

# CHILDREN'S MEDIA BAROMETER 2010:

The Use of Media among 0-8-year-olds in Finland



Sirkku Kotilainen (ed.)  
Finnish Society on Media Education



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*An English Summary of the Original Finnish Report*

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## SUMMARY

The Finnish Society on Media Education conducted a study on children's media use by interviewing children and observing their media environment, and by a questionnaire targeted at their parents. 36 children took part in the interviews and observations - at home, in day care and in schools - in different parts of the country. 743 parents answered the national survey, which corresponds to the geographical distribution of 0-8-year-olds in the country.

Within the project we conducted an experiment in which 14-15-year-old comprehensive school (upper level) peer students were employed as questionnaire interviewers for the youngest (lower level) students. A total of 55 7-8 year-old children took part in the one-to-one interviews. The training and support (in interview situations) for peer students was provided by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, which organises peer support in Finnish schools.

According to the study, children's media use begins at a very early age. A majority of 0-2-year-olds listened to books, radio, and sound recordings. Even children under 12 months of age played digital games, and used the internet and mobile phones. One-year-olds were also daily in contact with TV and visual recordings. Children of this age mainly used media in the company of their parents or other adults. The media use of 3-4-year-olds was somewhat more varied than that of younger children, but it was mainly concentrated on similar media. At this age, a child's individual taste in media begins to develop, and the tastes of girls and boys begin to slowly diverge. The pleasure and joy, as well as the excitement and suspense children experienced with different media appeared to be very meaningful for them.

Books and TV proved the most popular media among 5-6-year-olds as well. Radio, and audio and visual recordings were in part replaced by magazines, digital games, and the internet. The differences in tastes between girls and boys were sharpened at this stage. A majority of 7-8-year-olds used all media included in this research. The greatest difference with other age groups was the drastic rise in the use of digital games, the internet, and mobile phones.

The most useful forms of collecting data turned out to be observation at home (0-3-year-olds), and interviews (over 4-year-olds), including questionnaire surveys conducted by peer students. Through observation, it was possible to note the nonverbal messages in the expressions and gestures of the youngest children. Answering an adult researcher's questions seemed to be easiest for a child when they were allowed some meaningful activity (f. ex. drawing, playing) during the interview.

The study shows that media culture is a part of children's daily lives from the earliest age. It is crucial to recognise and acknowledge this aspect, from the point of view of children's rights. Thus it would be possible to enhance 1) the supply of information, as well as the opportunities for self-expression and participation with age-appropriate media for children, and 2) opportunities for adult support and awareness concerning their media use and various activities with media culture. The promotion of children's media literacies should be adjunct with life-long learning from the very beginning. Families with small children should be provided with more information on children's media cultures and media education. The media contents aimed at children should be researched in more depth, particularly when it comes to gender and cultural differences.

Keywords: babies, children, media

## INTRODUCTION

There has been little research into the media uses of children under the school age, and particularly children under the age of four. However, the need for such research has now occurred because in the West, media usage begins at an increasingly young age. Fresh survey results are needed in this age group, to aid early education as well as the media education aimed at parents. Simultaneously, there will be an enhancement to the practices and environments pertaining to children's safe use of media.

The aim of the Children's Media Barometer 2010 has been to describe children's media use on a national level, and also the development of methods which would enable frequent follow-up research. Frequent follow-up research - conducted for instance every other year - is crucial, because children's media environment is in constant change. Furthermore, as children grow older, the ways they use media change; thus, a pre-schooler's activities with media cannot be considered to be similar as those of a two-year-old.

Within the project, several data collection methods have been employed, including a questionnaire aimed at parents, observation of babies and children in their usual media environments, and interviewing children mainly at home, in day care, and at school. It is important that children's own voice is heard when it comes to their daily matters - including media use. One aim of this research was to expand children's agency. This was done f. ex. by conducting an experiment in which upper-level comprehensive school pupils were trained by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare to conduct a questionnaire survey on younger, lower-level pupils.

The English summary provides an overview of the media uses of Finnish children of 0-8 years of age, and evaluates the methods that were used and experimented with during the research. If conducted on a regular basis, a small children's media barometer can also have international consequence, because the need for media education is now considered to be a part of life-long learning experience, starting from the earliest childhood.

### Research on Small Children's Media Use Needed

In the West, children begin to use media in varied ways at an early age. Media, such as TV programmes, DVDs and games are being designed more often for under three-year-olds. The media environment of small children is undergoing a constant change, and therefore studies should take into account children's media relationships and the available media contents as broadly as possible.

Children also begin their internet use at a younger and younger age; internet usage appears to increase, and even become regular at the age of 5-7. There has been more research into children's internet use in the 2000s, but still published studies on the internet use of under five-year-olds have been marginal compared to older age groups.

During the early years of the 21st century, the society has also begun to note the need for researching younger children's media use. The Children's Media Barometer is one instance of such concerns. A similar project, "Småungar & Medier 2010" (Medierådet 2010) has been carried out in Sweden, using a questionnaire aimed at the parents of 2-9-year-olds (N=2000). The report

states for instance that young children's internet use is mainly made up of gaming and watching video clips on YouTube.

In Norway, Medietilsynet published their barometer "Barn og digitale medier 2010" in 2010. The survey shows that Norwegian children surf the net at a younger and younger age: the children are introduced to the internet at the age of six or earlier. Five per cent of 6-8-year-olds have played a game with an 18+ age rating. The data concerning younger children was collected by interviewing their parents (all of whom had access to the internet at home) over the phone. There were also 1777 9-16-year-old interviewees.

