of toddlers shall be reflected during creation of animation scripts for toddlers. Moreover, whether the ideas, personal characters and sentiment reflected are true shall be emphasized in the script. In contrast, authenticity of personal characters, background of story and external form through which the essence is presented need not to be overstressed. World created in animation scripts shall have arm’s length distance with real life to build an imaginary emotional situation and provide intelligent, emotional support and satisfaction, so that the emotional appeals of toddlers can be developed and improved to full extent. For example, the early-stage TV animation series *Barbapapa* created by France and Germany told stories about Barbapapa, Barbamama and their 7 children. Characters in the animation have distinct characters and different preferences. Barbapapa is ready to help others, brave, kind, smart, tolerant and humorous and is a model for children to learn from. He is also a father all children desire to have reality. All members of Barbapapa family can transform into anything—airplane, house, desk, tree and even any kind of small animal. They use “Barba-trick” to timely help others out and the transformation design corresponds with omnipotence in the world of animation. When children indulge themselves in happiness and illusion of animation which are exactly game-like, they gain emotional identification and sublimation as well as free spiritual release. Creators of *Teletubbies* launched in the middle of 1990s pointed out that “*Teletubbies* is not designed for specific educational purposes, and we just wish that children can build up their self-confidence, self-esteem and creativity in the midst of enjoying delights of playing and laughing.” Affection between mother and child in *Little Tadpole Looking for Mom* and friendship between trains in *Thomas & Friends* both have positive emotional impact on toddlers. *3,000 Whys of Blue Cat*, *Qiaohu* and other Chinese animations also focus on both emotional and intelligence development of toddlers. With promotion of EQ and IQ development as the target, while necessary knowledge is inserted in the process of creation, setting of emotional factors is also stressed so that toddlers can acquire more emotional cognition. The creation of script shall be based on emotion and mentality of toddlers, so as to provide relaxed and cheerful emotional background for video and audio presentation of animations. Construction of images, presentation of characters, elaboration of settings, and expression of actions and setting of character language shall be

completed in a proper way with rational expression. Characteristics of physiological and mental development of toddlers cannot be deviated from.

3. EDUCATIONAL COGITATION FUNCTION

The main contents of animation’s educational functions cover basic sensory perception on objects, education of cultural knowledge and the nurturance of behavior and habits. At present, creation of animations for toddlers always centers on purpose of “edutainment”. At the same time, animation production studios also attach greater and greater importance to impact of animations on growth and development of young children, in shaping of mentality and personality as well as acquisition of knowledge. As for toddlers, successful scripts of animation incorporate dull lecture into vivid animation representation so that toddlers would love it and tend to accept it more easily. As a result, its effect is much better than rigid instillation. For example, at present vivid, funny music animation is adopted for animations for toddlers, which are simpler, much easier to understand in the aspect of educational function and can effectively capture toddlers’ interest and attention. However, there are also plenty of animations that mainly deal with subjective lecturing, which cause severe deficiency in aspects of language understanding, cognition of objects and sensory control.

We are too eager to tell them what they should do so that we do not have time to be conscious of what they would do and say. Our behavior is directed by the assumption that children can do nothing without our instruction.

Blind lecturing will make the scripts dull and deficient in visual expressive power. It will not attract the attention of toddlers; on the contrary, it would be hard for toddlers to truly understand the meaning of stories and the basic effect on nurturance of behavior and habits and perceptual cognition is missing.

For children, the upgrade of intuitive thinking to concrete thinking and then to abstract logical thinking is realized in the process of mastering knowledge and experiences.

Human knowledge and experiences have in itself a certain sequence, which cannot be violated when children are mastering them. ... However excellent a teaching method is, children who have not mastered arithmetic would not master algebra and children who have not mastered Euclidean geometry would not master analytic geometry.

For this reason, during production of animation scripts for toddlers, possible and level of children’s psychological development shall be fully taken into consideration.

As cognitive ability and psychological development of young children are just in start-up stage, they do not have too much knowledge and experiences and can only notice distinctive external features and action of objects,

for example, yellow villi and sound a little yellow duck. Attention is mainly dependent on whether objects are novel and attractive. So during production of scripts, it is important to pass on the aesthetic image and cultivate aesthetic consciousness through modeling and the contents selected should be artfully of educational significance. For example, plot in series animation *Maisy's Playhouse* originated in Britain is cheerful and amusing. With game playing by a mouse, a crocodile, a squirrel, a chick and others as the main content, the animation intends to lead toddlers to contact the outside world and live together to avoid autism.

