MEiFA – Media Worlds in Families

Teach Parents – Encourage Children: A project to increase media literacy of Thuringian families

Project summary

Media is an important subject and an inherent part of family life. Children use media without anxiety, but have problems when it comes to using media in a critical and responsible way. For this reason parents and grandparents have to support them. This is only possible if (grand)parents are able to evaluate media changes and risks within their family life. MEiFA tries to improve the media literacy of all family members, especially of the (grand)parents: teach parents and grandparents – encourage children.

Aims: MEiFA wants to increase the media literacy of all family members: children, parents and grandparents. The project initiates and improves communication about media between the different generations, seeking to establish mutual understanding about different habits and preferences, and concerns about the media. MEiFA creates a common experience for children and (grand)parents during creative media productions. It empowers (grand)parents to participate in children´s media world by teaching them how to use media technologies such as computer games, email, Skype and social networks. It also shows (grand)parents the fascination, possibilities and risks of different media types, as well as suitable media products for children and teens. Based on this knowledge, MEiFA projects enable (grand)parents to raise their children to be responsible, aware and active media users. Furthermore, MEiFA qualifies professional educators of children and youth as well as family clubs to advise or support families in media issues.

Target group(s): All family members – from children (preschool up to teens) to parents and grandparents

Media: All MEiFA offerings include all types of media (television, movies, photography, computer and online games, Internet, Web 2.0, mobile phones, smartphones, etc).

Methods: Workshops for families or children and their parents or grandparents, focusing on media education or on creative media productions

Duration of project: The project is financially supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs of Thuringia on a yearly basis. As there's growing demand for strengthening media literacy in the digital age, it is hoped that the financial support for the project is sustainable and enduring.

Resources needed: Since 2009, an average of two employees (each 20 hours/week) have worked for MEiFA. They plan, prepare for and run media literacy events throughout Thuringia, create educational material and content, and document the course of the project. They are also responsible for public relations.

Project description: Workshops and events for families are the main offering of MEiFA. During these, children and (grand)parents jointly explore different media types; learn more about the opportunities and risks of several media offers, and learn strategies for using media with awareness and securely. Because of this common activity, families start to talk about their media preferences or concerns and see each other as contact persons for this subject. These family projects focus either on education or creative media productions; e.g. the workshop 'Fit for Facebook, WhatsApp & Co.', 'Game Get-Together' and 'Cartoon Course'. While workshops take place at a particular time in an extracurricular facility, MEiFA also takes part in festivals for families. At these events MEiFA provides creative media activities for families, such as producing a cartoon or a flipbook. This is always combined with an information stand, where parents and grandparents can take away booklets relating to media education. During these events MEiFA reaches out to and supports families who would not participate in workshops because of low interest or lack of time.

Method(s): The project aims to foster media literacy for both parents and grandparents by hosting workshops with a broad variety of topics and active work with media (film, audio, web, photography, games, etc). The main emphasis of these workshops is the sharing of information between those of all ages about the fascinating media world.

Exemplary description of one day/part of project

The workshop 'Fit for Facebook, WhatsApp & Co.' lasts from 90 to 180 minutes depending on what the participants are interested in. It focuses on the fascination and risks of using the World Wide Web, and especially social media platforms such as Facebook and messaging programs such as WhatsApp. The main topics are cyberbullying, data security, tips against online trickery, and important rights such as copyright and rights to one's own pictures. The main method is open discussion with the children and their parents about their own use and their experiences. Other interactive methods seek to get the participants to rethink their media use. For example, the parents and their children have to complete a social media profile and can choose which data (address, hobbies, family pictures, etc) they would post on their profile and which not. While discussing this, they reflect on their digital behavior. Another interactive workshop element is working with open-ended scenarios in comic style to illustrate some Internet-based risks. The participants have to find a possible ending, and suggest tips to reduce the risks. It's important not just to give a lecture but to get the members of the workshop participating so that they keep the facts in mind for future application.

What needs special attention?

The project's main focus is on sharing knowledge and experiences about the media among the different generations. Fundamental goals include the fostering of media competence and sustainable handling of the media, especially in families.

Project implementation difficulties

The main difficulty is to activate both children and (grand)parents together. On the one hand, parents' schedule is very tight, and parents often are prejudiced against new-media offerings. On the other hand, children hold prejudices against their parents; e.g. they think that their parents don't know anything about the digital world that children live in and use every day. Another problem is to reach the families, because many families aren't organized in static groups or organizations, and MEiFA can't run the workshops at their homes. That's why the participants themselves have to know that media literacy is important, and engage in the events and workshops that MEiFA offers.

What could be improved?

As of today the project is staffed by just two part-time media educationists. Due to high and growing demand for the workshops offered, we'd like to suggest sustainable and ongoing stable financial support for the project.

Information about the organization that runs the project

Initiator: Since 1 April 2009, MEiFA has been a project of Landesfilmdienst Thüringen e.V., a registered association and center for media literacy, media services and adolescent and adult education, founded in 1990.

Partner(s): MEiFA is financed by the public trust FamilienSinn and the Thuringian Ministry of Social Affairs.

Contact people: Current project staff – Anne Hensel , Anja Fischer and Stephanie Müller (MA, media educationists)

Email: meifa@landesfilmdienst-thueringen.de

Link to website: www.meifa-thueringen.de (a new website is being developed; the link will automatically transfer to the new website when it's completed)

Quotes of participants

"This workshop will introduce our participants to modern forms of media in a competent and qualified manner, ensuring that they feel comfortable in their usage of it, whilst also reducing any uncertainties they may have. In addition we will show them how to use modern media creatively within a family setting." – Leader of a multi-generation center, where a MEiFA project took place

"It's inconvenient to deal with unknown stuff like Facebook and WhatsApp, but it is right. As parents we have to know what our children do online and why they are doing it. I will try to pay more attention and accompany my child by exploring his media world." – Mother who participated in MEiFA activity

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