The Children's Media Barometer report helps to update research results on young children's media use. In our study, we looked at the following themes:

- the availability of media devices for children
- children's activities with media
- the change in media activities as a child grows older
- the most usual and most agreeable company in which children use media
- gendered practices in media use
- emotions evoked in the child by media use (for instance joy or suspense)
- children's favourite media and media contents
- the rules of media use at home

The Children's Media Barometer 2010 project has been carried out by the Finnish Society on Media Education, along with the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, the Universities of Tampere, Jyväskylä, and Kuopio, Aalto University, and the experts at the Finnish Board of Film Classification. The research report has been edited by Sirkku Kotilainen, PhD. The statistical section was compiled by Annika Suoninen, PhD, the qualitative section by Terhi Walamies, M.Pol.Sc., Suvi Tuominen, M.Ss. was responsible for the peer student experiment. The summary of the report was written by Saara Pääjärvi M.E.

## ANNIKKA SUONINEN

### Children's Media Use as Described By Their Parents

The broadest data for the Children's Media Barometer 2010 was collected with a questionnaire that was targeted at the parents of 0-8-year-olds. The questionnaire was answered by 743 families. Sampling for the survey was conducted on provincial level, and the research data was weighed so as to represent the geographical distribution of 0-8-year-olds in Finland.

The youngest children with whom the questionnaire was concerned, were born in October 2010; they were thus under two months old at the time of the survey. The oldest children were born in February 2001, and were nearly nine years old. The answers will mainly be dealt with in four age groups (0-2-year-olds, 3-4-year-olds, 5-6-year-olds, and 7-8-year-olds).

There was a slight majority of answers concerning boys (52.8%) over girls (47.2%), as the percentage of boys in the entire researched age group is 51.1, and that of girls 48.9. Thus there is a small overrepresentation of boys in the sample.

Out of all the children taking part in the survey, 96 per cent lived full time with the family in which the questionnaire was completed. The remaining 4 per cent lived with the family at least half of the time. 84 per cent of the families had at least two parents, and 16 per cent were one-parent families. Out of all the families, 38 per cent lived in cities, 26 per cent in the suburbs, 18 per cent in smaller towns, and 18 per cent in villages or in the countryside.

35 per cent of the children were the only children of their families. 40 per cent of the families had two children, 17 per cent three children, 5 per cent had four children, and 3 per cent of the families had five children or more.

The questionnaires were filled in in 97 per cent of the cases by the mother or other female parent; only 3 per cent were filled in by fathers or other male parents. Of the persons who answered the survey 21 per cent were under 30 years of age, 57 per cent were between 30 and 39 years, and 22 per cent over 40 years of age.

The questionnaire aimed at parents was concerned with the availability of different media appliances in the home, the use of the most common media, and the opinions of parents concerning children's media use and the media contents aimed at children. The questionnaire was designed to be as technologically neutral as possible, so that it can be used repeatedly even though technologies may change. Below are described the results to do with children's media use.

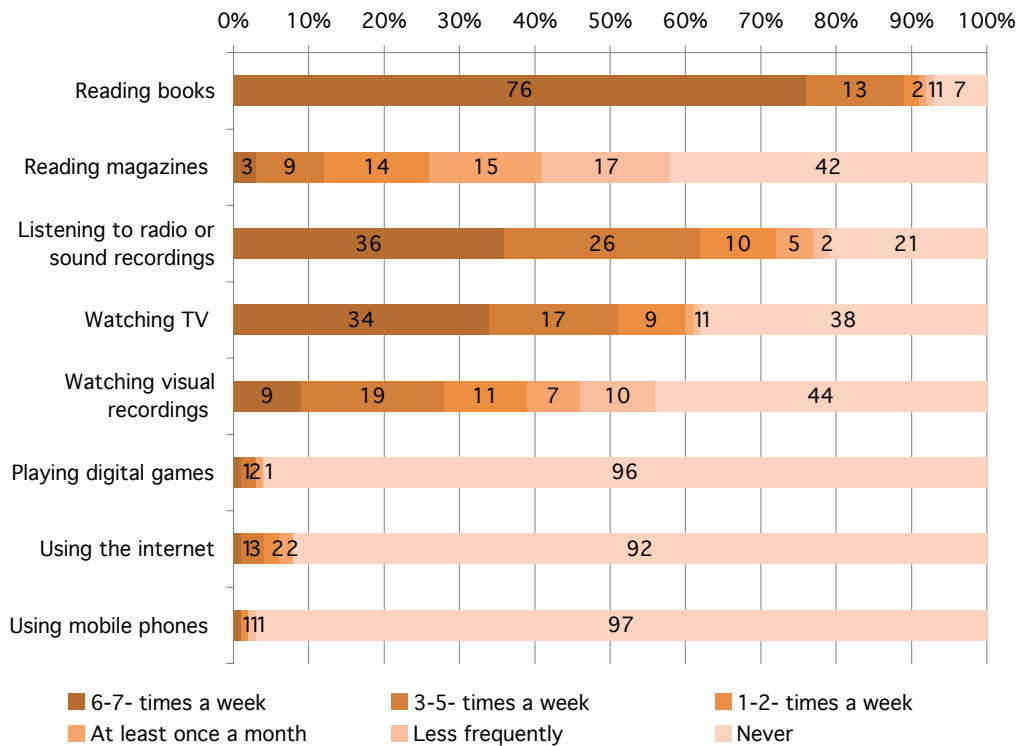
#### Small Children's Activities with Media

##### 0-2-year-olds: Media Use begins in Babyhood

Children's media usage begins at the very earliest age. The media world of babies under the age of 12 months was largely made up of books and listening to radio or audio recordings. One-year-olds began to watch TV and visual recordings. Some children under the age of 12 months

played digital games, and used the internet and mobile phones; yet, a majority of 0-2-year-olds didn't use these media. Around this age, children's media use took place under the supervision of parents or other adults, and to some extent with elder siblings.

