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From Reading Aloud to the Web

The media worlds of young children.

The generation of young children (between 0 and 5 years old) grow up in media worlds that do not only differ from those of previous generations but also transport quite different learning and experiential conditions from the children's room into the class room. The children of today live with books to be read aloud and computers on an equal basis; here there is no competition but rather a relationship of complementarity. When they are encouraged appropriately children grow up in comprehensive "media worlds" in which neither reading aloud nor the children's programme nor even communication via internet can be excluded. Through self-socialisation and the family young children today learn important elements of their communicative and interactive being-in-the-world. The task of the school will be to process these new experiences psychologically but also didactically.

Prefatory remarks

The following contribution will attempt to explain and back up two theses with information, data and reflections. One of them states: competence in reading and media competence are not in a competitive relationship; for the children they grow together so completely that it is possible to talk of over-arching *media worlds* and that means: even in the nursery the kids encounter a wealth of media of all kinds before they go to school: there lies an open picture book, fairytale and story books are normally together on a shelf; the walkman is lying on the bed alongside a few CDs (among them the newest from the *Kelly Family*); on a large poster we find the animation figure of *Batman* (now it's clear: we are dealing with a young child), the Gameboy stands in the corner, the cassette recorder has just be switched on, while the TV, which, of course, has to be shared with a sister is not on at the moment. A comic is lying around somewhere and a poster of the *Power Rangers* is still rolled up, waiting to be pinned somewhere on the wall. – The second thesis is intended to make it clear that *basic reading skills*—as well as general media competence—are acquired very early and above all in the *family* and because of that prospective teachers should be aware of the media experience they will find when they meet these very small media children again in the primary school or later. To summarise: children are "competent" in an astoundingly all-encompassing way by the time they go to school; they acquire a lot of media experience by means of *self socialisation* (this begins with the tentative murmuring of the baby, with the games played by themselves and continues and isn't even finished with singing a favourite pop song just before falling asleep). In addition *parents* play a decisive supporting role by including even small children in the entire spectrum of the media on offer—reading media included—so that they don't lose out later. So let's look at the media world of small children and see what prerequisites the new "media generation" brings with it today.

Books and Reading Aloud

Let's not forget: books are still among the culturally most important and, in the form of picture books, central, media in the children's room.

So it is not surprising that the picture book, found in 97,3 % of cases, is the most used medium: 74% of children look at a picture book almost daily, 20,7% several times a week and 5% less often. Only 0,3% never use a picture book. While 86% of three year olds, more than any other group, use picture books daily, this decreases with increasing age so that only a little over half of all six year olds use a picture book daily. While three year olds are engaged with picture books for 41 minutes a day and four year olds still 40 minutes, five years olds are only occupied for 30 minutes. It is only when they become primary school pupils that use increases again probably because of the importance of the first reading experiences that directs the children's attention more strongly towards comics and age-appropriate, illustrated print media. If one looks more closely, picture book use differs according to social class. 90% of upper class children use picture books almost daily while the daily frequency of use by children from the upper and lower middle classes decreases by a third and in the lower classes only half of the children look at a picture book daily. The length of use also decreases correspondingly from 43 minutes in the upper class to 33 minutes with lower class children. (Grüniger/ Lindemann 1998, Manuskript).

The data presented here make one thing perfectly clear: it quite obviously depends how much educational interest parents themselves communicate about pre-reading experience to the children. Here the differing educational background becomes all too clear and we can already draw conclusions for all the other media.

