

Media education projects in Finland

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**CHILDREN AND
MEDIA ACTION PLAN**

MEDIA MUFFIN PROJECT

DEVELOPMENTS IN MEDIA EDUCATION IN FINLAND

The roots of media education for children and young people in Finland go all the way back to the 1950's. The goal of the audiovisual education of that time was critical understanding of the movie, but also taking advantage of educational films in raising children. In the 1970's, Finland was a pioneering country in media education, as the curriculum for mass communication education developed in our country was spread globally by the UNESCO.

Now in the 21st century, discussion is focused on media literacy and media skills, and we are still one of the forerunner countries as promoters of media literacy. Nonetheless, there is room for development in the state of media education for all age groups.

In many countries, especially in Europe, the political decision-makers have taken action and included media education in national strategies. In Finland the subject has been tackled without delay after the turn of the millennium through various projects, some of which could be implemented in other countries as well. As the promoter of media education for small children, Media Muffin is one these projects.

MEDIA SKILLS ARE CIVICS IN INFORMATION SOCIETY

The goal of media education is the development of certain skills and abilities. Media skills are also referred to as media literacy, media language skills and media sense, meaning roughly the same skills. At the core of media skills is strengthened proactiveness, and a personality capable of controlling different media environments and communicative situations. Media skills are therefore seen as civics in information society.

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THE CHILDREN AND MEDIA ACTION PLAN: FOCUS ON MEDIA EDUCATION FOR SMALL CHILDREN

In 2003, after extensive consultations with experts, the Ministry of Education and Culture began the preparation of the Children and Media program, which seeks to chart the different areas and needed developments in children's media environments. A memo released in 2004 highlighted nine areas, from which active conclusions were drawn:

- Contents that violate criminal law
- Regulation of the means of protecting minors from harmful materials
- Improvement of communication and promotion of research
- The new dimensions of media education
- Responsibility of the field of professional media
- Introduction of filtering and blocking systems
- Positive alternatives – promotion of the production of quality contents
- Promotion of digital balance – regional politics and contentual tendencies
- Support for families and parenthood

Assessments of the program clearly showed that broader implementation of media education was generally considered to be a priority. The first project launched by the Ministry of Education focused on the development of media education for small children. The other areas mentioned in the action plan will be scrutinized later, although many of the proposed actions have already been taken, or are being continuously implemented.

The beginning of 2006 saw the launching of the main project, Media Muffin, whose aim is to improve the media skills of children of eight years of age or younger, and to support educators and parents in media education work. Another undertaking is the Swim Ring for the Sea of Media project, whose goal is to improve the media education readiness of library professionals. The project is coordinated by the Finnish Library Association.

These projects will be expanded and new initiatives will complement the Children and Media project. The forthcoming projects include a national media education portal which unites actors in the field of media education and offers information and materials for professional educators, librarians, workers in social services and health care, and parents. The project is coordinated by The Finnish Society on Media Education. Another project is the development of media education models in the Sami language and for the Sami culture. The project is coordinated by the Saami Parliament.

To support the work in media education, a large research survey will also be conducted to compile international and domestic research data of the effects of media on the development of children and young people. The survey is coordinated by The Finnish Society on Media Education.

MEDIA MUFFIN: AN INVITATION TO MEDIA EDUCATION



The goal of the Media Muffin project is to improve the media education readiness in early childhood education and care and the first grades of primary school.* It also seeks to inform parents of small children's media education.

The project produces media education materials. The first completed materials were sent to all Finnish kindergartens, primary schools and those responsible for children's before and after school activities. The contents will be complemented with things such as Internet materials to support media education at home, resources for creators and producers of media, and materials offering pedagogical support. The Media Muffin project organizes national training sessions, where teachers and other educators are introduced to the basic concepts and working methods of media education, and guided in the basics of the safe use of media. A survey is being made of the project materials and the associated working methods.

The Media Muffin project supports the consolidation of the position of media education in Finland. It seeks to promote the integration of media education into the documents governing early childhood education and care and before and after school activities. The goal is to make media education a more integral part of the training of daycare staff, school teachers, and those working in children's before and after school activities.

