

On media, children, and their parents

A lecture given on the occasion of the public acceptance of the appointment as extraordinary professor of Children, media, and parental mediation in the Department of Media and Communication at the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, on Thursday 9 June, 2011,

by Prof. Dr. Peter Nikken

Dear Rector Magnificus of the Erasmus University,

Dear Executive Board of the Erasmus University,

Dear Dean of the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication,

Dear representatives of

- the Netherlands Youth Institute,
- the Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audiovisual Media,
- the Pan-European Game Information S.A., and
- the My Child Online foundation,

Dear colleagues, students, family, and friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me take you back in time for a while. Imagine, Hoogvliet, a subarea of Rotterdam somewhere in the mid-sixties of the last century. Two boys, about 5 and 7 years old, and their father and mother are watching an exciting episode of the Thunderbirds on the television set in the living room. Tension is building up, and then all of a sudden on the black and white screen of the wooden television set a big explosion is seen and heard. A building starts to collapse, leaking gas propels big fires, and people are trying to find their way out of the burning building. Even though the Thunderbird characters are only puppets, the youngest boy doesn't want to watch the program any further. He is scared and wants to hide behind the sofa. At that moment his father puts an arm around him and comforts him. It helps. Sitting close next to his father, the young boy than again dares to co-view the show.

The young boy had two other interesting experiences that are relevant for my lecture here today. First somewhere around the same period, the boy had to put on his pajama like every evening before going to bed. Normally he would do so in the living room, but one day all of a sudden he hesitated. He pointed to the television set and said to his mother, "Look, there is a woman on the screen and I don't want

her to see me changing clothes”. His mother laughed and then calmly explained: “The people you see on television can’t see us, because they are filmed with a camera. They are far, far away” she said. At that moment the boy realized that indeed the television was connected to a cable that in turn was connected to an antenna.

Many years later one evening the boy came down from his bedroom and turned on the television set in the living room to watch a favorite show of the Six Million dollar man. His father said that he could only watch if he had finished his homework. The boy said that he had, even though he knew very well that he still had to finish many equations for his mathematics-test the next day. That evening he watched his favorite program, but definitely not as relaxed as on other evenings. Because of his father’s remark, all the time he thought of the equations that were waiting for him upstairs. The boy was fully aware that he was not prepared for his math test and realized he had to plan his homework better in the future.

As you may have guessed already, the young boy in these three situations was I. Now, you may wonder why I want you to be part of my personal memories. Actually, I have several reasons.

1. As you may have noticed the interactions between me and my parents were not intentionally planned but the situations presented themselves as part of the ongoing process of my parents’ daily routines of upbringing. Although these interactions may seem insignificant among all the other interactions I had with my parents, I clearly remember them now and they helped me being who I am today. Since situations as these are relevant for every child’s development it is of great importance to gain knowledge on how parents in their daily practices raise their children. Their interference may further the positive effects of the media as well as dampen the risks. Now, especially in the United States of America, there is a profound tradition of research on what is called ‘parental mediation’; that is all the activities that parents are involved in when guiding their children’s media use. In the Netherlands and in Europe parental mediation is not yet very high on the research agenda of scientists. Communication studies often only focus on

children's media preferences and media effects, whereas researchers of family and childcare often focus on the family and parenting, but not on the media. The installation of the professorship on media, children, and their parents is thus a significant first step in building a European 'parental mediation' research tradition.

2. Secondly, the three interactions I presented above show that parents make use of different strategies when helping their children deal with the media; sometimes they interfere with the content the child is consuming, at other times they will regulate the amount of time a child spends with the media, sometimes they give a thoroughly grounded opinion on what the child sees or does and at other times they may only raise their eyebrows. Actually, even when parents don't do anything special, they also apply a form of parental mediation. Because then too the parents are a role model for the child.
3. As you may have noticed, in the third place, my parents applied the mediation during my whole youth. They interfered with my media behavior and they talked with me about my media preferences when I was young and still very depending on them, but they did so too when I matured, attended high school and even later university. Surely, as I grew older the form and the amount of interactions we had changed, but all the time my parents somehow continued to educate me, and I responded to their upbringing. Thus, when looking at how parents and children interact around media from an academic perspective it is essential to look at the whole period of childhood, from early infancy until early adulthood.
4. Then finally, looking back to my childhood thirty, forty years ago, I can conclude that guiding children's media use by the parents in those years was essential. I have experienced it myself, and there are several older studies, that corroborate my impression (e.g. Himmelweit et al, 1958; Bower, 1973). But, parenting has changed. In the sixties it was custom for families to have only one black-and-white television set in the living room and to watch only a few hours of television per week. Furthermore, families more than today