Image 19. Media use of 0-2-year-olds



Three quarters of the smallest children read or browsed books daily; 91 per cent engaged in these activities weekly. 55 per cent of children were being read to daily. The smallest children read picture books, or books with both text and images. A third of the children listened to radio or audio recordings daily; 72 per cent listened to them weekly.

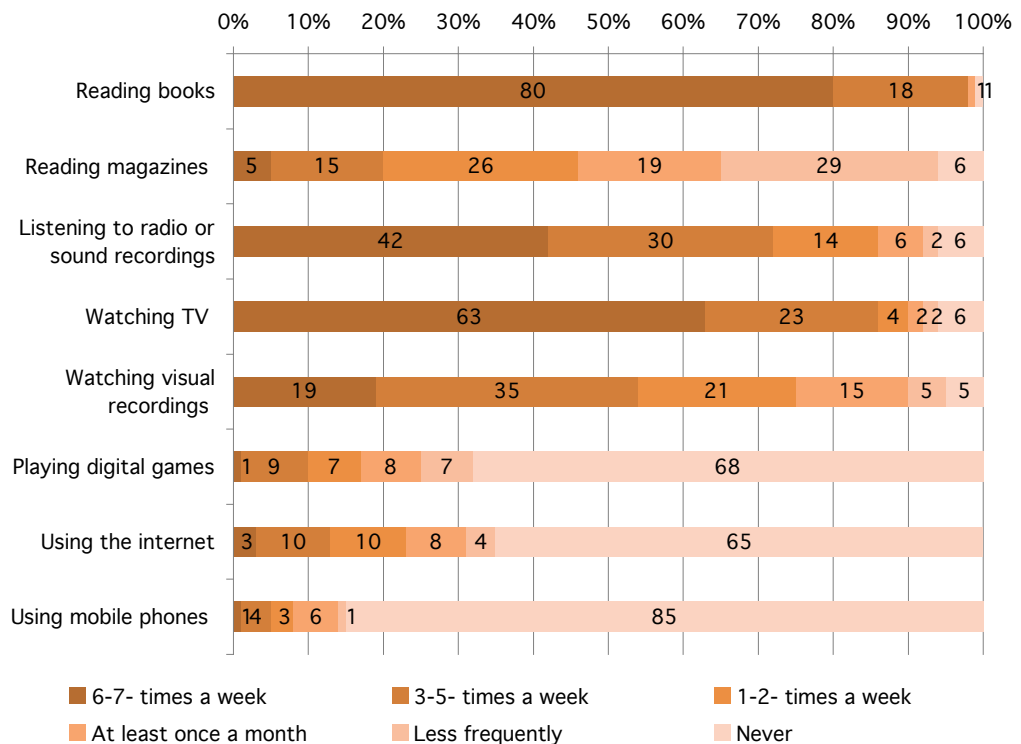
A quarter of under-year-olds, and two thirds of one-year-olds, watched TV or visual recordings. Out of all the 0-2-year-olds, a third watched TV daily, and 60 per cent weekly. One tenth of the children watched visual recordings daily, and 39 per cent did so weekly. The smallest children watched *Pikku kakkonen* and other TV programmes directed at their age group, either on TV or on visual recordings. Some of the TV programmes watched by the youngest children also included programmes their parents watched, such as news and current affairs programmes.

### 3-4-year-olds: The Emergence of Individual Tastes

3-4-year-olds mainly used the same media as 0-2-year-olds; however, their media usage began to diversify somewhat. The greatest difference compared to the younger children may be that children's media usage at this age begins to take place with siblings and other children as often

as with parents; furthermore, children's individual tastes began to develop at this age. Some children begin to use digital games and the internet; however, these media are not part of the everyday media of most children of this age.

Image 20 The Media Use of 3-4-year-olds



Out of the 3-4-year-olds, 80 per cent read books daily, and 98 per cent weekly. Over two thirds were being read to daily, 87 per cent at least three times a week, and 98 per cent at least once a week. The tradition of bedtime stories seems to remain strong in Finnish families. The most popular types of books were those including both text and images; another popular type is the comic book; comics were read weekly by a third of children. 42 per cent of children listened to radio or sound recordings daily, and 86 per cent did so weekly.