* More information about the early childhood education system in Finland can be found on the last page of this brochure.

The project is carried out by three non-profit organizations: The Center for School Clubs, the School Cinema Association and Media Education Center Metka, which get a part of their annual funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition to these participants, the project is supported by major media education and teaching authorities and organizations. The materials produced by the project are available in both Finnish and Swedish, and can be used free of charge.

THE ORGANIZATIONS BEHIND MEDIA MUFFIN



The Center for School Clubs (Kerhokeskus - Koulutyön tuki) promotes children's welfare and development. It is a service organization for child and youth work that operates in the

field of teaching and upbringing together with other participants. The Center develops and produces services and contents for school clubs and educational activities, before and after school activities, extracurricular activities, and culture and science education. The organization also participates in political discussion and decision-making regarding the welfare of children and young people.



Media Education Center Metka (Mediakasvatuskeskus Metka) is a national, pedagogical organization that promotes the media education of children and young people primarily for the medium of the film, but also other forms of moving image. The main areas of emphasis are media culture created by children and children's own media production. Activity is focused on children and young people, as well as adults, particularly teachers. Metka produces teaching materials and organizes workshops, an annual film and training event for the young, seminars and teacher training. It also publishes a media education journal.



School Cinema (Koulukino) is an organization that promotes film screenings

for children and young people in movie theatres during the school day, and the possibility to process the experience with the help of learning materials for teachers. Materials have been categorized both by age group and by theme, and they are available from the organization's web site. All movie theatres in Finland have made a commitment to arrange School Cinema screenings by request.

MEDIA MUFFIN MATERIALS TEACH CHILDREN TO EXPLORE, INTERPRET, PLAY, EXERCISE AND CREATE

Media education means learning and growing up with media. It consists of everyday activities in daycare, schools and clubs, with media as its tool and operative environment. The goal of media education is to develop small children's ability to study the different messages in media and to participate in media culture. There is no minimum age for starting to learn media skills; materials and approaches vary according to circumstances. The educator's task is to get familiar with the child's media environment and to offer safe experiences with media.

The following section introduces Media Muffin materials, with some examples of the working methods in small children's media education.

THE MEDIA EDUCATOR STARTS WITH THE EXERCISE BOOK

Muffe and the Lost Key



The exercise book looks at media and phenomena associated with it through introductions and easy exercises directed at educators. The exercises can be done using the basic equipment of kindergartens, clubs and schools. The book is built around a captivating story, where the

two friends Milla and Muffe have an adventure that introduces them to various media tools and media phenomena. The book comes with an audio cd with new media-related songs and sonic atmospheres. The book has been produced by the Center for School Clubs.

The five chapters of the book proceed from studying messages to active participation:

- The child as a media consumer
- Media tells stories
- Emotions and feelings
- The different messages of media
- The child as a participant in media culture.

Media education approaches media presentations, especially pictures, as objects of study. Pictures are convincingly used to appeal to emotions. The strength of pictures also lies in the fact that they are thought to represent the world the way it really is. Interpretation and critical analysis of pictures is a useful exercise even for small children.

The book gives some useful questions that can be used in studying and interpreting pictures:

- What is happening in the picture?
- Who or what is in the picture?
- What are they like?
- What kind of sounds might we hear in the picture?
- Do you like the picture? Why?
- Is it a photograph or a drawing?
- Could the things in the picture happen for real?

The analysis can be complemented by using the picture as an inspiration for writing, for example: The children make up a story based on the picture, which is written down either by the instructor or the children themselves. The stories and pictures are published at a parents' evening, and through these productions, media education can also be discussed with parents.

MEDIA EDUCATION KNOW-HOW FROM Media Fun! A Media Educator's Handbook

The book looks at media education and its concepts specifically from children's point of view. It strengthens the media skills of children, educators and parents through theory and applied exercises. Optical toys have also been made to illustrate them. The book emphasizes the joy of collective experience and the importance of creating things oneself. The book has been produced by Media Education Center Metka.

The handbook, whose themes are also available as an Internet version, approaches media education in a versatile fashion: The topics include, for example, stories and films, games, cell phones, as well as the safe use of media and media parenthood.