formed a traditional coherent unit. Surely, at the end of the sixties color television and somewhat later remote controls and VCR's were introduced. But, in those days there were no cell phones, there was no Internet, and playing games was only possible IRL. Also, one-parent families or newly formed families after a divorce definitely were not as common as they are today. Family life, and especially the media-environment in the home, up to the ninety's was completely different from today's situation. Therefore, it is highly important to see how parents have adapted their mediation practices to today's media-environment.

Today I will elaborate on three topics. First, what do we know about the child's media environment and their media use? This is important, because to interpret the essence of parental mediation one has to have an idea on what the child's media use and environment looks like. Then, I will discuss parenting and parenthood, and in particular the research so far about parental mediation. Finally, I will talk about what kind of assistance there is for parents to help their children using the media, and I will draw some conclusions about what is needed.

The child's media-environment

As said before, children and their parents or carers today live in a media-saturated environment. Ghetto blasters have vanished from our streets and are replaced by mp3's or -4's or iPods. Also, in a modern household there are several devices to access the Internet, such as personal computers, laptops, smartphones or iPads. In many homes there are advanced modern game consoles like the Play Station, Xbox or the Wii. And television is usually received by satellite or cable, and most of the time in a high digital quality on flat screens. Moreover, specifically for younger children, i.e. children younger than 6 years, there are also many devices to access the media: for example the iTod or specifically to younger children adapted cell phones, and game consoles.

Together with this growth in media equipment, the offering of media content also has exploded since the nineties. In my study on children's programming in the Netherlands during the 12-year period 1989 to 2001 (Nikken, 2003), for example, I found that the number of free to air TV channels that offered children's TV

increased from 3 to 9. The amount of time devoted to children's television, however, expanded dramatically in this twelve year period. On an average day, it rose from less than 3 to more than 40 hours, which was particularly realized by the commercial children's channels. Now a decade later, next to regular channels, there are also many channels for babies or kindergartners in the digital offerings of cable and satellite TV providers. The Mediasmarties-project recently calculated that there are now about 20 different TV channels or time slots available for children in the Netherlands. Together they offer more than 300 hours of children's TV per day (personal note C. Spierenburg, March 31, 2011).

But that is not all. Children also watch programs and clips on YouTube. Now, from the EU Kids online project we do know that on average 86 percent of the children aged 9-16 in Europe have access to the Internet at home (Livingstone et al., 2011). In two member states, Italy and Greece, the Internet is not a very common utility, but in many other countries, like the Netherlands, almost all children 9 years and older can go online at home and use it for information and entertainment

But what do we know about younger children? Well, according to a report by Mijn Kind Online and myself (Nikken, 2009), about 4 out of 5 kids under 12 years are regularly online. Their main activities are playing games and watching clips and other programs.

Unfortunately there is no European study on younger kids and the internet, nor is there European-wide research on children and their use of different types of media. A very recent study by the British media-authority Ofcom (2011), shows however that in addition to the Internet (87%), almost all British children in the age bracket from 5 to 15 years reported that they have access to high quality, digital television at home and 92 percent said that they own a game console. Furthermore, more than 50 percent of the children in the UK do use a digital video recorder, and every second child owns a mobile phone; one in five even has a smart phone.

