

= Educational goals of Sesame Street =

The children 's television show Sesame Street , which premiered on public broadcasting television stations in 1969 , was the first show of its kind that utilized a detailed and comprehensive educational curriculum , with specific educational goals , in its content . Its goals were garnered from in @-@ house formative research and independent summative evaluations , and its first curriculum was created in a series of five seminars in 1968 .

Sesame Street has both cognitive and affective goals . Initially , its producers and researchers focused on their young viewers ' cognitive skills , while addressing their affective skills indirectly , because they believed that focusing on cognitive skills would increase children 's self @-@ esteem and feelings of competency . They sought to prepare young children for school , especially children from low @-@ income families . The show 's producers used modeling , repetition , and humor to fulfill their goals . They made changes in the show 's content to increase their viewers ' attention and to increase its appeal . They encouraged " co @-@ viewing " to entice older children and parents to watch the show by including humor , cultural references , and celebrities .

After Sesame Street 's first season , its producers and researchers began to address affective goals more overtly . They addressed social competence , tolerance of diversity , and nonaggressive ways of resolving conflict , which was depicted through interpersonal disputes among its residents . In the 1980s , the show used the real @-@ life experiences of the show 's cast and crew , such as the death of Will Lee ( Mr. Hooper ) and the pregnancy of Sonia Manzano ( Maria ) to address affective concerns . In later seasons , Sesame Street addressed real @-@ life disasters such as the September 11 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina .

The show 's goals for outreach were addressed during its first season by an extensive and innovative promotional campaign targeted at children and their families in low @-@ income , inner city homes because these groups tended to not watch educational programs on television and because traditional methods of promotion and advertising were not effective with them . In subsequent seasons , the producers developed a series of educational materials used in preschool settings .

= = Purpose = =

According to author Malcolm Gladwell , " Sesame Street was built around a single , breakthrough insight : that if you can hold the attention of children , you can educate them " . Gerald S. Lesser , the first chair of the advisory board of the Children 's Television Workshop ( the CTW , or " the Workshop " ) , the organization that oversaw the show 's production , stated that to be effective as an educational tool , television needed to capture , focus , and sustain children 's attention . Sesame Street was the first children 's show that paid attention to the structure of each episode and made " small but critical adjustments " to each segment to capture children 's attention .

Sesame Street was one of the few children 's television programs that utilized a detailed and comprehensive educational curriculum , with specific educational goals , in its content . The show 's goals were garnered from in @-@ house formative research which informed and improved production , and independent summative evaluations conducted by the Educational Testing Service ( ETS ) during the show 's first two seasons that measured the program 's educational effectiveness . The first curriculum was created in a series of five seminars , led by Lesser and attended by Sesame Street 's new creative staff and by educational and child development specialists , in 1968 . The participants generated long lists of goals , which the Workshop organized into five categories . Eventually , these categories were whittled down to four : symbolic representation , cognitive processes , the physical environment , and the social environment . The show 's curriculum was eventually restated to identify the writers ' goals instead of the child 's .

= = Cognitive goals = =

Lesser reported in his 1974 book , Children and Television : Lessons Learned From Sesame Street

, written to document the development of the show and the CTW , that one of the goals of the show 's creators was " the fundamental purpose of preparing children for school " . They were aware of the " individual suffering and frustration " of the child who was ill @-@ prepared for the demands of school , so they sought to instill in their young viewers an appetite for learning . Two related goals were providing their viewers with basic educational skills , which Lesser insisted was valuable to inner @-@ city parents , and teaching children both what and how to think . The show 's creators decided to only include in their curriculum the range of skills of the three to five @-@ year @-@ old child , and not focus on skills they already had , or on skills beyond their reach .

Sesame Street 's creators recognized that television lent itself well to the use of modelling as a teaching tool . They understood that children tended to imitate what they saw on the screen , so many writing and production methods were used to directly model effective verbal communication . Indirect modeling , without explicit labeling , was used to demonstrate positive behaviors as well . One of the positive behaviors they modeled was inquisitiveness and the enjoyment of learning . If humor , for example , interfered with the intended instructional message or exhibited inappropriate behavior , it was removed . As Muppet performer Fran Brill explained , the show 's puppeteers demonstrated emotions by banging their puppets ' heads against the wall or by having them fall backwards , but when research found that these behaviors did not demonstrate good models of appropriate behavior , these behaviors were changed . The Muppet Roosevelt Franklin , for example , was removed from the show because many leaders in the African American community felt that he displayed negative cultural stereotypes .

