

STMS REPORT: Media Education and ICT in curricula for Early Years and Early Years Professionals

1. Background and general information

1.1. STSM researcher: Saara Salomaa, University of Tampere / National Audiovisual Institute, Finland
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1.2. Host: Professor Guy Merchant, Sheffield Hallam University (UK)

1.3. Duration and period: 8 January 2017 – 14 January 2017

2. Report on activities

STMS consisted of three parts: 1) scrutinizing the content of UK's national level curricula for Early Childhood Education in comparison to Finnish curricula 2) observing in-service training conference for early years practitioners in Sheffield Hallam University 3) discussing children's media cultures, the curricula and relevant early years' professional competencies with researchers and lecturers

2.1. Early Years' curricula in Finland and England in relation to Media Education and ICT

Finnish Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (for children before school age 7) has just been revised and will become effective in August 2017. Multiliteracy and ICT are included as a "transversal competence area" that should be promoted through all teaching. Concept of multiliteracy is based on broad understanding of texts, in which texts can be visual, auditive or audiovisual. Media education is also mentioned as a way to promote children's participation in society. In addition to that, media education pedagogies, such as discussing and studying media content, are included as a way to achieve more general educational goals, e.g. ethical issues.

Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage document in England has been effective since 2014. In this curriculum guideline, literacy is defined in much more traditional way: as decoding, reading and writing alphabetical text. Books (and other written material) are the only form of media explicitly mentioned. In curricular texts, ICT is not included at all in teaching or learning. Exploring and using different media are mentioned in the context of arts, but referring more to different techniques and material (e.g. painting) than to mediated communication and media culture.

A very important difference is, that Finnish curriculum sets goals only for education (professionals) whereas English early years foundation stage document's sets measurable early learning goals for children. These fundamental differences obviously lead to different viewpoints also in training of professional educators.

2.2. Observing in-service training conference for early years practitioners

During my STSM period, a Primary and Early Years Conference took place at Sheffield Hallam University. The conference included Guy Merchant's 21st Century Literacies workshop, allowing me to observe, how issues regarding "new" literacies are presented to practitioners. Professor Merchant presented a framework for 21st Century Literacies, constructed together with his colleague, Cathy Burnett. This framework had many similarities to the concept of

media literacy in my research and it is a very useful tool for me to study when designing my analysis framework for upcoming parts of the PhD study. We also discussed with Professor Merchant about our experiences of in-service training and found out that there are several similar issues and challenges to handle in England and Finland. One of the important aspects we talked about is how to empower senior practitioners and those communities who lack digital devices.

2.3. *Discussing the curricula and professional competencies*

My PhD research focuses in particular to early childhood media education and ICT in kindergarten and pre-school settings, hence professional teachers' in-service and pre-service training are one of my key research interests. I talked about it in more detail particularly with Guy Merchant and Caron Carter from Sheffield Hallam University. In England, early childhood education does not get any support for media and ICT issues from the national curriculum. Consequently, both pre-service and in-service training of professionals seems to be fragmented and dependent on universities' own choices, possible ongoing research projects and individual researchers/lecturers' interests. Because of the limited time of my STSM, I was not yet able to go into detail with the course descriptions to compare them and the targeted competences mentioned in texts with Finnish kindergarten teacher education courses. But once I receive and go through the text documents, this will be the most interesting comparison to the findings of our ongoing study¹.

During my STSM I also met Professor Jackie Marsh from University of Sheffield, and we discussed professionals' training and challenges on implementing digital literacies on curricula both at national level and at a university level. One of the long-lasting issues around the Europe seem to be that professionals are stuck on the question of effect and the question of whether media is "good" or "bad". Since I'm studying the concept "media educational consciousness" in my PhD research², these ponderings are very valuable. What kind of approaches would be successful in helping the professionals to overcome this barrier and to start focusing on their pedagogies and educational actions?

I was also able to meet other researchers whose work is closely linked to mine: Assistant Professor Becky Parry (University of Nottingham) whose research on media literacy and education can contribute to my work in several different ways, and three University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam's PhD students whose work is related to the media. Chris Bailey's research on Minecraft-related cultural practices in after-school activities, Ian Guest's a study of teachers' professional development by using Twitter, and Fiona Scott's research related to children's television viewing practices in family settings were all much of an interest for me. In the theoretical framework for my dissertation, I suggest that professional media educational consciousness consists of, e.g., conceptions of media culture and children's development in relation to it, as well as conceptions of oneself as a media educator and potentials for development in this role. Therefore all these studies were closely linked to my work and these contacts will undoubtedly be fruitful in developing the field and conducting research projects in the future.

¹ first results: Pääjärvi [my previous last name] & Mertala 2015, https://kavi.fi/sites/default/files/documents/mertala_paajarvi_2015_a4.pdf

² for a brief English summary of the first article published, see pages 159-165. https://www.shef.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.660127!/file/1st_TrainingSchool.pdf