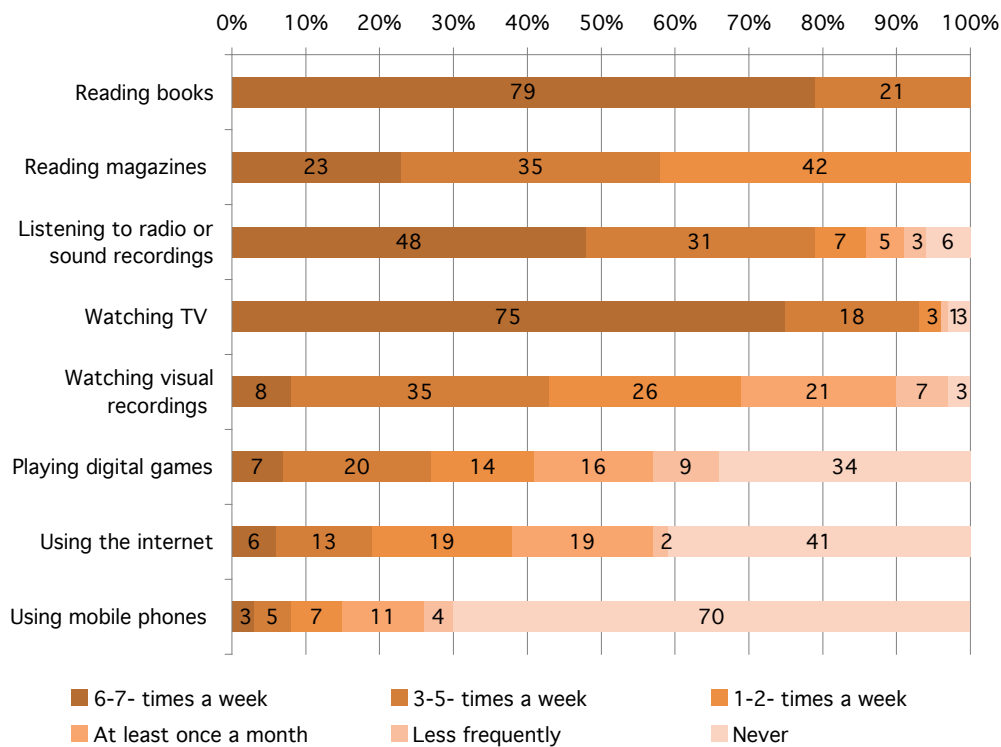
*Pikku kakkonen* and *Moomins* were the most popular TV programmes for both girls and boys of this age group; otherwise, the tastes begin to diverge. Different types of vehicles and machines are involved in a significant number of programmes preferred by boys; girls prefer programmes which have animals as their main characters.

Using the internet and playing digital games begins somewhat earlier among boys. Out of 3-4-year-olds, 32 per cent of boys and 13 per cent of girls used the internet. 25 per cent of boys and 10 per cent of girls played digital games. Among the most popular internet sites for children of this age were the home pages of children's programmes and YouTube; boys also preferred some gaming sites. Those children (both girls and boys) who played digital games preferred children's and learning games; some boys also played driving games and platform games.

### 5-6-year-olds: The Beginning of Gaming and Internet Use

Books and television were among the most popular media for 5-6-year-olds as well. The use of radio, and sound and visual recordings was somewhat less frequent than among younger age groups; however, the amount of time spent on reading magazines, playing digital games, and using the internet increased noticeably: a majority of 5-6-year-olds used these media at least once a week.

Image 21 The Media Use of 5-6-year-olds



79 per cent of this age group read or browsed books every day; everyone engaged in these activities weekly. 58 per cent had books read to them daily, three quarters at least three times a week, and 91 per cent at least once a week. Half of the children read comic books at least once a week.

At this age, girls and boys had rather noticeable differences in their TV preferences. *Pikku Kakkonen* and *Moomins* remain popular among both sexes; in addition, girls watched traditional children's programmes and various 'girls' series'; boys preferred more action-oriented adventures.

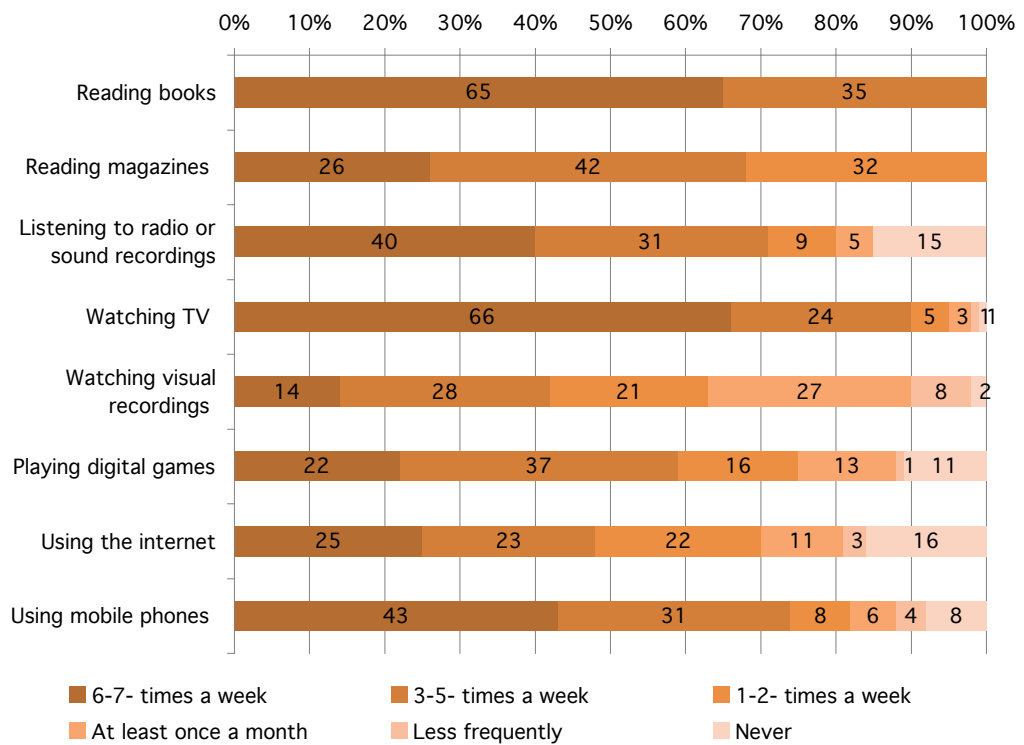
A half of boys and a quarter of girls in this age group played digital games weekly. Girls usually played children's and learning games and platform games, whereas boys preferred driving, sports, and adventure games.

