

Children's Cross-Platform Media Preferences: A Sense of Kindness and a Want for Learning?

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Abstract

Cross-platform media practices have moved from being something of an under-considered side show, to a strategic necessity. A development vision that attempts to transcend historic platform delineation is becoming the norm in many areas of media production, yet cross-platform media, as an over-arching conceptualisation, is still sparsely mapped. Children's media in particular can be said to have long spanned platform, yet there is little research that addresses media in this sense, and even less that attempts to bring together the voices of children with those that make media for children. This study sets out to explore children's cross-platform media within the UK; with children's media preferences acting as a trigger to dialogue. The study's original contribution to knowledge is said to sit within its multi-method interdisciplinary design, which as well as foregrounding participant voice, operates in a tactual and reflective fashion.

The study looks to explore children's preferences within media made for them, but also to question the extent to which producers of media for children understand these preferences; with the researcher himself having a background within children's media practice. To establish the foundations from which to consider these questions, the thesis begins by contextualising and conceptualising cross-platform media, before it moves on to address how children are positioned within media research. Argument is made that media should be seen not as distinct, or platform bound, but as utterances within a cross-platform dialogue, and similarly the study is orientated towards operating across a dialogic phenomenology in which it becomes difficult to locate the unitary, fixed and finalised. It is hoped that through engaging in dialogue on children's preferences within cross-platform media that this study will impact on practice within the field. Analysis of the research interactions suggests that producers of children's media share an understanding with children on the ways in which they appear averse to media that they see as unfair, unkind or in which others come to harm. Yet when it comes to the place of learning within children's media, something child participants appear particularly comfortable with, practitioners seem less in tune with the preferences of children.

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On the first night, I fell asleep on the sand, a thousand miles from any human habitation. I was far more isolated than a shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the middle of the ocean. You can imagine my surprise at sunrise when an odd little voice woke me up.

It said: 'Please... draw me a sheep.'

'What?'

'Draw me a sheep.'

The Little Prince
de Saint-Exupéry
1944

Introduction

Children's media sits at the heart of an on-going shift in commissioning and development practices; a shift that transcends historic platform delineation and in which once separate industrial landscapes are being thrown together in complex ricocheting ways. As new technologies and new business models emerge, media appear to have stepped across platforms in decisive ways, and significantly here, the affordances of cross-platform media technologies may be seen to allow individuals to engage with media in intriguingly active and participatory ways.

Children's media practice within the UK, although restricted by the realities of engaging with its younger audience, could be said to have operated at the forefront of many of these shifts, and as such, long standing media conceptualisations (even that of 'Children's TV' itself) have been brought in to question. Even though much media can still be said to be created or gravitate around a supporting 'tentpole' platform, production habits have emerged in which media intended for children is developed or operates 'conceptually', in near disregard of the platform – and here children can equally be said to engage with media 'beyond the medium'.

Any understanding of cross-platform needs to look past seeing it as just an expression of new media convergence, or old media 'remediated' within new media environments (see McLuhan, 1964 and Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Nor is cross-platform strictly interchangeable as a term with transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2006a) - even though it is perhaps kin. Cross platform media, at its simplest, sits conceptually astride multiple media forms (regardless of whether they are tied together by an overarching narrative) and arguably therefore, transcends them in a way that decentres platform led readings of media.

This study looks to conceptualise and explore the practices and discourses of children's cross-platform media through the lens of children's media preferences. To ask children to express something of their 'ideal' children's media production and then to open dialogue on these preferences with those that create media for children. Rather than isolate producers and users of media, the study sees the worth in bringing their thought together. With research in a still sparsely mapped and shifting landscape there are no firmly established disciplinary traditions on which to build ones study. In some ways this could be said to be limiting, but also perhaps liberating, in that in the absence of orthodoxical methodology to apply to cross-platform, there are opportunities to develop an approach free from perhaps blinkered paradigms.

In attempting to find conceptual and methodological purchase this study draws upon a dialogic phenomenology that acknowledges the co-constructedness of the research act, and in which media are seen not as distinct, but as utterances within a cross-platform dialogue. In this light the study sets out to operate in an interdisciplinary and methodologically open manner, and here the researcher looked to those tools that could encourage the dialogic, tactual and reflective, rather than those that might offer the unitary, instant and fixed. Children are often the focus of media research, and there are multiple studies that consider the voice of practice, but rarely however are the two brought together. This thesis was shaped around research interactions with both children and those that create media for them, and even though the realities of the research act meant that engagement with practitioners and children was qualitatively different, the imperative was to treat the voices of both groups as coming with equal validity and at 'face value'.

