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Guest editorial: Young Children's Engagements with Digital Media

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It is now well established that young children participate in a wide range of digital practices from birth (Marsh et al., 2005). Children's home access to media has grown considerably over the last few years (Ofcom, 2017) and if we are to fully understand these changes and their implications for education we must have space to debate them in the broader context of media education. We are delighted, therefore, that the Media Education Research Journal has given us a forum for discussion. We must also thank the COST Action IS1410, The Digital and Multimodal Practices of Young Children (DigiLitEY) http://digilitey.eu, led by Professor Jackie Marsh, which has established a rich community of practitioners in relation to very young children's digital and multimodal literacies, and has provided European funding for the research and international collaboration and discussion that forms the basis of four of the international papers we include here.

The aim of this issue of MERJ is to demonstrate a diverse range of approaches to engaging with children's experiences of media as both researchers and educators (Cannon 2018, in press; Parry 2014; Woodfall & Zezulkova 2017). We were keen to ensure that this special edition represented a range of international contexts, sharing the issues that are the focus of attention in different countries. In doing so we have, with some delight, broken with the UK definition of early years as being those children under the age of five, and include papers here which focus on children up to eight years old, reflecting wider international practice. Indeed, the age boundary is not the only aspect which makes the countries here distinct; there are marked differences in policy, curriculum and legislation even where there are commonalities in cultural phenomena. We may see some of the same films, games, toys and practices featured in research with children, but there are some highly pertinent ways in which children's participation plays out differently in the various contexts. We invite you to pay attention to these differences, as to do so has been richly rewarding to us as editors. Perhaps most significantly we have included papers which we feel help those of us working in this context to push at the boundaries, in terms of education policy, regulation and research and imagine new ways of responding to media learning and engagement in early childhood.

We begin with a paper which shares innovative research with very young children in the home. Cary Bazalgette's "Embodied movie-watching: Two-year-olds and big warm silky

screens" offers ground-breaking research on toddlers' emotional and embodied responses to moving image texts, offering rich theoretical understandings of this neglected dimension of media learning in relation to early childhood. Using in-depth and longitudinal observation, Bazalgette brings to bear decades of experience in film and media education to interpret the quality of her grandchildren's attention to certain short films, and their emotional reactions and interactions with screen and text.

For those of us focused on media education in the UK, where the move to formal learning and testing is ever more entrenched (Cannon et al. 2014), it has been heartening to gain an understanding of education reform which directly attempts to address the changes in children's media and digital lives. In "Promoting Multiliteracies from Early Years Onwards: Insights to an Ongoing Educational Reform Effort in Finland", Kristiina Kumpulainen offers an insight into the Finnish curricula context, where multiliteracy was recently introduced as a foundational competency to be promoted from early childhood onwards. Often regarded as a model of good practice in terms of early years education, Finnish education policy-makers have devised a new national framework for multiliteracies that stems from the deeply ingrained commitment to connecting with children's own experiences. Kumpulainen describes the implementation of this framework, encompassing teacher professional development, and reflects on the many challenges of deploying new multimodal approaches. Kumpulainen also reminds us of the continuing importance of collaboration and enjoyment, as a shared contemporary view of literacy begins to emerge. Following the work of the New London Group, the concept of multiliteracies also enables a foregrounding of intercultural understandings in ever diversifying learning environments.

In contrast with the account of national and strategic policy change above, Kate Cowan's contribution, "Digital Languages: Multimodal meaning-making in Reggio-inspired early years education", offers rich insights into Swedish educators' attempts to embed digital technologies in their everyday practice. Cowan recounts her experience in three Stockholm pre-school settings whose practices are inspired by Reggio Emilia's concept of 'the hundred languages of children'. Cowan's account demonstrates how early practices that connect with children's digital lives, align comfortably with discourses on multimodality. The paper helpfully unpacks the ways in which Swedish approaches embed and normalise the incorporation of digital media into everyday meaning-making practices. We see how practitioners in these sites of learning adopt critically informed pedagogic strategies, by taking into consideration the particular affordances of digital technologies, their potential and their limitations.

As part of the EU H2020 RISE funded MakEY project, we learn from Fiona Scott about the nature of 'makerspaces' in the early years. Such spaces serve as creative hubs, bringing together expert and non-expert learners of all ages to make artefacts using specialist tools and resources

– both digital and non-digital. Innovatory engagements with electronica and the empirical ground Fiona's suggestions for new theory and insights into young children's digital skills and creative capacities. Scott's contribution takes us further into the realm of connecting children's own media cultures with their play. "Knock, knock, it's Freddy!: harnessing young children's digital and media skills and interests to foster creativity and digital literacy in makerspaces" draws attention to the ways in which young children independently and skillfully translate their existing 'Funds of Knowledge' (González et al., 2006), such as knowledge of a simple digital game, into valuable in-school play practices. At a time when the boundaries between what constitutes digital and traditional literacies are themselves blurred (Scott & Marsh, 2018), she cautions that the knee-jerk value judgements accompanying a narrow understanding of young children's engagements with media risk widening existing inequalities and missing the important connections that can be made between learning opportunities.

In a contrasting out-of-school international context, Ayae Odagi & Jonathan deHaan describe a range of skills developed by children while making board games. In a bid to disrupt the binary distinctions made between digital video games and more traditional board games, Odagi and deHaan demonstrate the value of combining these seemingly divergent domains in creative production. As the title suggests, "Do rock-paper-scissors and if the last player wins, he can move in front of the first player': Exploring learning through a video game media translation project at a Japanese after-school children's center" we learn how the authors work alongside elementary school children tasked with translating Mario Kart DS into a concrete board game. Using a constructionist paradigm, they lay out a range of social, cognitive and skills-related learning outcomes related to media literacy, problem solving, storytelling and visual design.

Finally, Lynn Whitaker highlights the failure of regulatory decisions to fully address parents' concerns regarding children as consumers in "Exploiting the Child Consumer: ethical problems in monetising children's online games". Building on the work of Livingstone and Buckingham, Whitaker casts a forensic eye on the world of 'in-app purchases' (IAP), and the ways in which young children are interpellated as consumers by the game industry. Through qualitative data, Lynn explores the nuanced relationships between protectionist arguments, the 'pressure to buy' and the putative agency and autonomy that online spaces supposedly afford. In this historical moment of heightened awareness of online exploitation, her thesis is particularly pertinent when it calls for renewed efforts on the part of parents and industry to face up the problems associated with targeting children as consumers.

The positive response to our call for papers reflects a shared need to think deeply and critically about the myriad issues relating to the role of digital devices and media texts in the lives of very young children. The work we present demonstrates clearly that if children's

everyday encounters with media texts are marginalised and undervalued, opportunities for connected learning are missed, leading to a dissonance between home and school experiences (Parry, 2014) and risking ever wider inequalities (Scott, 2016). Doubtless, ongoing research has an important role to play in establishing a bridge between children's media experiences and their experience of media in schools. In addition, it has the potential to signal opportunities for new and dynamic ways of using digital tools (Cannon et al. 2018, in press) to create innovative pedagogic spaces for young children.

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