During the design of characters, attention shall also be paid to the matching of characters apart from design of characters. In addition to the main characters, their partners shall also be considered—which is similar to effective matching of leading role and supporting role in comic dialogue, a traditional form of Chinese folk art. Moreover, the matching of characters must be equivalent in value, so that they could stimulate, complement and promote each other and finally they set off mutually and bring delights in image and emotion. There are many successful cases: In *Tom and Jerry* by Walt Disney Animation Studios, the adroit mouse gives full play to the persistence of the cat; in *Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf*, a famous Chinese animation, the frustration of Big Big Wolf sets off the intelligence of goats. It is thus clear that artful matching of animation characters will result in surprising result in terms of interestingness of the story and presentation of gist.

Status of elements making up the animation changes regularly with children's development in age and mentality. The factors of an animation include: Corresponding environment, theme, characters and their actions. In imitative animations for toddlers, situation is of the greatest importance. At this stage, the theme and characters of animations are uncertain and relatively arbitrary. Moreover, much attention is paid to imitability of action and of language.

For toddlers from 1 to 3 years old, their most typical feature is being fond of imitating. They begin to learn language and accumulate vocabulary and often use body language to express their inner world; they have relatively weak cognitive ability for picture-reading and are extremely interested in simple figures and gorgeous colors; their imagination is unrestricted and they have unique simplification and generalization ability; they usually have strong curiosity but short attention span; they love being encouraged and praised.

Toddlers have strong sense of imitation. For toddlers, only novel, strong, brilliant, active and changing images can attract their attention. They can remember frequently repeated information and scenes naturally without effort, which is the principle way for toddlers to acquire knowledge and solve problems. From the aspect of action settings for characters in scripts, on one hand, as toddlers are gradually learning to run, jump, climb as well as other

relatively complex actions, more complex, accurate and flexible actions such as using chopsticks can be displayed; on the other hand, generalization of action, which means to extend certain action to objects of the same kind or the application of certain action to objects of the same kind. For example, feeding the dog (toy) can be extended to "cat", "bear" and so on. Rice bowl, cup and wineglass can all be used for drinking water. To use various kinds of objects through action, they can be at the same time recognizing the common characteristics of certain kind of object so that their perception will be more generalizing.

We can see the high-level initiative in speaking of 2- to 3-year-old children. They are fond of talking to adults and listening to fairy tales, stories and poems that are easy to understand, which means that it is possible for adults to make language as a tool to impart knowledge and experiences to children. Generalizing and regulating function of language are significant, which make it possible for toddlers to learn experiences and form moral character. Therefore, it is of supreme importance to actively set language, direct toddlers to actively learn language, enrich experiences and cultivate moral character through language during production of animation script for toddlers. From this moment on, children are likely to gradually grasp the syntactic structure of language from language habit of adults. Therefore, during production of animation scripts, much attention shall be paid to the use of repetitive language. Short sentences with relatively simple sentence elements shall be used for character dialogue. More demonstrative language and less descriptive language shall be used to encourage children to imitate and follow. Children's speeches should be actively developed, expanded and enriched continuously on the basis of their vocabulary and experiences. Making use of verbal communication, the children's speech can be continuously enriched. In the process of visual appreciation, some educational elements will imperceptibly come into view of children and are then imitated and accumulated. During production stage of animation script for toddlers, there shall be plenty of repetitive scenes and slow dialogue so that toddlers can actively learn knowledge and information implied in animation on the basis that it is suited to their understanding ability.

Attention shall be paid to the combination of interestingness, knowledge and emotionality during production of animation scripts for toddlers. Equal attention shall be paid to both artistic and scientific method to stimulate toddlers' perceptual ability on shape, color and music, cultivate their mind and provide imitable version for toddlers so that elementary aesthetic judgment can be formed. Animation is the most intimate window for toddlers to know and understand the world. As a result, having an accurate understanding of functional orientation of animation scripts for toddlers is beneficial to the sound development of toddlers' animation.

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