

TELEVISION, DIGITAL, MEDIA AND CHILDREN'S LEARNING

(Dr. Patricia Edgar and Don Edgar)

This paper covers the important issue of children's learning and development through electronic media and new technologies. It was commissioned by VCAA (Victorian curriculum and assessment authority) in order to widespread the power of modern technology that could be very helpful in enhancing the children's learning. It includes how children use media and the educational value of television, computers and electronic learning aids. It basically involves children up to 8 years who are considerable TV viewers.

Media technology covers radio and television broadcasting on in-house sets, I pods and portable players or on the mobile phones, films and TV programs, broadcast or on DVD's, computer games on PC's, laptops or hand held modules, interactive games on the internet and communicative media such as chat rooms, mobiles and email.

PART A: TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY

Today at present we know that media technologies (TV, film, computer games etc) are playing a good role in educating young children and certainly there is potential to enhance their development and learning. There was a survey done by Australian Communications and Media Authority on children of **0-4years** and found that they spend **154 minutes/day** viewing free to air television (127minutes on commercial television) and **194 minutes/day** watching subscription TV. This showed that children up to 0-4 years are the heavy viewers of the family who makes a total viewing time average of **5 hours 48minutes/day**. The trouble is that there are no adequate television programs made for the children of this age group, therefore they watch the adult programs throughout. On comparison for children of 5-12 years the figures were like: **130minutes/day** viewing free to air and **160minutes/day** for subscription TV.

However this is the age when child needs to get more physical and social experiences for healthy development but the average time of **4hours 50 minutes/day** were arguably too much for them.

The American Institute Of Family Studies' Longitudinal study Of Australian children (LSAC) provides an indication of variations in media use by different social groups in Australia like girls watch less TV than boys, children of unemployed mother watch TV 15minutes more

than others, children with one parent family watch TV more than children with 2 parent families. Also between 2000- 2005 the percentage of internet and computer usage raises from 7% to 23%.

OPPORTUNITIES:

TELEVISION- television could be a wonderful story teller. Stories bind the community together and guide the children to shape their lives, teach them about their feelings, their tribe, their culture and place in the world. It is not possible to educate the child about the cohesive national culture and identity without letting them know about the shared culture experience, and television can do this very effectively. Television helps child in many ways and this story telling provides them to enhance their imaginative skill and also helps in emotional development.

In Howard Gardner's terms children develop their inter-intra-personal intelligences. The programs which are good and are able to keep children engaged with quality content are repeatedly watched by them and is continued till they grow older. During these years children's brain plasticity is very high and therefore media would work as a marvelous and delightful development tool for them.

We are already aware of the importance of **play** in the lives of children. When a 0-5year old child grows, it is gradually moving from its self centered vision to more complex one, so watching television and observing the stories there would help the child in understanding its world better. Preschoolers are also forming their personal style and their sense of identity with their family, in a sex role, outside the family and within the ethnic and racial group. Also television includes people from all diversities and this also helps in emerging self image of the child.

Television programs are good when they age appropriate. Also through them they need to learn to share, to appreciate others, to know that jealousy, anger and greed are the feelings we all have and we must learn to control them. Children are learning and they need to get the right inputs as this will work as a foundation of their nature and personality for their whole life. These programs can help clarify emotions, reflect anxieties and hope and recognize problems with suggesting solutions to overcome hardships and worries.

Unlike some curriculum and media approaches which rigidly separate what experiences are appropriate for infants compared with toddlers and older children, the evidence is that quality TV programs and games can be designed for three to eight-year-olds and understood by them at different levels. Technology makes it possible to design programs that are not only appropriate to a particular age group, but also to different developmental levels within that age group. The

computer is inherently adaptable to different learning styles, but there is as yet little evidence of that adaptability being harnessed in the cause of more individually appropriate learning.

EDUCATIONAL GAMES:

Today's world of advanced technology is a good package of educational games too. Mobile phones, PDAs, graphing calculators, GPS receivers, MP3 players, digital cameras and watches can be used to play games on-line and off-line. Educational games have also lead to drift away the young gamers from television to spend time with interactive play. Such games are overtly didactic as they also teach time tables, numbers, letters, reading and comprehension. Games are particularly very useful for children with learning difficulties and enhance hand and eye coordination.

Even the narrative based games also proved to be very influential, effective that work as a valuable tool for learning. For instance:

- ✓ Children seek information and piece together data collection from many places
- ✓ They make decisions quickly which have clear consequences.
- ✓ They become experts at multi tasking and parallel processing and learn to collaborate with others over range of networks.