Having so many possibilities to access the media by itself does not necessarily mean that children are spending a lot of time with the media. But the figures in the Ofcom study tell otherwise. In all age groups watching television for 2 to 2½ hours per day, still is the main activity. Having a mobile phone, and a smart phone in

particular, and having internet or a game console, furthermore, means that every day extra time is added to traditional media time. As such British children as young as 5-7 years, on average, spend well over 3½ hours per day on using media. Somewhat older children aged 8-11 years reported that they spend more than 4½ hours on the media, and children from 12 to 15 years are almost 6 hours per day busy with watching, gaming and surfing; that is a quarter of a full day.

These figures on children's daily media consumption may well apply to many well developed countries. In 2010 the American Kaiser Family foundation reported among a slightly older sample, i.e. children from 8 to 18 years, similar percentages of media equipment in the home, and comparable times of media consumption for comparable age groups (Rideout et al., 2010). Children watch a lot of TV, they play games, and they go online. Please note, that I do not condemn the parents of these children, or the children themselves that they have so many media to use and that they are spending so many hours with the media on an average day. Parents may have very good reasons for letting their children use the media. And for the children, these media contacts may be beneficial. I do want to make the point, however, that the media are so omnipresent in the child's live nowadays.

The above mentioned studies on children and media also show that kids often spend their time with the media in privacy. Children use the media anywhere they go and many children's bedrooms now are multi-media centers (Pasquier, 2001; Rideout et al., 2010; Ofcom, 2011). The Ofcom study tells us that every second British child as young as 5-7 years already has its own television set in its room and somewhat less children also have their own game console. These young children do not have access to the Internet in their rooms, but among the older children aged 8-11 years one in seven already has, and among young adolescents four out of ten surf the web in their own room without a parent nearby. Among these older children it is also quite common to have a television set and or to have a game console. Both in the UK and in America about seven out of ten children older than 8 years can watch television privately in their bedroom and or use their own game consoles.

Now, are British and American children growing up differently with the media from Dutch children or children from other European countries? That is difficult to

tell. Holistic and reliable data on media ownership and media consumption by all European children from early infancy until adolescence are not available. The EU kids online project (Livingstone et al., 2011) presents a lot of information on children 9 years and older and the internet, but it doesn't say anything about video gaming, going to the cinema, or watching dvd's or television. Another important European youth monitor, the Health Behavior School Children monitor, does measure the use of different media, as well as the child's development, health, and well-being, but it does not include children under 12 years (Dorsselaer et al., 2007).

Here in the Netherlands, unfortunately, we have no full insight as well. Take for example the Netherlands Institute for Social Research, SCP. In cooperation with others they present figures on media consumption by Dutch citizens every 5 years, but they too do so only for people of twelve years and older (Huysmans et al., 2006). Data on media use are also provided by SPOT, a knowledge center by and for TV advertisers and media producers. SPOT offers data on daily media consumption for adolescents and adults, and also for children from 6 years on. In addition, they also measure the time spent on other activities such as reading, going to school, playing et cetera. The figures are measured by diaries and they match with the formerly mentioned British and American media consumption data. The sample sizes for the specific age groups in this yearly study are, however, rather small and may thus be not very reliable. Finally then, there is Qrius, a commercial research bureau that asks adolescents, and since a few years also parents of children under 12 about media consumption. Qrius uses bigger samples which makes their data more reliable. However, they also rely on the memory of the respondents to indicate their or their child's media use. Perhaps their figures are indeed a good indication of children's media use in the Netherlands, but at the same time I think it is also conceivable that parents underestimate the actual time their children are spending on different media. First, children may use the media outside the view of parents. Secondly, parents may be reluctant to admit that their child is using the media more than they would like them to.

My point, dear listeners, is thus that figures on media use by older AND younger children are lacking, or that they are difficult to compare and understand for policy makers and professionals in the field of parenting support. And that is too bad when

we want to help and advise parents on their daily parental mediation activities. How can we inform parents what to do with their children and the media, if we are in fact guessing what the media landscape of children in various family situations is.

Therefore, I am pleading for

- a monitor on how both the traditional and the modern media are used in today's households,
- with children from early infancy until early adolescence.
- that also looks at parents' and other educators' guidance practices, and their views on children and the media.