38 per cent of the children used the internet weekly. Their favourite sites included the home pages of children's programmes and various gaming sites.

### 7-8-year-olds: School Brings Mobile Phones and Literacy

A majority of 7-8-year-olds used all the media involved in this study: they read books and magazines, listened to radio or audio recordings, watched television and visual recordings, played digital games, and used the internet and mobile phones at least once a week. The greatest difference compared to the younger age groups was the rapid increase in the use of digital games, the internet, and mobile phones.

Image 22. The Media Use of 7-8-year-olds



Out of the 7-8-year-olds, 65 per cent read or browsed books daily; on a weekly basis everyone engaged in these activities. Around this age, children learn to read by themselves; yet a third of children were still read aloud to daily, and two thirds at least once a week. In addition to books with pictures, children were beginning to read books which include only text. As well as comic books, children also began to read children's and hobby magazines.

40 per cent of the children listened to radio or audio recordings daily, and 80 per cent did so weekly. Daily, two thirds watched TV, and 14 per cent watched visual recordings. Weekly, almost all 7-8-year-olds watched TV, and 63 per cent watched visual recordings.

TV programmes favoured by girls include traditional children's programmes, pre-teen series, nature programmes and game shows which include music. Boys' tastes have switched from traditional children's programmes to animated adventure series, sports, and reality TV. Unlike younger children, while watching visual recordings, 7-8-year-olds prefer films to shorter programmes.

Weekly, digital games were played by 86 per cent of boys and 65 per cent of girls. 30 per cent of boys and 15 per cent of girls played these games daily. Girls mainly played platform games and learning games, boys preferred platform games, driving, sports, and adventure games.

70 per cent of 7-8-year-olds used the internet weekly. Their favourite sites were mainly gaming-oriented. Girls particularly prefer sites that fall between children- and youth-oriented social networks and gaming sites, such as panfu.fi, littlepetshop.com, and gosupermodel.com.

Out of 7-8-year-old boys, 39 per cent had their own game consoles, and 55 per cent had either a console or a computer in their own room. 7 per cent of girls had their own console, and 28 had either a console or a computer in their room. Boys also had TVs and DVD or Blu-ray players in their room more often than girls.

82 per cent of seven-year-olds and 94 per cent of eight-year-olds had their own mobile phones. Among younger children, however, mobile phone ownership is rare. Out of those who had a mobile phone, 92 per cent used theirs weekly. The most typical way to use a mobile phone was to call or send text messages; a half of children also played games on their phones, and a quarter took pictures or listened to music.

## TERHI WALAMIES

### Results from Observing and Interviewing Children

When researching children and childhood, and collecting data for such research, it is important to have a relationship with the children themselves, not just with adults or institutional authorities. This project wanted to highlight children's own voices in relation to media, which means that children themselves were interviewed. Because some of the children taking part in the survey were infants, we decided to conduct observations within their own media environments – at home. Interviews of older children were conducted at school and in day care, while children were playing or drawing. Older children participated in the research also through questionnaire surveys which were conducted in collaboration with peer students (for more information, see Ch. 4)

#### How the interviews and observations were carried out

The research had ten locations of qualitative data collection: day care centres (4), private day care (1), and schools (1); in addition children were observed in four homes. The locations were situated in six cities (small, mid-size, and large) in different parts of Finland. These cities were chosen for their location and their socioeconomic position in order to get as varied a sample as possible. 36 children took part in the observations and interviews, out of whom three were 0-2-year-olds, fourteen 3-5-year-olds, twenty-four 5-6-year-olds, and four 7-8-year-olds.

Small children's media use was usually observed for two days in each location. In data collection the following methods were used: researcher's observation notes, children's interviews and drawings, and photographing and filming participants. Observations and filmed material made the data illustrative, as they captured children's actions, facial expressions, and gestures while engaging with media.

Thematic interviews were used most often in the qualitative part of the research, mainly because it provided both the child and the adult room to manoeuvre. We found that the most practicable interview situation involved groups of two children. While interviewing 3-6-year-olds, we employed the drawing interview method, in which a child was asked to draw their own dream room. The researcher carried on the interview while the child was drawing, and the drawings were afterwards used in analysis to reinforce other data. In the drawings media themes were not central: roughly a third includes some references to media, usually single objects. Nevertheless, drawing seemed to make it easier for the child to concentrate on the interview. It was important to motivate children for the interview, because of the novelty of the situation. Objects and concepts which may appear unfamiliar for the child (such as different media appliances) were introduced with illustrations.

A great deal of sensitivity was required from the interviewer, because it was often challenging for children to remember for instance the names of the games they played. Nevertheless, a child might recall the name when the interviewer returned to the topic later on. Furthermore, interviews had to be short, because after 15 minutes children began to show signs of fatigue.

When interviewing children, it is crucial to keep in mind the power difference between a child and an adult: a child often thinks that the adult expects 'correct' answers. In some of the home observation situations, parents also took part in the interviews. Particularly the answers of the mothers of 0-3-year-olds completed the researcher's observations; however, with older children a parent's presence could prove disruptive. In these situations, it is helpful to ask parents to move to another room, from where they can hear the interview without participating in it. In this way, it is ensured that the child's own voice is heard.