The decisive stimulation in dealing with media takes place, especially for small children, in active communication with parents and other role models. Wieler (1997, p.112 ff) summarised the analysis of family story-telling situations in various social milieus thus: even in the first family discussions with four year olds the demands, evaluation and structural assistance differ fundamentally. This shows itself particularly in the *“different reactions of the educators to the imaginative component of the child's story-telling, the help given each time to the child with their descriptions of their daily experiences set in a field of tension between reality and phantasy-led projection. Insight into milieu-specific norms of family story-telling situations stands in direct relation to identifiable variations of reading-aloud formats and depends on the social class the family belongs to. Just how much the family conversational culture in which the child grows up (and has to assert itself) sets the boundaries for coping later with the communication and comprehension-oriented demands in an institutional teaching and learning context can be seen in the reconstructive analysis of reading aloud and story-telling activities in the kindergarten. Because in this pedagogically structured context, the patterns of activity of context-generating cross-references between fictional and commonplace reality primarily links up with the child's family reading and story-telling experience from a middle class social milieu.”*

In this context, the role of being *read to* apparently plays a decisive role. It represents a cultural practice which, using the example of this medium, helps to analyse more precisely the statement that children take material from the media into their daily lives to process it. The question of how this translation actually takes place is crucial.

Here it is worth taking a look at the discussion going on in research concerned with media perception and processing. Charlton/Neumann (1990) start from textual social realities and understanding childlike forms of perception and reception against a background of an assumption that children learn linguistic rules as a sense-structuring basic unit of social action and go on to apply them. An example is Maurice Sendak's "Where the wild things are". It tells the story of little Max who is sent to bed by his mother without dinner and after a scolding. Thereafter his room transforms itself into a magic forest, Max sets off on a dream journey to "where the wild things are". Here he romps around and dances with them, finally tames them and becomes their king. After that he returns to his room where his dinner is waiting for him. It is still warm.

The story can be read psychoanalytically as overcoming "wild" phantasies and dreams with an eventual "return to the reality principle". The authors (ibid. p.47) explicate the expected interpretation of the six year-old Christian within his own life context—his development and situation—as follows: *"The regression into the phantasy world is used by him in order to identify his split off "wild" parts. At the climax of the story Max and the wild things make a rumpus without any pangs of conscience. Max finds out that he need have no fear of wildness, that he can control it, direct it according to his will and also counter it with a "no" when it threatens to isolate him from his mother's affection and care. At the end of the story there is an implied reconciliation with his mother who had never really repudiated him."* Exact participatory observation by two of the team's psychologists led to subtle insight into the dynamics of the family during Christian's everyday life and they diagnosed the central theme for Christian as follows: *"Christian got the book "Where the wild things live" from one of the observers for his 6th birthday. Like most of the presents this book was also selected by the team so that it addressed(...) the child's themes. In the present case the investigator was guided by the hypothesis that Christian's frequent anxiety attacks were connected with his repulsion of aggressive impulses and his attempts to let go of his caring mother. The present of the book was intended to provide Christian with the opportunity to find a way of dealing with his phantasies which was less dominated by fear."* In her critical analysis of this procedure Wieler (1997, p.122 ff) correctly points out that in pre-selecting the book present both psychologists are pursuing a particular quasi pre-defined theory, they assume the "rule-forming nature of social interaction" and follow interpretive intentions that consist of inducing Christian not to continue to defend against his—up till now assumed—own anxiety phantasies but to process them using the book "Where the wild things are". Although both the observers were then forced to experience that before, during and after the suggestion that Christian look at the book "Where the wild things live" he only showed limited interest in the book, often avoided it and participated in the reading to

conversation more from politeness than anything else with the then most obvious interpretation that Christian apparently had not been able to engage with the apparently still anxiety-laden text with sufficient comprehension but was reacting defensively instead. Is it not possible that—and this is the crucial question or interesting objection—a comprehensive theoretical concept of media activity and its linguistic regularity will produce pre-set interpretations that perhaps—despite precise family observation—miss Christian's interests and his real situation? What is communicated is the impression *“that the dominant theme in the family socialisation of the primary school child is reflected in the text and illustrations of a single children's book.*

Subtle processes of perception and communicative action between children and people who are close to them are the initial and crucial starting points for perceiving and constructing the world.