Can that be done? Yes, it can! At the end of the eighties in the former century, the ministry of Welfare, the public broadcaster's Research Department and the foundation for Kinderpostzegels once joint forces and money to organize such an enterprise (NOS, 1988). I think it would be very valuable if the ministries of Culture and or Welfare together with the Mediawijsheid-network and organizations such as Qrius again could help co-organize such an extensive survey, most preferably on a regular basis.

Parenting

But let's get back to the topic of media and children, and their parents! What can we say about children and media from the perspective of the parents? What do we know about parents' attitudes and their behaviors when it comes to regulating, guiding or stimulating their children in a media-saturated environment? Or perhaps should we ask, how are children regulating and guiding their parents when it comes to using the media?

Raising children has never been easy. Parenting is not taught at school. It is part of our lives, but luckily most of us as a parent overcome all kinds of challenges and we succeed very well (Weille, 2011). According to the literature on parenting (Blokland, 2010; Van der Pas, 2003), there are five basic elements in the upbringing of children:

1. Parents make sure that eventually the child can do things on its own;
2. They also provide their children a safe environment;
3. they take care of the child's physical well-being;
4. they monitor their child's whereabouts;
5. and they provide the child with boundaries and limitations.

Applying these basic elements of childrearing is both for the child and the parent, a continuing process of learning which most of the time is not done consciously or rationally (Hoek, 2008). That does not mean, however, that parents have no goal. On the contrary, normally all parents act from their sense of responsibility. Every parent wants their child to have a good life. As such, parental activities are based on general, implicit or explicit, ideas on what feels good and appropriate for the child (Van der Pas, 2003).

This basic idea that the child's well-being is an ultimate goal applies to all choices that parents make, including how the media in the family household, and more specifically in the child's life, are used. Every day parents try to find a balance between what they find 'good' or appropriate media for their children and what in their eyes may be harmful, risky or inappropriate.

With so many media that may be a daunting task. And from several popular media outlets we might even get the impression that quite a lot of parents and professional caretakers have given up. According to such publications teachers for example have no idea how to handle children with their cell phones in the classroom (Nationale Academie voor Media & Maatschappij, 2011). And children are portrayed as wizz-kids, members of a generation Einstein, with parents that apparently know nothing about the internet (e.g.: Boschma & Groen, 2006).

Sometimes these myths are debunked by the media themselves (Vossen, 2011; Groet, 2011). But various studies, and I have co-authored quite some of them, have also shown that most parents and carers still are actively and willingly involved in guiding their children. Parents do want to protect their children from bad media use (e.g.: Vander Voort, Nikken & Van Lil, 1992; Valkenburg, 2008; Nikken & Jansz,

2006; Nikken & Pardoën, 2010). One of parents' biggest worries in general, for example, is how to set rules and how to maintain them (Blokland, 2010), which translates in questions as: "isn't my child watching too much TV, or playing games too long?" More importantly however, the studies have also shown that parents want their children to profit from the positive effects that the media can have, including learning, participation, social interaction, or just plain entertainment for its own sake.

Parents' considerations about 'good' and 'bad' media for children are part of the general family standards. Views on good and bad media, therefore, may vary strongly between families resulting in different mediation practices. In some families sex and romance for example are considered more in-appropriate than in other families, with the result that these parents do not want to talk with their child about sensational clips on music channels and that they try to ban these channels as long as possible. Other families with a more liberal view on sex, however, may have no problem that their children are confronted with video clips and may even encourage them to think critically about the skewed images of barely dressed women. Together with Hanneke de Graaf from Rutgers-WPF, I hope to present some interesting results on this topic later this year.

Parental views on good media use may also vary within a singular family (Nikken, 2007). Usually, parents are somewhat more protective and careful with girls than with boys. Also, mothers mostly are more careful and fathers more relaxed when it comes to media violence or the amount of time spent on the media. Also, with younger children parents usually are more careful, although that does not mean that older children always have more freedom.