As a sometime children's media practitioner, the researcher shaped the study from within a deep seated frustration with his own position as a creator of content for children. Previously operating in a climate that perhaps under addressed the preferences of children, or saw children through the prism of the market, the researcher here dwelt long (and quite painfully at times) on how to conduct research that looked to the voice of children and practice, whilst also remaining alert to the positing power and 'editorial' of the researcher. The method utilised did much to mitigate these fears, and is where the study's original contribution to knowledge is said to sit.

Research Question

Operating across two axes – the cross-platform landscape and the media preferences of children – the overarching research question of this study is:

What preferences do children have within children’s cross-platform media, and to what extent do producers of media for children understand them?

To help address this question the study looks to explore emergent cross-platform children’s media practice and examine the ways in which cross-platform media can be conceptualised.

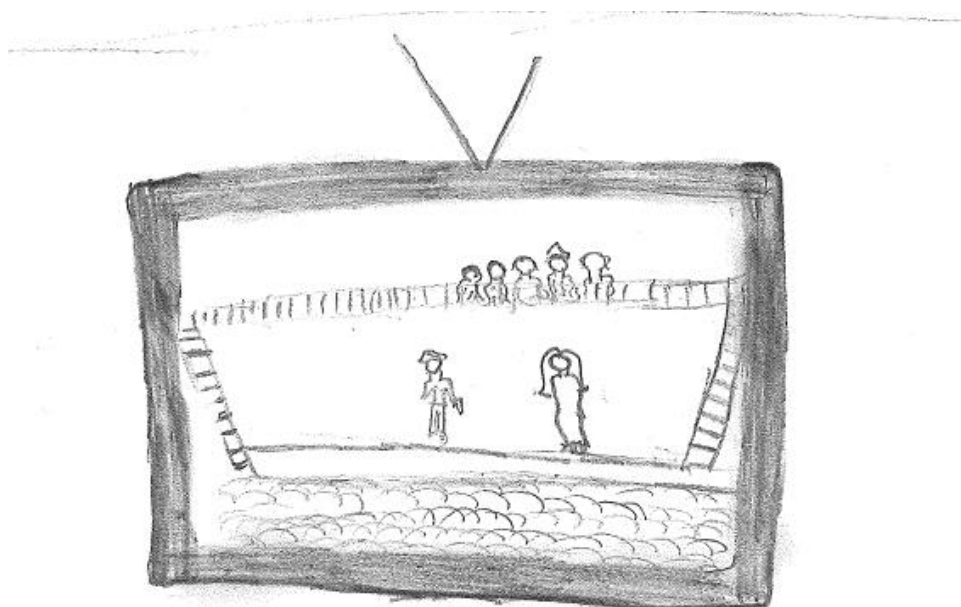


Figure 1.1. Child Participant’s ‘Ideal Media’ concept: *King’s Theatre*

Fieldwork spanned two distinct stages: the first adopted a drawing led ‘Creative-Reflective’ approach, in which ten and eleven year old children devised their own ‘ideal’ children’s media production (see Figure 1.1 for example); the second stage, utilising the outcomes of the first, used ‘Q Sort’ based interviews (see Figure 1.2) to encourage both children, and producers of children’s media, to offer their own perspectives on children’s media production.

The first stage child participants expressed their own preferences on children’s media, whilst the second stage interactions with children and practitioners are based on the outcomes of the first. Here then the first stage child participants mapped out the broader field of inquiry of the study and, with the second stage Q Sort interview interactions predominantly shaped in light of the thought that seemed of most significance to the first stage participants, these participants are seen then to have also effectively written the interview ‘questions’ for the second stage participants.



Figure 1.2. Child Participant’s Q Sort

Shaping the study in this way is not just an acceptance that each participant group comes with equal worth, but it is also seen to answer a closely held fear on the part of the researcher himself, that the research could become a closed conversation with industry insiders, that then went on to ordain from on-high some ‘expert’ soliloquy on cross-platform media for children.

In this light the study acknowledges ‘voice’ in shaping the focus of research, whilst listening to both the voices of the child participants and those that make media for children. Here the multi-method design, in combining elements of ‘Creative-Reflective’ and ‘Q Technique’, is seen to hold particular value – and indeed this is where the study’s original contribution to knowledge is seen to be. Firstly in that it enables the co-construction of meaning-making in a manner that questions the hierarchical primacy of the researcher, and secondly in that it helped trigger dialogic, tactile and reflective engagement with the research act.