However, what was not taken into account was the value of reading aloud in the daily interaction of the family being observed, the function of being read to and other activities relating to media use for stabilising and redefining family relationship patterns. Characteristic for this screening out of the social structure of the family is that the reproduced material is not documented as parent-child conversations but as interactions between child and experimenter (psychologists).” Thus what is produced is an investigatory praxis *“in which exactly these observers operate as the only partners in the process of the child's reception and processing of media stories.”* Wieler puts forward an alternative process which is closer to the child's situation. This is defined as *“ a dialogue, as a structured process defined along with adults about the subjective construction of meaning. In the view of this concept, the possible contribution that reading aloud has for a child coping with life lies in the field of tension between concretely articulated questions and problems which arise from reception and the guiding activity engaged in by the person reading aloud and thus their reaction in each case – but it also includes their expectation of the problems of the child's comprehension and need to understand.”* (ibid. p.128) This is, in fact, a constitutively different procedure to the one proposed by Charlton/Neumann because the *real situation*, the reading of parent to child and the conversation which results *therefrom*, is brought to the foreground, not the (hidden) directive intervention of two psychologists who always bring interpretive contexts into the situation based on preconceived theoretical elements. And so it proves in this case – for various reasons, including the fact that he already knows the picture book, Christian is not so attentive to the reading experience as the psychologists might have wished so that the insinuation that the reason here is “defence against anxiety” proves to be inappropriate.

What have we got from this discussion? What is made tolerably clear is that the small child's perspective cannot be captured by generalised theoretical preconceptions but rather by contexts which are *situation-*

specific and determined by the family—thus *inconspicuous and commonplace*—in which (for example) reading aloud takes place between parent and child. Thus first of all, *before* any interpretation is made, the conversation and interaction of the child with the mother is placed at the centre of attention in order to find out what the subject of the discussion might be. This perspective suggests itself also because, as was indicated at the beginning of this chapter—with reference to Bruner et. al.—it was once again made clear that the subtle processes of perception and communicative action between people who are close and children are initially the crucial starting points for perceiving and constructing the world. Only in this way can we establish (and this is the assertion here) a *child's perspective* worthy of the name because the concrete nature of the actual being-read-to experience and the exchange with the mother about it yields experience, directs thoughts, stimulates expectations (or not). In this way something else may be explained: Charlton/Neumann consistently apply their theoretical and procedural thesis of a textually normative structure with psychological elements *to all media*, such as television for example. Wieler's approach however would suggest that first of all the reading situation, the role of the person reading (the mother) and Christian (the child) should be looked at, that is, to capture the literary socialisation through the text or oral accompaniment to the *picture book*. Whether this specific situation can be transferred to other media such as watching a short feature film must remain an open question because not only the non-discursive narrative but also the audio-visual performance structure and associated with it the other ways in which children watch television affects the interactive experience in different ways. Although Wieler, in her examination of child reading/being read to, has presented interesting results about the meaning of children's communication and interaction, there is at present—despite many observations—no appropriately exact analysis of the *television* situation of small children. Here one might well conjecture that there are variations: not only is the aesthetic structure of the *audio-visual* message different (which possibly leads to other forms of expression) it might also be postulated that a mother will interrupt more often when reading children's books than when watching a film. Further, it might well be that seating arrangements (sitting opposite each other or nestling against each other) might elicit different effects etc.

Generally speaking one cannot talk of a uniform use
of television by children.

In conclusion, returning to the reading: we are obviously dealing here with a form of interaction with print media which is secured within a cultural tradition – also because it is “old”, a medium that has been tested for around 200 years. That the quality of the dialogic dealings rises with the educational experiences of the parents is a further sign that *reading aloud* is a relatively established cultural tradition with a high level of interactive importance, one which captivates children even today. Although the availability of books that can be read aloud is, as we have seen, something that can be taken for granted in most households and the practice of reading aloud has not been ousted by a long

way—it still plays an important role, especially for *small* children—nevertheless it is television (as an activity) and the television set (as a technical-electronic instrument) that increasingly draws the attention of young children.

Television: Data and tendencies

What does the analysis of television use (most recent data in this issue: 1997) in Germany (Feierabend/Klingler 1997, p.16 ff) give us? The age group 3 to 13 year-olds is often combined but in individual questions also sometimes fragmented.