Also children who use computers are good communicators and cooperators, they can play better with rules, share leadership roles, take turns and initiative interactions. Children learn to use more complex speech patterns and higher level of verbal communication because they tend to narrate what they are doing as they play. Basically according to many children computer protect them from being isolated moreover it helps them to connect with other people around. In fact, a computer activity motivates and produces a longer attention span and enhances self-concept and attitudes to learning because it insist on mastery from level to level.

In 2006, the Federation of American Scientists issued a statement supporting the use of Computer and video games in classrooms:

"...educational games are fundamentally different than prevailing instruction because they're based on challenge, reward, learning through doing and guided discovery in contrast to the 'tell and test' methods of traditional instruction ... Games offer attributes important for learning – clear goals, lessons that can be practiced repeatedly until mastered, monitoring learner progress and adjusting instruction to learner level of mastery, closing the gap between what is learned and its use, motivation that encourages time on task, personalization of learning, and infinite patience."

Children up to age 8 gained various cognitive skills like:

- ✓ Attend and concentrate
- ✓ Associate words and symbols with objects

- ✓ Perceive and discriminate
- ✓ Identify similarity and difference
- ✓ Classify objects
- ✓ See order or relationships
- ✓ Develop concepts – space, size, shape
- ✓ Explore and be curious
- ✓ Manipulate
- ✓ Use creative imagination.

Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) has done a study, which involved more than 600 pupils in 32 schools across Scotland, they analyzed that the game improved pupils' concentration and behavior with less time needed to complete the tests. The improvement in the games group doubled that of the control group. LTS said the results offered the first independent, academic evidence that this type of computer game could improve attainment when used in an educational context.

Through such games young people are learning how to play, express themselves and collaborate in large-scale communities. But according to Professor Henry Jenkins² from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology there is another skill often missing in games –judgment. Few children ask about the motives or accuracy of the way games depict the world or the ethics underlying the choices both game players and game creators are making. This is a subject for a media literacy program.

ROLE OF THE FAMILY:

Today as we know media has been very educative for the children's learning so parents are not doing any favor by keeping them away from the internet. Besides technology is a part of child's life and a growing element of their identity, connectedness, community participation and future engagement.

Now a day's parents are very busy in their lives as they have become two-income household so they don't have time for their children, therefore television, videos and computer games act like babysitters to them. It has been found that children learn most when their parents or adults "mediate", whether that is on screen or in the kindergarten classroom. Childhood is a stage when their brains are being wired and re-wired, not just through parental words but also by the repeated image, patterns, sounds, music, stories, emotions and behavior they see on the screens in their homes.

Before the child could read, write or speak clearly are introduced to the various forms of technologies, particularly if they have older siblings. Children need to learn how to use the new technologies to become effective citizens in the digital age, so prohibiting or banning is not a practical action. However parents and educators can control and regulate the amount of time

spent watching television or on the computer, guiding children towards a balanced, responsible use of technology. The aptitude of children to learn is incredibly far above the ground from their surroundings they are active users readily investigating the new media technologies to gain knowledge of the world and express themselves in fresh ways. The goal should not be to keep them away from technologies but to help children make informed choices about how they use media and for how long and how much they can trust and be informed by what they see. Therefore they should be prepared for a citizenship model of media literacy.

The British communication regulatory authority (Buckingham, 2006) calls for media literacy in three main areas, covering children's ability to:

1. *Access* the media – the skills needed to gain access to media content
2. *Understand* the media they access – as they develop, children must learn the difference between reality and representation, how to cope with upsetting emotional responses to media content, and to make critical judgments about TV violence and advertisements.
3. *Create* – a neglected and little known aspect of children's use of the media, even though children's own production of media content is rapidly expanding with new technology such as mobile phones and website interactivity. (Demos report *Video Republic*, Hannon, Bradwell & Tims, 2008) This is a useful framework around which to build a national approach to the development of media literacy in all young Australians.

However, it is necessary to now go further and add a fourth dimension:

4. *Learn through* the media - this involves having parents, carers and teachers build on the content of what children view to enhance child development and learning in the areas of physical growth and health, language and communicative competence, self-understanding and interpersonal skills, cognitive skills and general knowledge.

Therefore media is a very powerful tool in order to inculcate new ways of technology among children. Keeping child away from internet is not a practical or intelligent move of parents or educators but they should be pushed towards correct measures and method of using it. Thus, electronic media and new technologies certainly plays good role in escalating child's learning.