

# **Children, Youth and Media**

## ***An ECREA Temporary Working Group***

### **Objectives**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The Children, Youth and Media TWG will serve as a Europe-wide network for researchers and educators interested in the analysis of all kinds of media- and communication- related activities undertaken by, for and about children and young people. Despite having long been studied by media and communication scholars, it remains the case that children are often treated as something exceptional – on the one hand ‘special’ but on the other hand an afterthought, even forgotten in wider analysis of media societies or media processes or ‘the population’. This TWG aims to bring a valuable spotlight onto children and youth in a thoroughly mediated society, both drawing together and giving visibility to the array of existing theory, findings and perspectives and also stimulating new approaches and further research in this important area.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

The TWG will bring together researchers on children, youth and media working within media and communications, along with those working on media within adjacent fields of literature, psychology, sociology, cultural studies and education, to sustain and give visibility to this vibrant and important domain of research.

Our objectives are as follows:

- To develop and debate the theoretical and multidisciplinary frameworks by which to study children, youth and media;
- To explore and critique the methodological and ethical challenges of researching with and for children and young people;
- To stimulate and support new empirical research on children, youth and media across diverse cultural and media contexts;
- To sustain and expand the current research community of scholars, educators and policy makers interested in children, youth and media;
- To generate a constructive and effective dialogue between researchers working with children and youth and those working in other parts of ECREA, including in the other sections and TWGs, on adults, families, schools and other sites of children’s media and communication activity.
- To promote the importance of European research on children, youth and media by making it visible online, at conferences and other scholarly events, through

publications and other international activities among scholars, stakeholders and the wider public.

## **CONTEXT**

In the past, most social science research has examined children's relation to television, while today many researchers are fascinated by children and teenagers' uses of social media and the internet. However, we will also welcome research on the many other media important to children – books, comics, film, electronic games, and more – as well as on children's representation in the media targeted to different audiences. Indeed, the group will encompass a wide range of research topics, addressing children and youth from infancy to young adulthood, whether framed in terms of child and adolescent psychosocial development, critical constructions of 'youth' and/or cultural analyses of childhood in diverse settings. It will also include all media relevant to children and youth, considering variables such as age, gender, SES, ethnicity, nationality, cultural and family experiences and more. As children's and youths' experiences of media diversify in an increasingly complex media landscape, drawing together diverse research insights and projects becomes all the more important and fascinating.

ECREA – and Europe more widely – includes very many researchers examining how children and young people engage with or are addressed by communication media of all kinds. Yet they have no single organisation that brings them together, nor any recognised conference at which they can meet and share ideas. The TWG aims to provide what we believe to be a much needed opportunity that we are confident will be welcomed by relevant scholars in Europe, and it is our ambition to create and sustain a lively, multidisciplinary community of researchers at a very timely moment in the field.

On the one hand, concerns about the media's effects on children – whether harmful (c.f. the violence debates) or beneficial (c.f. the history of research and policy initiatives on media education) – is one of the most long-standing themes in the field of media and communication. On the other hand, interest in how children and young people are now engaging with the latest forms of digital technology has captured the imagination of researchers, policy makers and the wider public. In short, although the reasons change with the times, children and young people represent a key thread running through media and communication scholarship.

At the same time, questions of how children and youth engage with or are addressed by media and communication technologies are highly contested, making this also a stimulating field of endeavour, and one in which the answers matter – policy makers and stakeholders watch the results of our research closely, often building new initiatives on a foundation of evidence produced within our field. These debates and contestations centre on questions of power (are children the most vulnerable, even victimised of all audiences and users, or are they the perpetrators of mediated abuses?), of commercialisation (is the increasing targeting of marketing on children and youth pernicious or creative, oppressive or liberating?), of regulation (can parents manage their own children's upbringing or need the state or others regulate children's media?), of sociality (are the media, or are children's uses of media, changing the nature of friendship, privacy, intimacy and values), of culture (do the media

result in a mainstreaming, or a mediatisation, of once-distinct cultures or do they, instead, stimulate the production of subcultures, alternative cultures and individualised lifestyles?) and of children's rights (how do the media consider these rights, does children's media access and use accord with their rights to provision, protection and participation?).

These and many other debates are stimulated in part by the very multidisciplinary nature of research on children, youth and media. To be sure, many scholars work within the field of media and communication, but they were variously trained as – and still work with – historians, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, literature specialists, educationalists, clinicians and more. The result is a lively set of deliberations over both theory and method. All this needs a point of focus, and the TWG will provide exactly this.