(1) In general there can be no talk of a uniform use of television by children. Viewing and duration vary according to age, gender, geographical origins so that all generalised, cross-section data can only be considered as rough guidelines. This insight is a preface because it confirms the necessity of differentiated observation as was seen in the example of reading aloud. If we summarise data then we can only talk about approximate “trends” and have to go on to take a closer look at the differentiated climate in individual families as well as their different styles of interaction.

(2) It is possibly comforting for critics of television to know that the net range of reception for children in the age group 3 to 13 on an average weekday dropped in 1997 by 2 percent from the previous year and now lies at 59% despite an increased choice and two additional children’s programmes. In the group of 3-5 year-olds, it was only a little more than every second child who could be found in front of the television set (if only briefly) on an average day (54%). With the 6-9 year-olds this was 59%; with the 10-13 year olds it was 64%. Summarising: the older the child the more (and longer) they watch television – the television use data for people 14 and above is, on an average day in the same year, 73%). These data correspond to the average *duration of viewing*: 3-5 year-olds watched 76 minutes; 6-9 year-olds 91 minutes and the 10-13 year-olds showed an increase of 22 minutes on that (a total of 113 minutes). Summarising: small children do not only watch less frequently, they also watch for a shorter time. The difference between the youngest and the oldest groups is more than half an hour.

(3) However it would be an error of judgement to conclude from this data that small children represent a viewer group that obviously needs to be paid less attention. If one investigates the age group of 3-5 year-olds, it shows that this, the youngest age group, has experienced a continuous increase in viewing duration from 1992 on. Whereas viewing duration in 1992 for this age group lay at 66 minutes, over the years to 1997 ten minutes were added. Because the television market as far as what was on offer had changed significantly, especially for younger viewers, this apparently affected television behaviour of the youngest age group. Although the length of viewing for 3-5 year-olds was 141 minutes while for the 6-9 year-olds it rose to 154 minutes and by older children even to 178 minutes, that is it lay at almost three hours, nevertheless looking back over the previous three years a movement towards equalisation in the use value becomes evident.

(4) Thus, although small children are, in the meantime, “catching up” due to a greater choice there is a conspicuous stability of children’s use of television over the years which may calm television-critical users. With the extent remaining constant there is apparently more selection made of what is on offer on television and viewing per se is not increased.

(5) Let’s look at the example of the varying amounts of use or duration of viewing: In the year 1997, 1.3% of all 3-13 year-olds (that is around 120,000 children) watched less than 5 minutes television on an average day; 3% (around 270,000 children) watched for between 5 and 15 minutes and a further 6.4% (around 580,000 children) between 15 and 30 minutes. Every ninth child can be placed the minimum viewing category who watch less than half an hour television per day. The part that watches a lot, those children who pass more than three hours a day in front of the television comprises about 6%. In this group there are more older children than younger, more boys than girls.

(6) For all age groups the most important television day of the week, considered purely qualitatively, is Saturday immediately followed by Sunday.

Let us now take a look at the *content* of the television programmes and programme preferences. Thus, especially for small children, the start of the public law children’s channels (ARD and ZDF) with their violence-and-advertising-free programme is an important media event for these age groups. The children’s channel Nickelodeon (which has been terminated in the meantime) had already begun to broadcast. This selection of entertainment and information in age appropriate language finds great acceptance with young viewers. *Animation film series such as ‘Flitz, das Bienenkind’ or ‘Isnogud’ or series like ‘Sprechstunde bei Dr. Frankenstein’ or ‘Amanda & Betsy’ are classics, the ‘Augsburger Puppenkiste’ as well as feature films stand for entertainment. The ‘Sendung mit der Maus’, ‘Logo’ or ‘Sesame Street’ are responsible for age-appropriate information. With that, the aim of the children’s channel to provide a high quality alternative to the continuously growing flood of children’s programmes was successfully realised”* (ibid. P.173). As in precious years, the most *successful* station for children were, however, PRO 7, RTL, Super RTL and RTL 2. The children’s channel had a market share of 5.6% over the year; ZDF had 5.2%, Nickelodeon 3.8%. In comparison PRO 7 had market share of 5.6%, RTL 15.3%, Super RTL 13.0% and RTL 29.4%. Among the 3-5 year-olds Super RTL is the market leader and the children’s channel reached 10% of the little ones. Here a clear pathway is visible inasmuch as small children are evidently oriented more on special children’s programmes and the “run” on private stations only begins to rise appreciably with school-age children. Small children, as we have seen, evidence a comparatively low level of television use which is in the process of rising. But we do not yet have “Japanese conditions” in which four-month old babies look at the screen if there is a visible programme. According to Groebel (1993, p.11 ff) the competition between media impressions and those of the immediate surroundings shows itself very early here. At the age of seven months the game with the remote control has already begun—given the possibility. At eight months children clap imitatively when shown how to on screen. Finally, one year olds imitate mimicry and gesture of the television actors and at one and a half, television tunes are imitatively hummed. This early recourse to television in Japan can also be explained by the fact that in 75% of all households with 2-3 year-olds who

