



THE JOAN GANZ COONEY CENTER, NAMED FOR *SESAME STREET*'S VISIONARY FOUNDER, TO EXAMINE DIGITAL MEDIA'S EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL

Center Will Explore Kids' Literacy Development in the New Digital Playground

New York, December 6, 2007 – In 1969, Joan Ganz Cooney and her colleagues created a pop culture phenomenon called *Sesame Street* (www.sesamestreet.org) forever linking the words, 'educational' and 'television' and harnessing the power of the medium in a unique way. Almost 40 years and 150 Emmy Awards later, Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind *Sesame Street*, is taking Ms. Cooney's experiment into the digital age with the unveiling today of THE JOAN GANZ COONEY CENTER at Sesame Workshop (www.joanganzcooneycenter.org). The Center, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research and production institute, will explore the 21st century equivalent of her original question, "How can emerging media help children learn?"

Focusing on the needs of elementary age children, The Joan Ganz Cooney Center will conduct and support research, create new media properties, and stimulate a national dialogue on how interactive technologies can be utilized to help accelerate children's learning. Based at Sesame Workshop, the Center will work closely with leading universities and industry partners that are engaged in cutting edge media and learning innovations. New media platforms such as the web, cell phones and video games will be examined to better understand their role in children's literacy development both in school and out. The Center will also champion best practices and develop policy agendas to stimulate investment in promising and proven new media technologies for children. Two Cooney Fellows have been appointed, who will assist with carrying out the Center's objectives.

"When *Sesame Street* was created, we brought national attention to the sorry state of children's television and challenged the industry to raise the bar," said Joan Ganz Cooney. "Today, history is repeating itself as the new media environment resembles the old, vast wasteland. The Center will lead a much needed conversation on how young children can learn from new media innovations, and be a major force in getting industry to act on their behalf."

Michael H. Levine, Ph.D., an early childhood education research and policy expert has been named Executive Director of the Center. Prior to joining the Center, Michael Levine

served as Vice President, New Media and Executive Director, Education for Asia Society, overseeing the global nonprofit's interactive media and educational initiatives. Previously, he led Carnegie Corporation of New York's groundbreaking work in early childhood development, educational media, and primary grades reforms. He is also currently a senior associate at Yale University's Zigler Center for Child Development and Social Policy.

Michael Levine added, "I am greatly privileged to lead a new institution with an essential mission. The Workshop's vision has left an indelible imprint on the children's media field and will serve as a vital anchor for our work. Today's children are living in a fast-paced, technology driven world. But far too many are struggling to learn both the basic and advanced literacy skills they will need to compete and cooperate in the new global economy. The Center will be a catalyst for creative research, cross-sector production partnerships, and needed policy changes."

The Center's inaugural report *The Enduring Power of Pow! Wham!: Children, Digital Media, and Our Nation's Future* (executive summary available at www.joanganzcooneycenter.org) places a sharp focus on the needs of elementary school children, who are immersed in media far earlier than any previous generation. According to the study, entertainment media including the internet, games, and software are major influences in children's lives and too often provide little or no intentional educational value. The report documents the potential of digital media to encourage learning, but concludes that funding for research applications is not yet a national priority. The study includes key action recommendations to advance children's literacy skills, and to address learning gaps that are growing with a new 'digital divide.' Written by Dr. Rima Shore, Adelaide Weismann Chair in Educational Leadership at Bank Street College of Education, observations were assembled from over 50 leaders in their respective areas.

Future research will also examine key policy issues such as how to address the nation's 4th grade reading slump, how media can be better deployed to prepare second language learners, and how to overcome market barriers in developing educational games.

The Center has launched an interactive website, www.joanganzcooneycenter.org, featuring applications that support the Center's goals. The site will expand in the spring to include podcasts, blogs and other new media features and an online community for policy and industry leaders, researchers and practitioners.

"Joan Ganz Cooney has already contributed more to young children's joy in learning than anyone in the past four decades," said Gary E. Knell, Sesame Workshop's President and CEO. "With the creation of the Center, we have the unprecedented opportunity to build on the experiment she began; putting new media to the task of helping children develop vital literacy and learning skills. By harnessing the power of educational media technologies, we can reach out to a new generation of kids and champion innovations that will help shape the media landscape, we hope, for the next forty years."

Leading the day to day operations with Michael Levine is Ann My Thai. Ann My Thai, who was deeply influenced by Sesame Street as a child of Vietnamese refugees, will lead strategic partnership efforts with high-tech and gaming industries and oversee organizational strategy

and growth. Before joining the Center, she worked for Education for Development, Vietnam, which develops informal educational programming for children in Ho Chi Minh City. Directing research for the Center is Dixie Ching, who previously worked on digital media studies at the Center for Children and Technology and in documentary production.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center was established with the generous support of Peter G. Peterson, Chairman and Co-Founder of The Blackstone Group. Additional support was provided by Harvey Weinstein, Genius Products, Inc. and Sesame Workshop.

About Sesame Workshop

Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit educational organization that changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. As the single largest informal educator of young children, local Sesame Street programs produced in countries as diverse as South Africa, Bangladesh and India are making a difference in over 120 nations. Using proprietary research to create engaging and enriching content, Sesame Workshop produces programs such as Dragon Tales and Pinky Dinky Doo. In addition, multimedia needs-driven initiatives provide families tools for addressing such issues as children's health, military deployment and emergency preparedness. As a nonprofit, product proceeds and philanthropic donations support Sesame Workshop's educational research and creative content for children around the world. Learn more at www.sesameworkshop.org.

Contacts:

Ellen Lewis
212-875-6396
ellen.lewis@sesameworkshop.org

Jodi Lefkowitz
212-875-6497
jodi.lefkowitz@sesameworkshop.org

Sheila Feren
FerenComm for Sesame Workshop
212-983-9898
sheilaf@ferencomm.com