

Dr Jacqueline Harding

'Children's TV and schematic attraction' research

A case study-led investigation into schema-related attraction in children's TV shows

Abstract

Increasingly, research in the early years has sought to establish the possible benefits of popular culture offered to this young age group (Marsh 2005; Buckingham 1994; Harding 2015) and to bring about a sense of balance in current discourse analysis, creating a systemic move away from constant and insistent negative narratives around the damaging effects of media.

While there is a wealth of literature in this area regarding socio-emotional benefits, particularly in the US (Fisch and Trugliuo (2001); other possible cognitive gains are largely ignored and when research does seek to address this area, it does so within the narrow confines of overt numeracy and literacy teaching (Rideout, Vandewater, and Wartella, (2003). The link between literacy research and TV literacy is scarcely acknowledged, although image-based theory (semiotic ideology) is undeniably similar (Fiske, 1987). The pioneering schema research work of Bruce (1991) and Athey (2007) has only recently been applied to children's media (Twirlywoos, CBeebies 2015) but existing territories remain unexplored for their inherent potential capacity to meet the developmental schematic needs of young children.

This small-scale case study research investigates two TV shows: Teletubbies and Paw Patrol, questioning how widely embedded schematic signals might be within the shows and investigates children's responses specifically 'in the moment'. The interdisciplinary nature of this inquiry highlights the interrelationship between the schematic productions of the printed word, the moving image and real life play. Furthermore, the paper provides an analysis of the comparative element between these three 'platforms'. Significantly, semiotic analysis suggests it is inappropriate to separate the systems.

This case-study led approach utilizes a methodological tool (Harding, 2015) and draws on the work of Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi (1991), and Ferre Leavers (1994) regarding scales of involvement and engagement for observing young children's media interaction. Furthermore, this study explores the embodied responses to schematic representation within TV shows; how children manifest their interest (what might be observable and

discernable in their behaviour) and how parents and early years professionals and content producers interpret and understand the nature of the child's attraction to specific schemas demonstrated in the format.

The study offers insights into how young children experience screen narratives through a moment-by-moment process, and probes and examines that experience for levels of engagement and involvement. The paper argues that young children (and their parents) have a right to involvement and participation in the development of any media narrative and application for consumption.

Fundamentally, the study questions recent rhetoric regarding the work of screen content as being: 'being done to the child' or actually working *with* the child in terms of their right to quality media (Buckingham, 1994), arguing that is a child's right to be heard in the discourse around notions of shifting power between adult and child, and acknowledges their important place in society whilst examining their right to contribute to production of media content.

This study simultaneously illuminates the structural and fundamental levels of TV show design and although this study was limited in duration and scope, it concludes that the results clearly support earlier research regarding the wider cognitive and developmental benefits of high quality, thoughtfully produced TV content (Marsh, 2005 and Harding, 2015). Significantly, as indicated by Marsh, (2010) there is a need for more extensive studies of children's cultural practices, specifically in the area of formal and informal learning spaces and the fluidity of movement between the domains.

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