### Qualitative results concerning children's relationships with media

The media use of children involved in the research was diverse and active. Media use begins in babyhood. The activities of parents and their relationship with media seems to have an effect on the child's subsequent activities. For instance, a child may use the internet by sitting in a parent's lap before beginning to surf independently. As a child grows older, her own choices and engagement with media increase.

Music, books, magazines, and TV programmes concerned all 0-8-year-olds who took part in the qualitative part of the research. The children are being read to, and they browse or read books and magazines. Babies begin to watch TV from the earliest age. Almost all the families taking part in the qualitative part had a computer at home. Children as young as 0-3-years of age have the internet as a part of their media environment; however, a third of the 36 children did not recognise the internet at all. Activities with social media were limited to some isolated mentions.

Children over 4 years of age report on their activities concerning digital games on consoles, computers, and online. Around a third of children – a majority of them boys – report that they play digital games. Children told the interviewer that they usually play alone or with siblings, and prefer to play alone or with friends. All 5-8-year-olds report that they want a mobile phone, which, according to the children, is used most often for making calls and gaming.

Gender differences occurred in content preferences, for instance in the topics of favourite games. Boys reported they usually play games involving action, suspense, or adventure; girls' preferences were more diverse, including social, simulation, action, and platform games.

Eight out of the 6-8-year-old children taking part in the interviews and observations came from non-Finnish backgrounds. Some of these children expressed a wish to have more children's media in their home language, and one of them reported using Skype to keep in touch with their relatives abroad.

According to the interviews and observations, the feelings of pleasure pertaining to media use, and the joy children feel about media are very meaningful to children. That children enjoyed themselves with media was obvious in their own narratives on media use, but also in facial expressions and gestures; children sang, moved about, or clapped their hands while engaging with media, and played games with media themes.

Based on the interviews and observations, it can be said that children learn from media and by media from very early on. Children knew the songs from their favourite programmes word for word. Children also reported that they had familiarised themselves with media appliances for

instance by using their parents' old appliances (mobile phones or MP3 players). 5-8-year-olds exhibit their media learning through their reports concerning gaming, the internet, and mobile phones. Particularly those children reporting on their gaming successes were proud and excited.

Children also report negative experiences pertaining to their media use. They mentioned diverse psychological shielding mechanisms which helped them deal with harmful media contents; these include calling for an adult, switching off the TV, putting hands in front of one's eyes, and getting out of the frightening situation. In the children's reports, feelings of suspense and fear were usually attached to children's programmes and films, or news items. However, children's tastes also vary; while one six-year-old found the news "disgusting", another child thought it was "lovely to hear" about current matters.

Most of the rules mentioned by children pertaining to media use involved restrictions to gaming or watching TV. Children from more affluent areas reported such restrictions (particularly to do with the duration of media use) more often than children from less affluent backgrounds.

## SUVI TUOMINEN

### Peer Students Interviewing 1st and 2nd Graders: An Evaluation of Method

In the Children's Media Barometer, childhood is understood as a phase in which a child is an active individual, capable of making decisions for instance in his activities concerning media. In addition, a child can communicate her viewpoint, for instance on her favourite media contents which bring her joy. Thus it is crucial to bring out children's viewpoints in research as well. A child's participation in research, even as a co-researcher, is seen as one of the rising trends of children and youth studies. Our project involves co-researchership in a methodological experiment in which upper-level peer students, trained by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, interviewed children who had just begun school.

The experiment was based on the notion that upper-level comprehensive school pupils are closer to a child's media environment than adult researchers, and can thus better identify with children's media experiences. It was also our assumption that children feel more comfortable with young people, and can thus honestly talk about their media use to them. Because the interviewees are so young that they have trouble filling in a questionnaire on their own (due to the lack of literacy skills), the interview method is in any case the only viable way of collecting statistical data. Employing peer students in the research is also beneficial because in enhancing interaction between older and younger pupils, it also contributes to communality in schools.

The aim of the Children's Media Barometer 2010 project concerning peer student involvement was not so much the collection of statistical data on children's media use, but the testing of the method and the questionnaire. The number of interviewed children is so small that it cannot be used as material for drawing any statistical conclusions. Therefore this section concentrates on the description and evaluation of the method itself.

55 lower-level comprehensive school students in the Helsinki Metropolitan area took part in the peer student interviews: 27 girls and 28 boys. One fifth of the children were 6 years of age, roughly the same number were 8 years old, and the largest group, 31 children, were 7 years old.

#### Peer Students as Interviewers

We chose peer students to conduct interviews because they had already been trained to work for the good of the school community. Peer students organise events for the whole school, help new students get acquainted with the upper level of comprehensive school, and take part in 'guardian class' sessions for 7th graders in which they discuss e.g. bullying. Peer student activity is coordinated by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, and involves 90 per cent of all upper level comprehensive schools and over 10,000 pupils yearly. The pupils taking part are 8th and 9th grade students who are trained to work with and support younger pupils. The goal of peer student activity is to enhance good relations between all students and teachers, and promote joint responsibility and safe and encouraging atmosphere in schools. Every peer student school

has a teacher who works as a mentor for peer students, taking care of their training and other practical matters.