Chapter Outline

The chapters that follow initially look to contextualise and conceptualise this study, before they move on to address the ways in which the research is enacted and analysed. Chapter one, on ‘Cross-platform Media’, prepares the ground by exploring and (in part) delineating the cross-platform landscape, as well as briefly focusing in on current cross-platform practices within UK children’s media production. In doing so it argues that, from a child’s perspective, all media could be said to effectively span platform. The first part of the chapter draws on examples of cross-platform media which began within television, cinema, gaming, and publishing, and establishes the worth of conceptualising media as ‘phenomena’. Here some distinction is made between the synchronicity, or otherwise, of user engagement across platforms, as well as between that cross-platform which is ‘platform led’, ‘conceptual’ or ‘combinational’ in nature. The second part of the ‘Cross-platform Media’ chapter sets out to conceptualise cross-platform from three cross-cutting perspectives - the textual, technological and user. Under the textual readings cross-platform is considered in light of how texts may span platforms in dialogic and narrative led ways, and here the contours, stability and authority of the text is problematised. Discussion then turns to question media technologies and media engagement, with the chapter then addressing the place and power of the user. These discussions were partly shaped by the researcher’s own practice background within UK children’s media - and can be seen both as an attempt to undo television practitioner pre-supposition and to reflect the researcher’s journey in to teaching ‘cross-platform’ media theory within higher education. As such the chapter reveals a tension between practitioner and academic understanding, as well as traces constructive and welcome dialogue with multiple students as they helped, knowingly or otherwise, critique the study’s contextual and conceptual explorations and arguments.

The chapter on 'Children and Media Research' is similarly split in to two parts, the first of which considers the ways in which childhood may be said to be 'constructed'; with children often positioned as less capable than adults at 'voicing themselves'. The second part of the chapter looks at the ways in which children have been addressed within media research (with media often seen as being 'to blame', and children as immature and somehow at risk). It returns to voice, and questions the dialogic relationship that spans all parties to the research act, before moving on to question the nature and worth of participatory approaches. The chapter ultimately positions children as 'social actors in their own right', and as being able to offer research responses 'no less inherently competent than adults' (Hampshire et al., 2012, p.220). The discussions here, written after the researcher had completed the preceding contextualising 'cross-platform' one, were shaped in response to a realisation that even though much energy had been spent across the study exploring the ways in which media could be understood, to this point little had been offered by means of questioning the 'child' and 'childhood'. Here the researcher first engaged with the 'construction of childhood' and its foundational constructionism – with thought here helping inform the study's conceptual orientation. This part of the research journey was probably the most troublesome for the researcher, who although long experienced as a children's media practitioner, frustratingly found that he had not previously dwelt on the core questions at play across this chapter.

The 'Methodology' chapter is split in to three parts; 'Conceptual Orientation', 'Design' and 'Procedure'. The conceptual orientation reflects on the descriptive dialogic phenomenology under which the study is shaped. In doing so it briefly relocates and cross-pollinates with some of the preceding chapter's constructionism, and acts as a sounding board for the study's core conceptual struggle - one that resonated through all stages of the research - the tension between constructing research that looks to validate the voice of the participant, and the 'positing power' of the researcher (Danaher & Briod, 2005, p.223).

The design section, responding to thought aired to this point, begins by arguing for 'methodological openness', before it introduces the two research tools/stages utilised within the study's multi-method design. Firstly the Creative-Reflective stage is discussed, in which meaning-making is constructed in response to children being asked to create a drawn representation of their 'ideal' children's media production (see Figures 1.1 & 1.3 for example). Here particular caution is shown for how these drawn artefacts might be

interpreted. Secondly consideration turns to the card sort based interview interactions (common to Q Methodology (Figure 1.2)) in which the second stage participants rank order the meaning-making that emerges from the first stage. The tactual reflective worth of both tools is explored, before discussion moves on to question the ways in which the research interactions can be understood. Even though much worth is placed on the tactual and reflective benefits of adopting the Q Technique card sort (particularly when coupled with a Creative-Reflective approach), this study rejects the statistical end-game of conventional Q Methodology. In bringing these research tools together to help operationalise a dialogic co-construction of meaning-making and reflection on children's media preferences, method is recognised as being part of this study's original contribution to knowledge.