Next to differences between and within families, there may also be confusion about 'good' and 'bad' media use within one and the same parent. In a preliminary mini-survey among 26 parents, I recently asked them to look at their child as a media consumer and write down what they were most proud of. In addition, I also asked them with an open question to report what was most worrying. The parents reported about 10 sons and 16 daughters ranging in age from 4 to 16 years. Interestingly, many parents were proud of their child's competence on the computer. At the same

time, however, many of these parents were worried that their child would come into contact with strangers, choose inappropriate content on the web, or would become Internet addicted. Apparently, being competent on the computer inevitably increases certain risks that the parents were less fond of.

Another eight parents said they were proud that their child was obedient in using the media. Among these parents, however, quite some were worried that someday their child would transgress the rules or that their child would be more knowledgeable on the computer than the parent. Although this was a small, convenience sample it does show that one and the same parent can have mixed perceptions on their child's media use, resulting in doubts on how to guide the child.

What parents actually practice as parental mediation has been researched in quite some studies in former years. It even has resulted in a theory on what parental mediation entails. Parental guidance was studied already in the sixties and the seventies of the former century, but then it was usually measured with a priori defined single items. The idea that parental mediation is a multi-dimensional concept started with Bybee, Robinson and Turow in the early eighties of the former century (1982). Among a special sample of mass communication scholars they empirically established different types of mediation for children's television viewing. Bybee and his colleagues reasoned that if there is one group of parents who can professionally think about the media and its effects on children, and who can relate those thoughts to their own daily practices as a parent, it should be mass communication scholars. The researchers asked their respondents how often they applied more than a dozen different activities when guiding their children's viewing. It turned out that the activities could be grouped into three distinct types of parental mediation:

- 1) restrictive mediation; i.e. making rules about TV content, if and when it can be viewed;
- 2) evaluative guidance; i.e. indicating what is good and bad behavior on TV or how to interpret the reality of TV; and finally,

- 3) unfocused guidance; several activities that basically dealt with just watching TV together with the child.

A few years later together with Tom van der Voort and Jan van Lil, I replicated this study among ordinary Dutch parents (Van der Voort, Nikken & Van Lil, 1992). We added some items to the questionnaire and using the same technique of factor analysis we also found the same three distinct types of mediation. In our case, however, the third type of mediation was not so much a mix of left-over items. Since we had added specific questions about the intention of the parents to watch together with the child, the unfocused guidance actually measured watching together deliberately. Parents co-view with their children either because they want to, or because their child asks for it. Later studies on parental guidance have replicated these outcomes (see Mendoza, 2009). Moreover, new studies have also shown that the parental strategies in a general form not only apply to television, but also to videogames and to the internet. Jeroen Jansz and I, for example, have published some papers on how and why parents mediate their children's videogaming (Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Nikken, Jansz & Schouwstra, 2007). Furthermore, both with Jeroen and with Jos de Haan and Nathalie Sonck the mediation of children's internet use is work in progress at the moment. Finally, later studies have also used children as respondents showing that the mediation parents exude is also recognized by children and youngsters (Van der Voort, Van Lil & Peeters, 1998; Van den Bergh & Van den Bulck, 2001; Koolstra & Lucassen, 2004; De Graaf, Nikken e.a., 2008).

All these later studies on parental mediation have further refined the trichotomy of mediation. But in my opinion the formation of a parental mediation theory is far from complete. On the contrary, it is just at a starting point.

First of all, more research is needed with regard to the mediation types that have been established. The unfocused guidance, for example, is now usually referred to as co-viewing, or in the case of gaming co-playing, and for the internet co-use. The status of this mediation type varies, however, depending on how the researchers measured this type of parental mediation. In an often cited study by Patti Valkenburg and others the researchers for example did not ask whether the parents

had a pedagogical intent to watch together (Valkenburg, Krömer, Peeters & Marseille, 1999). Instead they posed questions like “Do you watch together with the child, because you both LIKE a program?” or “because of a common interest?” The researchers constructed a reliable scale, labeled it ‘social co-viewing’, and found that merely watching together was not related to the parents’ views on media effects. From that, one might conclude that it is not necessary to advise parents to co-view. As a matter of fact, watching together with the child may sometimes indeed be ineffective since just sitting together while watching a violent program may give the child the idea that the parent condones the violence on the screen (Nathanson, 2002). From other studies we know however, that co-viewing or – playing intentionally may be beneficial for the child (Nikken, Jansz & Schouwstra, 2007).