In May 2010, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare sent an email to 30 peer student mentors in the Helsinki Metropolitan area, enquiring about their willingness to participate in the project. The schools were chosen in this area because of our limited resources. Seven schools professed interest in the project, and two of the first who wrote back were chosen to participate. The task of the peer student mentors was to communicate with 1st and 2nd grade teachers and to organise interviews with their pupils. The lower level teachers were responsible for getting interview permissions from the parents of the pupils. Two Mannerheim League for Child Welfare employees were responsible for the interview training of the peer students; they also oversaw the interviews, giving support to the peer students.

A fifth of the interviews (11 in all) were filmed for method evaluation purposes. Parents had given a written permission for the filming.

### **The Training and Support of Peer Students in Interview Situations**

Out of the 18 peer students in one of the chosen schools, 16 would have liked to participate in the interviews. There was not a need for such a large number, however, and we decided to choose those peer students with siblings the same age as the interviewees (1st and 2nd graders). With this criterion, we could limit the number of peer students to eight. In the other school, there were only 9 peer students, and thus everyone who was interested could participate. Based on our observations, it is useful to choose interviewers from among those peer students who have younger siblings, because they can interact naturally with the smaller pupils and were relaxed in the interview situation.

The peer students received a 90-minute training on small children's media use, interviewing children, and the questionnaire used in the interview situation. They were also familiarised with media themes through activities, such as playing *Alias* with words to do with media. The peer students were pleased with the training, although a recap session of around 10-15 minutes before the actual interviews - dealing with filling in the questionnaire and interview practices - could have been useful as well. As it was, the training was held a few days before the interviews, which meant that some subjects dealt with in the training had already been forgotten by some of the peer students.

Originally, we chose one 1st grade and one 2nd grade elementary school class from both lower-level schools. As it was not possible for all teachers to be present while their classes were being interviewed, it was decided that the employees of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare be present all the time. This was crucial so that we could evaluate the method, and also for practical purposes. Adults were needed for the collection of interview permits, and for making sure that only those who had a permit were interviewed. The adults also took care of the interview locations and schedules, and dealt out the questionnaires for the peer students and collected them once they had been filled in. In the future, it would be useful for the adult to also check the questionnaire with the peer student and ask them to clarify or complete the form if there are some unclear areas.

## A Workable Method, Given Small Changes

Interviewing children is a challenge for even a seasoned researcher. A child's world view is very different from that of an adult, and children are not yet familiar with certain concepts. From the filmed peer student interviews it is clear that certain improvements need to be made in the questionnaires, and the training of peer students. Some of the options listed in the questionnaires proved problematic both for interviewers and interviewees. It is difficult for children to deal with temporal concepts; when it came to stating precise times they used certain medias, the most usual answers were "quite often" and "sometimes"; furthermore, some children found it hard to grasp such abstract notions as 'a week' or 'a month'. There were also problems with the way peer students marked down the answers; some did not make enough specifying questions to their interviewees.

A questionnaire proved a quick and economical way of getting information about the media use of school children. Given small changes to the questionnaires and to the training of peer students, this method will become workable. The filmed interviews show that in the interview situation children discuss many things that are not mentioned in the questionnaire. Thus these things have been left out of the survey. When collecting statistical data, it is not even viable to write down everything.

The number of volunteer peer students exceeded our expectations, and the smaller children were excited to engage in interaction with an older student. Only a few children were visibly tense in the interview situation. Most peer students chosen for conducting interviews had siblings the same age as the interviewees; thus they could talk naturally to their younger.

The peer student interviews showed a similar trend as those qualitative results which were collected through interviewing parents and observing children: among 6-8-year-olds, TV and books were the most popular media. Over a half of interviewees uses both media daily. Children prefer to watch TV and visual recordings and play digital games in the company of one's siblings (usually around one's age or younger) and friends. Most children use the internet by themselves. Very little media is used together with parents.

When it comes to TV content, children watch some programmes that are clearly aimed at adults. The soap opera *Salatut elämät* and the news are mentioned often, but some children also watch such programmes as *Duudsonit* and *Big Brother*. Children tend to listen to adult-oriented radio channels and music. When it comes to books, magazines, and digital games, however, interviewees mentioned only child-oriented contents. There are differences in the media preferences of girls and boys. Boys are interested in suspense, action, and sports, while girls prefer fairy tales and fantasy elements.

## SIRKKU KOTILAINEN

### A Review of Results and Conclusions

The Finnish Society on Media Education conducted a study on the media use of children aged 0-8 years by interviewing children and observing their media environment, and by a questionnaire targeted at their parents. 36 children took part in the interviews and observations - at home, in day care and in schools - in different parts of the country. 743 parents answered the national survey, which corresponds to the geographical distribution of 0-8-year-olds in the country.

Within the project we conducted an experiment in which 14-15-year-old comprehensive school (upper level) peer students were employed as questionnaire interviewers for the youngest (lower level) students. A total of 55 7-8 year-old children took part in the one-to-one interviews. The training and support (in interview situations) for peer students was provided by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, which organises peer support in Finnish schools.

Data collected among children includes 1) interviews and observations conducted by adult researcher and 2) questionnaire surveys conducted by peer students. Almost all the respondents of 3) the survey directed at families were mothers or female parents, and a majority were 35-44 years of age.

In the following is given a summary of all the main results of the study; the qualitative data mainly conforms to the results of the statistical survey aimed at families. Finally, there are the conclusions arising from the data; these have been discussed in the meetings of the research's supervisory group, and have arisen in the public presentations of the research for instance among professionals of early education.