The creators of Sesame Street believed that young children were easily distracted by peripheral details and were unable to selectively attend to the most useful aspects of what they observed , so they gave special care to , as Lesser put it , " make salient what the child is expected to learn " . They eliminated irrelevant and distracting content without making the content uninteresting , especially in repeated viewings . The content they presented had to compete with the distractions that occurred as a result of viewing at home , so they realized that the show had to have high appeal . They found , however , that the relationship between appeal and comprehension was more complicated than they initially thought , and discovered that young children probably did not attend to material that was presented at a higher level than they were ready to understand . The Workshop 's researchers found that by crafting the show 's segments , children 's verbal participation and interaction could be increased , which addressed their critics ' concerns about children 's passivity while watching television .

Repetition was a convention used often on Sesame Street . The creators understood that repetition gave young children opportunities to practice new skills and assisted them in making a connection between new and unfamiliar concepts . They observed that children seemed to enjoy some material more after viewing them several times , and allowed them to predict and anticipate the outcome of a sequence . Repetition made it easier to teach complex concepts or situations a child would not be able to comprehend from a single viewing , and allowed children to explore different facets of a subject . In the early years of Sesame Street , the producers took advantage of repetition as an effective teaching tool by often repeating the same segment many times during the course of an episode ; in the first ten seasons , one in six segments was a repeat of an earlier one . The Workshop also learned that varying the details while repeating the same format was also an effective use of repetition .

Television historian Robert W. Morrow saw what he called " the often repeated alphabet recitation segment " as an example of the show 's use of repetition . For example , in a short film in which actor James Earl Jones recited the alphabet , Jones made long pauses before each letter , which were superimposed in a corner of the screen moments before he said it . According to Cooney , some educational advisors recommended against using Jones , thinking that he would frighten young viewers , but children ended up loving his segments . The producers found that children who had seen the segment a few times said the letter before Jones did , and Jones often served as confirmation or correction . The producers viewed this as a way to make television more interactive , and dubbed it " the James Earl Jones effect " .

Humor was used on Sesame Street to both attract the attention of its young viewers and to , as

Lesser put it , " entice parents and older siblings to share the young child 's viewing " , called " coviewing " by Truglio and Fisch . Jim Henson 's characters and humor were instrumental in creating the show 's " two @-@ tiered audience " of younger and older viewers . Lesser went so far as to state that educational television was " completely dependent upon the effective use of humor " . Lesser also stated that in order for comedy to be an effective teaching tool , it had to coincide with the lesson being taught . Although critics complained that slapstick was too violent for children 's television , the Workshop found that it was the most effective comedy form they used , and as Lesser said , " a favorite with preschoolers " . Morrow reported that the only violence depicted on Sesame Street was " slapstick punctuation " , and that it was used only in animations and short films .

Another way the Workshop encouraged co @-@ viewing was through the use of cultural references that only adults would understand . Celebrities familiar to adults and older children also appeared on the show Cooney 's previous documentary production experience and producer Dave Connell 's " wide ranging contacts in the media " resulted in successful bookings of celebrities on the show , even before the show became successful . As of 2009 , over 500 celebrities had appeared on Sesame Street .

= = Affective goals = =

At first , the creators of Sesame Street addressed " affective goals " indirectly , believing that focusing on cognitive and educational goals would naturally increase children 's self @-@ esteem and feelings of competency . Their viewers ' racial identities were addressed by integrating the show with , at first , black and white actors and performers . Eventually their critics during the show 's first season forced the Workshop to address affective goals more overtly , which occurred after " extensive research and planning " . The affective goals they addressed were social competence , tolerance of diversity , and nonaggressive ways of resolving conflict , which was depicted through interpersonal disputes among its residents , making Sesame Street an " idealized place of child empowerment " .

According to Davis , Sesame Street 's curriculum began addressing affective goals more overtly during the 1980s , when the show focused on " turning inward , expanding its young viewers ' world " . Davis reported that their affective goals were inspired by the experiences of its writing staff , cast , and crew . For example , in one of the show 's landmarks , the producers addressed grief after the 1982 death of Will Lee , who had played Mr. Hooper since the show 's premiere .

For the 1988 and 1989 seasons , the topics of love , marriage , and childbirth were addressed when they created a storyline in which the characters Luis and Maria fall in love , marry , and have a child , Gabi . Sonia Manzano , the actress who played Maria , had married and became pregnant ; according to the book *Sesame Street Unpaved* , published after the show 's thirtieth anniversary in 1999 , Manzano 's real @-@ life experiences gave the show 's writers and producers the idea . Research was done before any scripts were written to gain an understanding of the previous studies about preschoolers ' understanding of love , marriage , and family . The show 's research staff found that at the time , there was very little relevant research done about children 's understanding of these topics , and no books for children had been written about them . Studies done after the episodes about Maria 's pregnancy aired showed that as a result of watching these episodes , children 's understanding of pregnancy increased .