Let me give you another example. Evaluative guidance is now often referred to as active mediation, because next to evaluating media content other interactive activities are performed by the parents. Depending on the study it can encompass, for example: giving information about the media, helping understand the content, listening to the child, or stimulating a critical mentality. In addition, active mediation may also be positive, approving, or it may be negative and disapproving (e.g.: Austin, Bolls, Fujioka & Engelbertson, 1999). Since active mediation has so many sub-forms, I am not sure if the researchers are always talking about the same concept.

Mediation studies may thus give a blurred input for youth professionals and parents. At least in my work at the Netherlands Youth Institute I have experienced that it is difficult to give evidence-based advisory tips that go beyond the general advice of ‘set rules’, ‘talk with your child’ or ‘actively watch or play together’. What we need is research that indicates in specific childrearing situations what a parent can tell or do with the internet, a game, a movie or a TV program, with which children, under which circumstances, and how to tell or do it.

Furthermore we also need research on new types of guidance. Since all modern media including television can be used in new interactive ways, parental guidance has to adapt. Technical applications such as parental control systems may change

the way parents make agreements with the child on when and what to play, see or download. Monitoring, i.e. looking at the internet browser history afterwards, or using white-list or black-list filters may be another new type of mediation (Livingstone e.a., 2008, 2011; Nikken & Jansz, i.p.). In addition, since modern media ask for the participation and social interaction of the child a new type of guidance is conceivable too, namely guiding the child's online social behavior. Finally, because media are used more and more on an individual basis with children out of sight, co-viewing and –using may alter in strategies like supervision with the parent at a distance from the child.

To sum up, I find it crucial to continue the research on parental mediation in the coming years. First, we do know rather little about mediation for the very young. Most studies are focused on families with adolescents, or with children from 6 or 8 years and older. Second, there are also very few, if any, studies on parental mediation with children that are more at risk for media effects, such as children with learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, autism, or other behavioral disorders. Third, there are also very few studies that give insight in the effectiveness of parental mediation. The vast majority of the studies cannot tell if the child's behavior is the result of the parent's intervention or vice versa. Finally, we need good review studies that compare former studies on their methodology and the outcomes. Together with Media Master student Lili Wiesenhütter I am taking a first step now by analyzing how the mediation strategies are operationalized in former studies on parental mediation. We hope to do this job the coming months and deliver a solid fundament for future studies.

Supporting parents

The professorship on parental mediation does not only aim for better knowledge on parents, children and media for the sake of academics. Society as a whole, and caretakers and parents in particular want advice on how to raise children in the media-rich environment. Last weekend a report from the British government stated that nearly nine out of ten parents felt that children are under pressure to grow up too quickly. At the same time many parents do not know how to withstand this media-pressure (Bailey, 2011). Perhaps even some of you have come here this

afternoon in the hope to get useful tips on raising your own child. Unfortunately, I personally cannot give you a simple list or a recipe with tips for the ideal parental mediation. First, because you know your own child better than I do, and secondly, you have your own views on ‘what acceptable media use is for your own child’. It is with pleasure, however, that I refer to the website Mediaopeding.nl where dedicated specialists, including myself, provide you with an underpinned advice.

In the coming years, I will also try to help improve the system of parenting support in other ways. That is an important topic in my activities, and in those of my colleagues, at the Netherlands Youth Institute.

For us, the basic question on this point is: what should be organized so that parents can get good support? As my colleague Tom van Yperen has stated, in youth care it is more and more recognized that it is better to help parents with light preventive forms of advice when problems at home are relatively small, than to invest lots of money on curative interventions afterwards, when problems have gotten out of hand (Van Yperen & Stam, 2010). In my opinion such a preventive approach should also apply to helping parents raise their children with the media.