have their own rooms there is a television. In keeping with that reports show that over 80% of Japanese 1-3 year-olds watch television for more than two hours a day and that 10% of that age group spend more than 8 hours in front of the screen. Here the values in Europe, especially in Germany, are much lower – influenced by the exemplary behaviour of the parents, the availability of a set and its proximity to the child's environment. A television set in the children's room would certainly change things rapidly here.

Observations of *attention spans* while watching television deliver interesting indications which can easily fitted into what we already know (ibid. p.14 ff) some of the results worthy of consideration are going to be given here:

(1) What was investigated was which stimulus particularly engaged the attention of the children. In order to find this out, children were brought into a room in which they were allowed to play while a television was playing in the background. Sometimes sudden loud noises were produced by the television set and at other times fast-changing and colourful pictures played across the screen. In the comparison it became clear that initially acoustic stimulus has a much stronger attention-attracting potential than optical stimulus. Loud shots or other loud noises captivated the children best. Thus in “competition”, attention is captured first by noise – assuming, of course, they are loud enough to divert attention from the pictures.

(2) Small children do not direct their attention first to the television set—if it is on—but perceive all stimuli in the surroundings simultaneously. Young children do not, therefore, watch continuously but employ a rather *wandering gaze* and it is only with a strongly intrusive stimulus that they pay it lasting attention. Just how important role model behaviour is, is shown by observations that a child's attention became immediately focussed when parents were given instructions to watch the next programme carefully.

(3) Small children do not yet watch “according to a programme concept” but put together their own programmes by reacting to stimuli that are bound up with their own daily lives and experiences. This is in keeping with the determination that especially small children initially prefer *assimilation* (the integration of what is perceived into a personal concept) to *accommodation* (the insertion of what is perceived into pre-existing elements of perception).

(4) Finally there is also a remarkable bonding effect which takes place when a programme succeeds in fixing children in front of the television set for longer than 10 seconds. What happens then—and it also works with adult as well—is a kind of “suction” which increasingly shuts out stimuli from the surroundings.

(5) Children do not yet pay attention to the overall context of the action and are often not in a position (nor the interest) to follow a longer narrative sequence in one piece. This means that individual images or scenes are perceived more independently and more strongly, acquiring a separate meaning of their own. Groebel (ibid. p.16). “*So it is not surprising that afternoon trailers which contain brutal scenes intended to announce adult programmes in the evening are linked to reactions of extreme anxiety in children. The single image, the individual scene had the effect and not the overall context of the plot.*” In this connection there are results which give cause for thought: we have already reported that reading to children gives a higher “educational quotient” caused by the correspondingly higher level of educational care by the parents/mother

which possibly represents a qualitatively higher level of communicative encouragement than television. This has, in the meantime, been proved by one study for the young children age group (Grüninger / Lindemann 1997, p.X12). According to this the following connections can be validated:

- (1) the lower the social class the more often television is watched.
- (2) the lower the social class, the longer the children look at television per day.
- (3) the lower the social class the more often they watch television in the afternoon.
- (4) the lower the social class the more the children are allowed to watch television without parental supervision.
- (5) the lower the social class the more a television prohibition is used as an educative measure.
- (6) the lower the social class the less differentiated the parent's basic attitude to television consumption.
- (7) the more television is watched the less the medium of picture book but also radio plays and music cassettes are resorted to.