#### Summary of the Results of the Entire Study

##### *Media Use Begins as a Baby*

Based on our research it can be said that children begin to consume media in babyhood. A majority of 0-2-year-olds listened to books, radio, and sound recordings. Even children under 12 months played digital games, and used the internet or mobile phones. TV and visual recordings were also a part of the daily lives of one-year-olds. Children of this age group mainly used media with parents or other adults, and to some extent with older siblings.

##### *Individual Tastes Begin to Develop at the Age of 3-4*

According to our research, Pikku Kakkonen and Moomins were the TV programmes preferred by both girls and boys of this age group; however, the tastes of girls and boys also began to diverge. Different vehicles and machines were a part of the audio-visual entertainment favoured by boys, whereas girls preferred programmes with animals as main characters. The media use of 3-4-year-olds is somewhat more varied than that of 0-2-year-olds; however, the media they used were mainly the same.

Some 3-4-year-olds begin to play digital games and use the internet; however, these media are not a part of the everyday lives of most children. Boys begin gaming and surfing online slightly earlier than girls. The greatest difference with the younger age group is that children of this age use media with their siblings or other children as often as with their parents.

#### *Gaming and Internet Use Begins at the age of 5-6*

Our study shows that books and television were the most popular media among 5-6-year-olds as well. The use of radio and sound and visual recordings had been to some extent replaced by magazines, digital games, and the internet; all three increase their popularity at this age. The tastes of boys and girls concerning visual programmes were rather different; girls watched programmes aimed at boys, but also were interested in traditional children's programmes and various 'girls' series'; the tastes of boys were directed at more action-oriented adventures.

According to the survey directed at families, a half of 5-6-year-old boys and a quarter of girls played digital games. Girls played mainly children's games, learning games, and platform games, whereas boys preferred driving, sports, and adventure games. When surfing online, children of this age preferred the home pages of children's programmes and various gaming sites.

#### *Media Use Becomes a Part of Everyday Life at the Age of 7-8*

A majority of 7-8-year-olds frequently used all the media included in this research: they read books and magazines, listened to radio and audio recordings, watched television and visual recordings, played digital games, and used both the internet and mobile phones. The greatest difference compared to the younger age groups was the rapid rise in the use of digital games, the internet and mobile phones.

Children usually use mobile phones to make calls and send text messages; one half of the children also played games, and a quarter took pictures or listened to music on their phones.

In addition to books with both pictures and text, children began to read books with only text, and also children's and hobby magazines. Girls and boys had different favourites among their reading material.

According to the questionnaire survey conducted by peer students, 7-8-year-olds prefer to watch TV and visual recordings, and play digital games with younger siblings or friends.

According to all our data, a majority of parents sets limits on their children's media use. Most of these rules at home mentioned by children involve time limits on gaming and watching TV.

#### *Media Brings Joy and Excitement to Children*

According to the interviews and observations, the feelings of contentment and the joy media brings to children's daily lives are very meaningful. In the interviews, children also described some negative experiences relating to their media usage. These experiences - usually involving fear and nervousness - are usually connected to children's programmes on TV, films aimed at children, and some news items.

## Conclusions

### *Media Culture Is a Part of Children's Lives in Finland*

Our study shows that media culture is a part of children's lives from the earliest age. It is crucial to recognise and acknowledge this aspect, from the point of view of children's rights. Thus it would be possible to enhance 1) the supply of information, as well as the opportunities for self-expression and participation with age-appropriate media for children, and 2) opportunities for adult support and awareness concerning their media use and various activities with media culture. The promotion of children's media literacies should be adjunct with life-long learning from the very beginning.

### *The Parents of Small Children Need Support in Media Education*

According to our study, the relationship the parents and other familiar adults of under-2-year-olds have with media seems to have an impact on the child's activities as well. A child may use the internet by sitting in a parent's lap before beginning to surf independently. Families with small children should be provided with more information on children's media cultures and media education. The role of adults in children's media use should be discussed for instance in child health clinics and day care centres. It would also be useful to involve families in the planning of media education.

### *Gender and Cultural Differences under Scrutiny*

Our study shows that the media preferences of girls and boys differ from the earliest age on. These differences pertain both to the use of media themselves, as well as contents. The question is, then, should girls be encouraged to use media in more diverse ways? Also, what skills do boys learn from their media favourites? What kinds of cultural differences occur in children's media use? There should be more research into the media contents aimed at children, particularly from the point of view of gender and culture differences.

### *Small Children's Viewpoint Made Visible Through Diverse Methods*

The most useful forms of collecting data turned out to be observation at home (0-3-year-olds), and interviews (over 4-year-olds), including questionnaire surveys conducted by peer students. Through observation, it was possible to note the nonverbal messages in the expressions and gestures of the youngest children. Answering an adult researcher's questions seemed to be easiest for a child when they were allowed some meaningful activity (f. ex. drawing, playing) during the interview. It was possible to get viewpoints of younger schoolchildren visible – for statistical analysis as well – through one-to-one questionnaire surveys. These surveys, conducted by upper-level elementary school peer students, will make a workable method with some changes to the questionnaire and the training of peer students. The number of volunteer peer students (trained by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare) was larger than expected, and younger pupils were excited when they had the opportunity to interact with older students. Most peer students chosen for conducting interviews had siblings the same age as the interviewees; thus they could talk naturally to their younger.

# CHILDREN'S MEDIA BAROMETER 2010:

The Use of Media among 0-8-year-olds in Finland

**Finnish Society on Media Education**

Mediakasvatusseura   
*Sällskapet för Mediefostran*