Now, normally parents have several implicit or explicit coping strategies to ensure that even in difficult situations they succeed in raising their children (Hoek, 2008), for example: looking for advice in the direct social environment. With information systems such as Kijkwijzer or PEGI parents don’t even have to leave their home to get reliable advice in their direct environment. Based on scientific knowledge, the media industry has arranged a profound system to classify hundreds or thousands of media productions per year on possible harmfulness for children in various age categories, which at the same time is easy to understand and use by parents. In the blink of an eye by means of age and content signifiers, parents can estimate if their child is old enough for a television program, a movie, or a game, and what type of harmful content they can expect.

In addition to Kijkwijzer and PEGI, parents also use their own parents, teachers at school, or friends and fellow-parents as nearby resources for their parental mediation practices. In a study with Mijn Kind Online I found that the exchange of

ideas, spontaneously in the schoolyard or in organized school-parent meetings, is an appreciated way of spreading such practice-based knowledge (Nikken, 2009).

But, these exchanges may also be risky when parents start to talk other parents into wrong beliefs. For example: ‘that parents will always be behind their kids in skills and knowledge’, or ‘that setting rules is hopeless because kids won’t listen anyway’. To prevent such risks, parents as well as professional educators need resources that are not only easily accessible, but that also provide validated, evidence-based information.

Now finding resources on children and media is not so much a problem. Both in the Netherlands and abroad, there are many organizations, individuals, or institutions that provide tips, advice, support, training et cetera. In the partner-database of the Mediawijsheid network, you can even find almost 500 Dutch organizations. On the one hand I am proud that there are so many initiatives in the Netherlands. On the other hand, a problem is, however, that parents or professionals most of the time cannot check if the information, products or services they get from these partners is underpinned.

Therefore, another line of research that I want to propose is focused on the effectiveness of the tools for parenting support. At the Netherlands Youth Institute there is a lot of experience in compiling, verifying, and disseminating knowledge on youth matters and parenting support to professionals. We have easy searchable databases with validated information on interventions, instruments, and organizations in the youth sector. In line with this work, I think a more systematic approach to the products and services in the field of media guidance is needed too. For the Mediawijsheid-network it will be a big step forward when we systematically, and on a scientific basis, check what is available, who is doing what, and how valuable the contribution eventually is for parents and educators. I think it will be an interesting challenge for students to tackle that issue.

Another enterprise lies in realizing a more solid network of professional organizations that parents can fall back on whenever they need assistance. Together with my colleague Anne Addink and trainee-student Karien Verhappen, last year, I organized several meetings with experts on childrearing, and professionals from

libraries, child & family centers, and health and youth care. Our aim was to gain more knowledge on what the youth sector needs with regard to supporting parents.

We drew several conclusions (Nikken & Addink, 2011):

1. Professionals lack information about the child's development as a media consumer; without that it is difficult to help parents in specific situations;
2. They lack good background information on parental mediation, such as leaflets with FAQ's;
3. Professionals aren't properly trained on media-pedagogical issues or on media-technical issues; and
4. Different organizations, such as libraries, schools, child and family centers, and health care organizations, do not work coherently when supporting parents.

Luckily the Mediawijzer-network later this year will organize 'de week van de mediawijsheid' and during this week parental mediation will be a central issue. From my position I hope to contribute to a more solid support system for parental mediation. Interesting building blocks for this enterprise are, in my view definitely, on and off line versions of the child and family centers, libraries, the Mediasmarties project, Kijkwijzer, PEGI, and the new website Mediaopvoeding.nl which is 100% focused on parental mediation.

Wrap up

Ladies and gentlemen, I have presented a rough sketch of the world of children and media, and concluded that it is essential to upgrade that sketch to a detailed painting, preferably by regular research on children's media use and ownership, and especially among families with younger children.

Next, I have shown that parental mediation is a natural part of childrearing and highly dependent on what parents feel appropriate for their children. In terms of knowledge, however, much more research is needed. From my position at this university I hope to contribute to this need.

Finally, I discussed the issue of parent support. Parents are in need of advice, tips, help et cetera. They can get such support from friends and relatives, or from all kinds of institutions. It is necessary however, to systematically validate the support and to realize a more solid network of organizations that parents can fall back on.