Notwithstanding the problematic nature of using a "class" indicator nowadays, it nevertheless does correspond with higher, middle and lower educational behaviour and their appropriate educational expectations in each case. Put succinctly: looking at the overall situation, too much television can force out other media and thus restrict the multi-layering and multi-dimensionality of media stories of all kinds. This conclusion does, of course, rest on a value judgement: to wit, that dealing with various mediums—from picture books via audio cassettes to television and CD songs—is something desirable and that a one-sided preference for television is possibly less challenging. This assumption does not seem implausible but is insufficiently substantiated. Thus discriminating against small children watching television is certainly not appropriate but advice to the effect that the use of a wider media palette might be required because the differing coding strategies—hearing, seeing, hearing *and* seeing or in more exact modalities of activity: listening, asking, looking, turning pages backwards, jumping pages, nestling up etc.— would provide more possibilities of expression and arrangement for small children which is more challenging in their breadth and multiplicity as a whole.

Cassettes, Computers Internet

Even if the picture book is the oldest and "noblest" medium, television has a strong fascination for children and as stated at the beginning all the other media in a complex "ensemble" also play a role. Alongside picture books and television programmes (which are less tolerated by "educationally demanding parents") plays and music on cassettes also have great significance in the children's room. Children who engage in listening to audio cassettes several times a week also watch television for 55 minutes daily whereas children who listen to cassettes less often watch television for longer, around 68 minutes. A similar connection can be found with music cassettes: whoever enjoys listening to them watches about 58 minutes of television a day; children who use this medium less often have a higher rate of television consumption (around 69,5 minutes). When video games and video films are included the rates of use are proportional. Children who spend a lot

of time in front of the television prefer more video films and video games than children who would rather have audio or music cassettes or picture books. (Cf. Grüninger / Lindemann, 1998, manuscript; there are detailed data there too). If this thesis is confirmed, two media-cultural profiles could result in the way that although all pre-school children increasingly use all media in some form or other, a group of more print and audio oriented children will contrast with another group which is more video game and video film oriented. Or with more emphasis: that children's culture of perception becomes more differentiated culturally by the formation of different preference groupings. However it is also simultaneously important to state that *audio cassettes* are important for pre-school children – they take third place behind picture books and television. 38.8% of children integrate audio cassette listening into their lives daily and 31.4% several times a week. The average daily listening time is at least 36.6 minutes (ibid. p.X8). *Music cassettes* are also listened to with enjoyment but are, as with radio, rather a medium that is listened to as incidental since during reception there is enough attention left to look at picture books and play games with friends. Use and duration of listening is somewhat less: 26.7% of children listen to music cassettes almost daily, 34.8% several times a week and 32.3% less frequently. As with audio cassettes, music cassettes are used more by girls than by boys. *Radio* with an availability quotient of 85%, is ahead of all other audio media but stands lower in listener favour and the time spent listening than the media already mentioned. That the average budget of time invested in listening to the radio is around 13 minutes would tend to suggest a “tendency towards redistribution of time for audio media away from radio to sound media such as records, cassettes and CDs” (Klinger 1996, p.20). *Video films* are, like audio cassettes part of the media system. Programmes which were originally produced for television such as “Pumuckl” or “Pippi Langstrumpf” were often acquired afterwards on video cassettes or are available in video shops and libraries.

The fantasy and self-testing abilities of the children are more encouraged by a differentiated media palette.

