

Children's Media Barometer – A National Study as a Base for Media Education in Finland



Project summary

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The Children's Media Barometer research carried out in 2013* explored the media uses of children aged 0–8 years in Finland. Based on that and previous studies since 2010, policies and activities on media education have been developed; for example, in school, kindergarten and for families. The 2013 study indicates that various media play a strong role in the daily lives of children, starting from babyhood. The most important media content for babies is music and books. Children start watching audio-visual programs at 1–2 years of age and playing digital games becomes common at 2–4 years of age. The Internet is now part of the lives of even the smallest children; 93 per cent of all 0–8 years-olds use it at least occasionally. Watching audio-visual programs has overtaken the playing of games as the most important reason for Internet use among young children.

**Study by Annikka Suoninen, Finnish Youth Research Network/Finnish Youth Research Society, Internet Publications 79, Publications 153, English summary:*

www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/media_barometer_2013.pdf.

Project description

In the years 2010–2013 the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland financed the annual Children's Media Barometer study to provide reliable data on children's media uses. The core of the study each year was a nationwide questionnaire survey carried out to obtain nationally comprehensive information on the use of media by the age class being studied. The target group in the years 2010 and 2013 was children aged 0–8; in 2011, those aged 7–11, and in 2012 pre-teens aged 10–12. The aim of the research was to discover children's relationships with media (print and audio-visual) so as to develop media education in early childhood education and online material for families. Several NGOs, media organizations and the Finnish National Audiovisual Institute develop contents online (see for example, www.mediaeducation.fi or kavi.fi; material also in English).

Focus on babies and small children

In 2013, the target group of the Children's Media Barometer study was children 0–8 years of age. The research data were collected by means of a postal questionnaire sent to the children's parents. Sampling for the study was done in two parts: half of the sample targeted all households with children and half targeted households where the child's mother was not older than 29 years. The response rate was 31 per cent of the sample, and there were 917 responses. The sample for the survey was weighted regionally, and the research data were weighted so that they corresponded to the age and gender distribution of the 0–8 year-old population as well as the distribution by region of the place of residence. In 2013, information on media use among 0–8 year-old children was collected in such a way as to ensure comparability with the 2010 study; information was thus obtained on whether changes in the children's media use had occurred in three years, and if so, what these changes had been.

Media use begins in the company of adults

Results indicate that children begin using media as infants. First comes listening to books or magazines read aloud, as well as to the radio or music. More regular watching of audio-visual programs began for most children at the age of one year. Internet use often began at 1-2 years of age. Most of the 0-2 year-olds, however, did not play digital games or use a mobile phone. The youngest children used the media most often in the company of an adult. Quite many even of the 0-2 year-old children, however, watched audio-visual programs alone or in the company of other children. The 3-4 year-old children began watching audio-visual programs and playing digital games increasingly often alone or with other children, and no longer only in the company of adults, but the parents or the whole family were the children's preferred company when using media, more often than other children. By contrast, children of this age used the Internet mainly in the company of adults. The main difference in the use of media by 5-6 year-old children compared to younger children is that Internet use and playing digital games become much more common. The children preferred watching audio-visual programs with their parents or the whole family, and playing digital games alone or with other children. Relative to younger children, more of the 7-8 year-olds used different media types daily or almost daily. With the start of school in Finland, the use of mobile phones in particular becomes more common; almost all of the children have their own mobile phone. The whole family was particularly pleasing company for watching audio-visual programs; moments of shared viewing with the family were clearly important to the children. Most of the school-aged children preferred playing digital games alone or with other children rather than in the company of adults. The 7-8 year-olds also preferred to use the Internet alone or with other children, even though, for half of them, adults were the most common company when using the Internet.

Internet more dominant in children's media use since 2010

The greatest change in 0-8 year-old Finnish children's media use in the period studied was increased use of various Internet services, and the earlier onset of Internet use. In 2010 less than half of the children were Internet users, but in 2013 more than 90 per cent of all 0-8 year-olds used the Internet at least occasionally. Internet use begins with watching audio-visual programs, even among those aged under two. Playing digital games online starts to become more common at 3-4 years of age. Watching audio-visual programs has overtaken the playing of games as the most important reason for Internet use among 0-8 year old children. Reading books and magazines and watching audio-visual programs are still the most common media uses among small children in Finland. Two-thirds of the children watch audio-visual programs and read (or are read aloud to) at least once a day, and nearly all of them almost daily. No major changes in the frequency of reading and watching audio-visual programs have occurred in the period 2010-2013. However, a clearly greater share of watching audio-visual programs takes place through video or on-demand program services on the Internet.

Conclusion: Media education for parents needed

The Children's Media Barometer study reveals the uses of media among children, and even babies. This use is not isolated from the uses of the whole family, especially parents. The research indicates that much of the child media use is dependent on parental uses of media. Small children start their uses based on the parental choice of media, and the older children enjoy the company of parents and siblings while using media. This underlines the importance of parents as media educators in a family context. The question is: How can parents acquire the knowledge they need? This important question may be solved in many ways: increasing information targeted to families, integrating media literacy in the practices of childcare institutions, etc. Parenthood generally includes some sense of the wellbeing of one's own child and sense of child education within the family. But what should parents know about the media? One suggestion is that what is needed is not a particular skill or specialized knowledge, but rather parental awareness of media education, and of themselves as users of media; both their personal uses and collaborative uses with their children. Moreover, it includes a critical attitude towards media and a reflective attitude towards children's uses of media (Andersson 2013). However, parental awareness of media education cannot evolve without the willingness and collaboration of parents. Let's make the connection!

Contact

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References

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