

Youth and Media Studies Center
(Centre d'études sur les Jeunes et les Médias)

with the partnership of Experice (Paris 13 University) and Grems (UCL)
organise

Media cultures of early childhood

April 7-8th, 2016
MSH Nord, Paris
International conference

- Call for Papers -

How can we understand children's media culture, especially among the 0-7 year-olds? Based on what uses and practices, and in what contexts? What media constructions and media strategies (pertaining to formats, contents or audiences) nourish children's media culture(s)? What (formal or informal) teaching and learning processes do these media practices imply?

Childhood has not always been considered as a separate moment within people's social and cultural life. The current definition of 'childhood' is indeed at the junction of various disciplines (especially psychology, anthropology and sociology) and is clearly related to the presence of products specifically aimed at children, for which media are precisely conveyors in many respects. The expansion of mass media since the nineteenth century, and in particular during the twentieth century – with the advent, among others things, of a children's press or TV programs for children – has contributed to the recognition of children as active subjects with an agency of their own, and in the recognition of childhood as a specific and critical biographical moment. Moreover, media participate in people's socialization, especially during childhood. While mutations around children's media practices (be they recreational, cultural or educational) seem very important nowadays, the role of media in people's social integration need to be reexamined: media carry cultural and social representations of childhood, and are thereby mediations between children and the world.

Toys, action figures, books, musical instruments, adornments may indicate the presence of a child, even before his / her birth, and reveal the media culture in which they will grow. New media, such as tablets or connected toys, have acquired a privileged situation within family environments, although socioeconomic inequalities should remind us that it is not the case in every household. New media are also gradually spreading out in other child-dedicated spaces (kindergarten, schools, game centers, libraries, etc.), in which children are experiencing earlier and earlier an increasing diversity of media devices. Accordingly, the conference will give researchers the opportunity to look into the emergence of children's media cultures through the interactions between kids (between 0 and 7) and media. Media contribute in how children construct their representations of the world: the devices they watch or manipulate, the way they use them, the meaning they assign them, and the significant relationship they establish with the world through them take part in the development of their media cultures.

This conference will focus on three complementary questions to understand childhood and early childhood media cultures. Firstly, what mediations to the world do contemporary media offer to children, and what is their role in children's socialization and development? Secondly, how do media contribute to the social and cultural construction of children's image in our societies? Finally, what is the children's situation or integration into these constructions of the self and the world, potentially via some (more or less formal) educational practices? As these three questions cannot be addressed separately, this conference is an invitation to build bridges between them.

The conference will decline these questions towards three directions: (1) the observation and analysis of young children's media uses and practices, (2) the critical exploration of media contents and devices available to children, and how they are designed and delivered to children, (3) the examination of the (formal or informal) educational dimensions that accompany or guide children as they build their media culture and literacy.

This multidisciplinary scientific event is open to researchers studying childhood and / or early childhood media cultures from different perspectives and from various disciplinary frameworks: media studies, psychology, sociology, anthropology, education sciences, language sciences, IT, etc. Expected submissions may deal either with experiments or theoretical reflections, as well qualitative and / or quantitative observations of media practices. They should follow at least one of the suggested directions, even if considering their interdependence is highly recommended.

Research direction #1: **Media uses and practices during childhood**

Today, the child evolves within a media-friendly family environment. Recent surveys show the multiplication of screens in homes. Thus, from an early age, children use and manipulate various media objects that allow them to discover a physical (sensory), social, psychological and symbolic world, different from the one they encounter in the here and now. These practices and usages remain to this day much less documented in the scientific literature than the ones of teenagers, probably partly because of the – supposed – difficulty of investigating younger audiences.

Submissions in relation with this axis will address issues related to media practices of young children in the multiple environments in which they are likely to evolve, drawing, for example, on the following issues:

- What media practices and what uses do young children build for themselves, and at which stages of their development?
- In view of developments in the media supply, what status do these uses assign to children within the family, but also in other reception areas for young children?
- What are the psychosocial mechanisms (identity and personality construction, cognitive development, etc.) at work behind these uses?
- What skills (social, technical, cognitive, informational) are developed through these uses?
- What differences can be observed in different social contexts, age or gender of the children?
- How do children themselves consider media devices (screens, connected devices, books, etc.), as well as the recreational, cultural or educational experiences they live with or through them?

Research Direction #2: **An Exploration of Children Media Contents**

Children are now a specific audience for media industries. They represent one (or more) target(s) that content providers (publishers, authors, developers, advertisers, producers, broadcasters) try to reach, with an uneven and sometimes presumed knowledge of their tastes and expectations, and with diverse goals. Moreover, children media contents keep expanding and diversifying with the segmentation and the specialization of media industries (e.g. the children's press, the children TV channels, etc.) on the one hand, and since the advent and the democratization of digital technologies on the other hand.