Another way Sesame Street addressed affective goals was by addressing real @-@ life disasters . For example , the producers addressed the September 11 terrorist attacks with an episode that aired in early 2002 . They also produced a series of four episodes that aired after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 . These episodes were used in Sesame Workshop 's Community Outreach program .

Gikow called writer Emily Perl Kingsley an " expert " at interpreting the show 's curriculum goals surrounding tolerance , diversity , and inclusion , especially as it related to the disability community . Kingsley has been a leader in the Workshop for ensuring that people with disabilities were included in the show . For example , she hired the Little Theater of the Deaf to appear on Sesame Street , and was instrumental in the addition of Deaf actress Linda Bove to its cast . Kingsley 's son Jason ,

who had Down syndrome , also appeared several times on the show . As Kingsley reported , " ... Sesame Street has a better record than any other show in the history of television of doing this on a regular basis in a comfortable kind of way " .

### = = = Healthy Habits for Life = = =

Healthy Habits for Life is a series of segments and storylines in Sesame Street . Launched in season 36 , the segments are a " multi @-@ year , content @-@ driven initiative to help young children and their caregivers establish an early foundation of healthy habits that can last a lifetime . " Developed in the early part of the 2000s as childhood obesity became a critical issue in the public mind , Sesame Workshop took interest in promoting healthy lifestyles to its viewers . At the start of every show , before the sponsorship list and opening sequence ran , a " Healthy Moment " segment aired . Generally , these segments included celebrity guests .

As part of the Healthy Habits programming , Sesame Workshop began " broadening Cookie Monster 's eating habits " . A 1999 Sesame Street Beat Newsletter for parents discussed his balanced lifestyle :

Lately , Cookie has also taught children the importance of eating a balanced diet . This doesn 't mean that Cookie rounds out his diet with plates , trucks , ukuleles , and other objects the munching monster has been known to devour . This means that Cookie now eats a fair share of salads , meats , and vegetables to set a good example for viewers at home . And Cookie doesn 't mind a bit . Sure he loves cookies , but he likes the act of eating in general . As long as his mouth is full , his heart is happy .

The international media picked up on the story , but instead a high percentage twisted it into sensationalism , with headlines like " ' Sesame Street ' tosses its cookies " or claiming the character was " sent on a diet " . An Internet petition / boycott received hundreds of signatures of support , from misinformed web users .

There have been many product tie @-@ ins , including the Sony Wonder home video release Happy Healthy Monsters , a series of books from Random House , and product placement efforts including Del Monte canned vegetables featuring the characters , as well as Sunkist strawberries and blueberries . Hannaford Supermarkets ran an " Apple of the Month " promotion , featuring the characters on various varieties ' stickers , with activity sheets describing the unique traits of each fruit .

### = = Outreach = =

Sesame Street focused on children from disadvantaged backgrounds , but the show 's creators recognized that in order to achieve the kind of success they wanted , they needed to encourage all children , no matter what their background , to watch it . At the same time , however , their primary goal was to make the show appealing to inner @-@ city families , a group that did not traditionally watch educational programs on public television . As Lesser stated , " If the series did not work for poor children , the entire project would fail " . Morrow called the new show 's audience " concentric " , with its targeted audience , " the urban poor " , within the larger circle of all preschoolers .

The Workshop devoted 8 % of their initial budget to advertise the new show . In what Morrow called " an extensive campaign " that Lesser stated " would demand at least as much ingenuity as production and research " , they promoted the show with educators and the broadcast industry . The Workshop understood that a special effort had to be made to reach their target community because traditional methods of promotion and advertising were not effective with these groups . To get the word out to their target audience in the inner cities , they hired Evelyn Davis from the Urban League , whom Michael Davis called " remarkable , unsinkable , and indispensable " , as the Workshop 's first Vice President of Community Relations and head of the Workshop 's Community Educational Services ( CES ) division .

After Sesame Street 's popularity became established after its first season , the CES ' outreach efforts turned from promotion to the development of educational materials used in preschool settings

. The child @-@ care community eventually became the CES ' " core constituency " . Early outreach efforts included mobile viewing units that broadcast the show in the inner cities , in Appalachia , in Native American communities , and in migrant worker camps . In the early 1980s , the CES developed into the Sesame Street Preschool Education Program ( PEP ) , whose goal was to assist preschools , by combining television viewing , books , hands @-@ on activities , and other media , in using the show as an educational resource .

The Workshop 's outreach programs included providing materials to non @-@ English speaking children and adults . Instead of following the traditional practice of translating their English materials into Spanish , for example , they employed what they called " versioning " , or creating parallel sets of materials that conveyed the same content and messages in culturally and linguistically relevant ways . Starting in 2006 , the Workshop expanded its outreach by creating a series of PBS specials and DVDs focusing on how military deployment affects the families of soldiers . The Workshop 's outreach efforts also focused on families of prisoners , health and wellness , and safety .