The advantage here lies in the fact that the parents can make a calculated and age-appropriate pre-selection and the duration of reception and this is easier to measure particularly when the child-relevant programmes can be recorded and viewed (when possible, together) at an appropriate time (Grüninger/Lindemann 1998, manuscript). Although the video recorder is primarily a parental instrument, 17% of pre-school children already know how it functions so they can switch it on and off. Children like this who can switch on the video recorder without outside help watch 40 minutes television and thus distinctly more than people of the same age (25 minutes) who are dependent on the help of their parents. Nowadays *video games*—games with a console that can be plugged into the television set (e.g. the products from Nintendo or Sega)—offer graphically and technically sophisticated programme selections and projection surfaces as well as fantasy worlds which the children can immerse themselves in. Their mobile off-shoots, Gameboys, which from the

definition point of view can be counted amongst computer games are small and inexpensive, technically and graphically less well developed but are demanding enough for the child player as far as gaming skill is concerned. Since certain motor skills are a pre-condition, it is the pre-school children who are occupied with video games. Here, frequency of use and length of use increases with age. *Computers* as work and communication instruments are becoming increasingly important and increasingly serve to carry out daily tasks (home banking is one example). Pre-school children are the professional users of tomorrow. In the meantime there are also offers that appeal to children of pre-school age via internet such as the “Kids Club” or the “kindernetz” from Südwestfunk. They can be activated by clicking on icons and don’t assume pre-knowledge. Commercial computer games and educational game computers are available for small children which of course require cognitive and sensory and motor skills that only older pre-school children have. After all, there are at least four demands made by the game here that, on the one hand, have to be fulfilled but on the other can be practiced and learned early if there is sufficient motivation. Amongst them (1) sensory and motor synchronisation (extension of the body to include “electrical proxies”); (2) transfer of meaning (understanding content and representation in the game); (3) competence in regard to the rules (understanding the rules and acting according to them appropriately); (4) self-referring activity (forming a relationship to the game, translating one’s own impulses and interests into action).

Outlook

Our presentation shows that disproportionate fears are misplaced. On the contrary, it looks rather as if the fantasy and self-testing abilities of children are encouraged by a diverse media palette. This is clear in the classical case of being-read-to just as it is with television use that finds its way into the game repertoire thus expanding the daily scripts of direct interaction between mother and child. **More of the world is forcing its way into the children’s room and this doesn’t have to be a disadvantage.** The children themselves have the least anxiety. Quite the contrary, they turn to all new media eagerly and with curiosity and show no fear of contact. An “unfamiliarity” with technology that could be anthropologically substantiated as a moving away from biological principles, something that has to be slowly overcome after birth, is not in evidence. Similarly there is almost no evidence that children—at least in the vast majority—turn exclusively to one medium or neglect their friendships and peer contacts. **On the contrary, perhaps it is exactly the media and their messages which open up the world. With contents that are much wider than family and nursery they make it possible for children take part in new kinds of encounter and new worlds of contact.** In any case it will be increasingly difficult to guarantee an early childhood world that is a media-free province where everything is centred on the mother-child relationship, even with the 0-5 year olds. The space and reach of the images, longings and hopes and, of course, also fears have brought a repertoire into existence that has penetrated the configurative meanings of social relationships—but also the world of objects—and confronts the children with symbolic riches, that are challenging and versatile and of course, need to be processed. Since even pre-school children grow up in complex worlds that penetrate all spaces as diagonal structures and cause far-reaching changes in the axes of perception, communication and learning.

One might suspect that all these early experiences in reading and media socialisation would have consequences for teaching in the schools. Children today have an experiential repertoire that is constituted differently and in the area of communication is much wider. **Competition between reading and other media cannot be detected. On the contrary, the media ensemble is used in a very broad manner by children encouraged to do so and it helps them in their development.** However, it is worth pointing out that there is a rift between a socially stable milieu and one in which no reading aloud is practiced – with shifts which we have clearly stated. **If someone watches too much television this is not the fault of the medium itself but thanks to unfavourable social milieu from which the children come.** Here children will have to catch up especially in the primary school.

Considering early childhood media self-socialisation and family experiences there is, generally speaking, one task that is going to be important for schools that are there for everyone and that is to counter imbalance and to see that children get the media competence that is basically available nowadays. Along with this compensation assignment, the school itself will be where completely new media worlds come into existence. The “electronic classroom” extended to the “virtual classroom” is no longer a utopia. But that is another story.

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