Submissions relevant to this research direction should discuss and analyze the evolution of media products aimed at young children (contents, formats, devices), by keeping in mind the following questions:

- What multimedia universes (heroes, worlds, etc.) do media offer to their young readers / viewers / players?
- Under which conditions and with what knowledge of their audiences are children media contents created?
- How do media industries adapt their language to these specific audiences (use of stereotypes, presence or absence of certain topics, etc.)?
- What representations of the world and society do media convey to young children? In particular, what specific image of childhood and early childhood do they seek to spread?
- Do media contents offer a place for adults, and if so, which one (e.g. purchase or viewing justifications, opportunities of co-reception, etc.)?
- Do media change the way adults conceive childhood and behave with children?

Research direction #3 : **Formal and informal learning with media**

The increasing presence and use of media (be they digital or not) in the different contexts of young children's everyday lives (at school, at home, in associations and communities...) point to several educational issues. Numerous studies have shown the interest, but also the difficulties, of implementing an education to and through media. Rather than seeking to erase the differences between these two approaches, this axis aims at rethinking their boundaries, to better understand their connections and synergies.

A first focus for such analyses focuses on the formal types of these educational practices (from "media education" as such to the introduction of innovative teaching practices through the media), or at least in those intentionally designed and developed by adults (teachers, parents, educators, etc.) with an educational goal. Schools are obvious venues for such initiatives, when they leverage media, as part of the vast array of informational, technical and social resources available today, to foster the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. But in this context, how should cultural industries that produce so-called "educational" content and resources be considered?

A second issue concentrates on the informal educational practices that pervade most of children's everyday learning experiences. These can be observed at home. Indeed, the family environment, which acts as an incubator of the child's most fundamental representations, actions and human relationships, is increasingly traversed by media systems. Such practices are also present in the actions of cultural associations and community organizations, which have long played an important role in child

development, and in particular in their appropriation of media. Children themselves also sometimes find the opportunity to educate one another, in open-ended contexts, by developing creative media practices that make sense to them. As a result, the media have become ubiquitous in the children's socialization processes, which unfold throughout their development, experiences and everyday interactions. The encounters with peers or the role played by mediators in particular recreational contexts can then be analysed as opportunities to appropriate media and their ever increasing presence. If formal and informal learning need to be distinguished for analytical purposes, they are often combined, or, more accurately, overlaid, voluntarily or de facto, by the various institutional (schools, game libraries, media centers, childcare centers, etc.) and social (family, peer groups, etc.) spaces that call upon them. The study of media and media uses can only gain in relevance by deconstructing these interactions, in order to enrich and widen how these educational issues are investigated.

In this context, possible topics for submissions include, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- What are, or should be, the modalities of formal and/or informal media education and education through media directed towards very young children?
- To what extent can the media support and foster learning, and to what degree of formalisation?
- What types of formal / informal knowledge and skills can the media provide young children with, for the media in general, and for those labelled "educational"?
- How do the media fit into the educational practices of families?
- How do cultural or recreational venues assign a specific role or place to the media in their projects, with or without a connection to their educational goals?
- Under what conditions can different actors (e.g. media producers, educators) contribute to the media education of young children? How do they succeed in involving families in a co-construction of informal educational practices?

For this conference, multidisciplinary and international approaches will be highly appreciated. In order to offer a powerful and critical look at these issues, a discussion will be engaged with professional actors of the media world and youth specialists.

Abstracts should be submitted by December 28th, 2015 in French or English (maximum 5,000 characters, including spaces, Times New Roman, font size 12, single spaced, 5 keywords, one title) to the address jeunesetmedias.events@gmail.com. All submissions will be double-blind evaluated by the scientific committee. Submissions as well as presentations at the conference may be given in English or French.

In the submission email, please provide the following information: first name, last name, email address, academic/professional status, university and research centre affiliation, title of the paper. Please send the paper proposal itself in an attached document in .doc format with your name (FirstnameLastName.doc). In the abstract, on the other hand, you are asked to respect anonymity, even if you are referring to some of your previous publications.

Selected papers will be grouped in an academic publication, the terms of which will be specified later.

CALENDAR

Deadline for submissions: December 28, 2015

Notification of acceptance: January 20, 2016

Conference: April 7 and 8, 2016

For publication:

Sending texts for evaluation: June 1, 2016

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CONTACT

Marlène Loicq, marleneloicq@gmail.com

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