Word of gratitude

Dear listeners, I can imagine that you long for a drink which will be offered on behalf of the Netherlands Youth Institute. However, I ask you for a just bit of patience, as I would like to express my gratitude. I thank you as listeners here today. Gratitude also goes to several special persons who are dear to me and who have had or still have their role in the chair I am fulfilling here at this university.

First of all, much gratitude goes to the university's board and all at the Erasmus School for History, Culture and Communication for creating this position. Dick Douwes, Dean, Susanne Janssen, Chair of the Department, and Jeroen Jansz, with whom I already had a fine working relationship for several years, I appreciate your efforts.

I am grateful too to the Netherlands Youth Institute for initializing this professorship and letting me combine my regular work with this new academic challenge. Kees Bakker, Carolien Gelauff, Tom van Yperen, and all other wonderful colleagues at the institute, I thank you for your efforts that have led to my appointment and I hope that this chair will have valuable input for the Netherlands Youth Institute as well.

I also thank Wim Bekkers, his board, and his team at the Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audiovisual Media, for co-realizing this chair. Already since 2001 when Kijkwijzer started you've asked me for advice relating to children, media and parents on multiple occasions. I hope to support Kijkwijzer in the future even better with new insights on children, media and the family.

Dirk Bosmans, Simon Little, Jürgen Bänsch at PEGI, and Remco Pijpers and Justine Pardoën at Mijn Kind Online, you too are dear to me for co-supporting this chair. For PEGI I will do my best to find a European twist to all my activities here at the Erasmus University. With Mijn Kind Online I already have an intensive and

fine relationship, not only as a member of your advisory board, but also on our shared website Mediaopvoeding.nl, by which we provide evidence-based advice for parents and professionals.

Erik, Jiska, Isabel, Martijn, Theresa, Evelien, and all others at ERMECC it was really heart warming how you all welcomed me last January when I started on the 3rd floor of the L-building. I'm looking forward to working with you in the coming years, which probably will be more natural when you also move up from the 2nd floor.

When it comes to collaboration I also have to thank all researchers and colleagues with whom I worked together and co-authored books and articles in the past, or will in the near future. Jeroen (again), Jos, and Nathalie here at Erasmus or SCP, and Patti, Moniek, Jochen, Juliette, Hans, and Ed from the University of Amsterdam, thanks for sharing your ideas and knowledge. Hanneke, the last few years it was great working with you on our surveys on adolescence and sexuality and I look forward to new projects. Then, with the risk of forgetting other co-workers, thank also goes to Tom van der Voort, my promoter at Leiden University more than ten years ago. You taught me to rethink and rewrite every word in a scientific article at least three times. Your red editor pencil was feared by many, but it helped.

Then, all involved in the Mediawijzer-network, especially Mary, Marjolijn, Joyce, and Cathy, who now works for the Mediasmarties-project. Thanks for sharing your experiences and help so far. I am looking forward to 'De week van de mediawijsheid' in November.

Ladies and gentlemen, final thanks naturally apply to my family. Kaja, we've met more than 25 years ago in Poland and since then I enjoyed every day we've been together. I confess, that sometimes I'm a workaholic because media and children – next to oil painting – are my passion and it is not always so easy to let go. However, you've managed to accept me as I am and I am grateful for that. Kocham cię na zawsze! Monika and Miriam, you both are wonderful daughters to me. You're both officially adults now and within a few years you'll probably leave home. I thank you both, and your friends, for helping me in the past years, to realize how young people perceive the media.

I also have to mention Gerard, my brother. Thanks for watching the Thunderbirds and many other television programs with me, helping out whenever necessary, and for just being there; even though in the last few years you often were far away for quite a long time.

Then finally, special thanks also apply to my parents, who are no longer with us. As I mentioned in my introduction, they helped me being who I am today by caring and comforting me, stimulating my thoughts, and controlling my media use. By the way, to reassure you, even though I didn't make all my mathematic equations that evening, I did pass the exam I was worried about.

Ik heb gezegd.

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