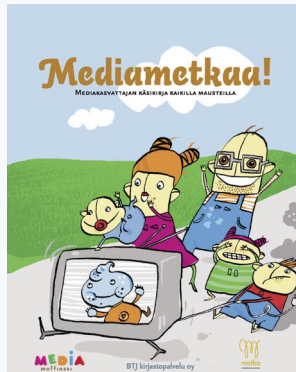
Media skills are practiced not only through interpretation, but also through creation. The purpose of creating something one self, for example, an animated film, is to improve expression capabilities and to offer a chance to test the line between fact and fiction. Filming also introduces children to technical devices.

Giving attention to children's productions rewards both the creators and the audience. It offers a peek into the children's world and their own culture.

Metka has also produced a documentary film to illustrate how small children's media education can be used in everyday educational work. The documentary has been used in various training and demonstration sessions. It acts as a motivator and pedagogical support for the educator.

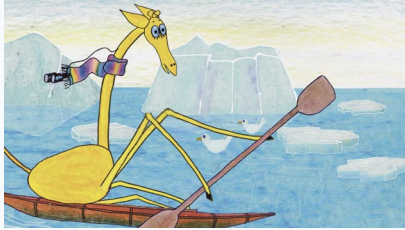
CREATE YOUR OWN ANIMATED FILM!

Make up a story. Decide the location and environment of the film. Make the characters and a background against which they are clearly visible. Shoot the film using a video or digital camera. The process is easier if the camera has an animation function. Place a character against the background and start filming. Move the character one small move at a time and film a tiny segment between each move. The soundtrack can be recorded afterwards using the camera's audio dub function. When the story is finished, arrange a premiere for the film and invite guests.



SEE, FEEL AND EXPERIENCE!

– film education materials from School Cinema



A screenshot from the animated film *Yellow Giraffe's Animal Stories* (2000)

Materials for the film education of small children guide the educator in creating a safe film experience at a movie theatre, and in processing the experience through various exercises.

Watching a film from a big screen is a great experience and an important educational event. Preparation is important for the educator: The educator chooses the film for the children by familiarizing themselves with its maturity rating, synopsis and themes. Watching the film then becomes a shared, safe experience for the children and educators.

A good film that is suitable for the age group is entertaining and enjoyable. In addition, the film creates an experience and gives a chance to mirror one's own feelings, which always teaches something about oneself and the surrounding world.

When an educator raises themes that are important to the film through characters or plot, they also help the child to process their feelings safely in the company of an adult. Learning materials facilitate and deepen this process, which for small children may include discussion, drawing, playing or exercise.

A compiled list of films suitable for small children is available on the Media Muffin and School Cinema Internet pages. Pedagogical materials have been made for each film to support the educator's media education work.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN FINLAND

Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) covers both the daycare arrangements offered to families and the goal-oriented early childhood education open to children. All children under compulsory school age (7 years) have an unconditional right to daycare, once parental leave comes to an end (at about 10/11 months). The system consists of public and private services. Over 90% of services are provided by municipalities.

The system could be described as holistic. It comprises the intertwining dimensions of care, education and teaching. The primary aim of ECEC is to promote the child's overall well-being so as to ensure the best possible conditions for growth, learning and development.

Early childhood education also includes free of charge pre-school education for children one year before they start compulsory education. Its aim is to develop children's learning skills as part of ECEC.

According to the 2005 statistics, the participation rate for children from one to six/seven is 62,7%. Almost all children (in 2006 97,4 %) take part in pre-school education for six-year-olds. (Statistics Finland, Stakes) For school children on first and second grades, there are also before and after school activities, which means offering quality activity for children before or after school.

In Finland ECEC, including pre-school education, and basic education, together with before and after school activities for school children, form an integrated entity progressing consistently in terms of children's development and learning.

LATEST DOCUMENTS AND PLANS OUTLINING THE GOALS AND CONTENTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE, BASIC SCHOOL EDUCATION AND BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL ACITIVITES

The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland 2005

Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland 2000

National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004

The Basis of Before and After School Activities 2004

MORE INFORMATION

STAKES

- National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health
www.stakes.fi

The Finnish National Board of Education
www.oph.fi

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