Within the procedure section of the methodology chapter focus shifts to how the design is enacted within fieldwork interactions, and how those interactions are analysed. The chapter ends by drawing participant meaning-making together under the 'categories of description' that appear of most significance to the children within the study. The methodology chapter conceals a complex and cross-cutting relationship between research conceptualisation and actualisation, with each step along the research journey dialogically informing, re-shaping and challenging those that had come before; there is no claim that the study operated in a 'neat' and strictly linear fashion, even though it is laid out as such here for clarity. The researcher's professional background and evolving academic engagement was never going to be methodologically isolatable from the experience of the participants, and the research act was never going to be anything other than a quite messy (and thankfully rewarding) dialogue.

The 'Description' chapter considers the study's core outcomes. Firstly children here are recognised as sharing a disinclination towards unfairness and 'bad' behaviour, as well as an aversion to witnessing others get hurt, lose, fight, argue or be in danger within media for them, with this body of thought being addressed under the heading of 'kindness'. Secondly the child participants are seen to be comfortable with the place of the educational within their media, with this addressed under the heading of 'learning'. Significantly, in light of the study's alignment with (explicitly) descriptive rather than (implicitly) interpretive

approaches, what might be called findings within other studies are framed here as description.



Figure 1.3. Child Participant's 'Ideal Media' concept: *Super Cow*

The 'Discussion and Conclusion' chapter however takes a more reflective/interpretive (and paradigm conciliatory) stance as it dwells on the 'kindness' and 'learning' description. This final chapter then moves on to address how children may understand media in ways that practice might not, before it offers a few closing thoughts on the implications of the study and the research method as an original contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 1. Cross-platform Media

Part 1. The Cross-platform Landscape

In light of the research question the following chapter will draw on examples of platform spanning media from amongst those that are of particular significance to children and children's media production. In doing so it will suggest that media have long transcended platform delineation and will argue against any platform bound understanding of media. The chapter will then go on to contend that children actively inhabit a cross-platform landscape where they can be seen to engage with media in a way that is not platform bound.

It would be difficult to offer any fixed definition of 'cross-platform media', but for the operationalising purposes of this discussion the following sets out to offer some measure of heuristic. Beyond being awkwardly tautologous, it is perhaps troublesome that the term, now almost quotidian within some circles, is regularly used in an uncritical fashion, and is often confused with the similar terms multiplatform and transmedia. By means of distinction 'multiplatform' can be seen to describe the ways whereby the same media content is 'reversioned' across multiple platforms (Bennett & Strange, 2008) (e.g. the same edited news package being both broadcast, in the traditional linear sense, and then also embedded within a website), whilst cross-platform can be used to represent any linked, but different, platform traversing media content. Transmedia, more specifically, is considered an exercise in storytelling or 'world making' (Jenkins, 2006a, p.21) that deliberately utilises multiple platforms (and as such operates as a subset of cross-platform); and here Ibrus & Scolari (2012) neatly, and in near mathematical fashion, see transmedia as equating to a combination of cross-platform (or 'crossmedia' as they put it) and narrative.

Transmedia and cross-platform are readily conflated, with children's media practitioners holding a variety of positions on what transmedia can mean. Bor (2014) suggests it is simply 'about looking across different platforms', whilst Kinder (1991) places particular significance on the ways in which characters operate across space. Practitioners within this study offered

similarly discordant interpretations on cross-platform. Some turned to 'content', or focussed in on the 'digital' (particularly when talking "to anyone who's not in cross-platform"), whilst others drew on legal terms like 'intellectual property' (IP) to help locate meaning – all perspectives that could be recognised as 'industry side'. There was mention of adopting 'platform agnostic' approaches, whereby practitioners address "the strengths and weaknesses" of each platform before deciding to develop a production across it – and again this focus on the affordances of technology is industry facing. Here we are reminded that the term cross-platform media, and the majority of the conceptualising that sits behind it, is the product of practice (and it is perhaps worth noting that the term 'practice' can be seen to include the 'way of making' (de Certeau, 1984) of individual 'practitioners', the activities of the broader media industry, and the discourses that surround both).

Cross-platform is not unfettered from a market need to 'sell, convince [and] persuade' (Gillespie, 2010, p.359), and it has more than the hint of the deterministic to it; even the word 'platform' itself can be said to operate as a discursive construct that is readily adopted, and promoted, by business for its perceived 'sense of technical neutrality and progressive openness' (Ibid, p.360). Even in light of these problematics, perhaps it is at this point we accept the 'working' value of cross-platform media as a term; firstly because of its currency within practice (and to a lesser extent the academy), and secondly because it pushes us towards a usefully anti-essentialist stance – in a way that rejects the medium specificity of much media research (Berger & Woodfall, 2012).

Intriguingly, if we acknowledge that 'media penetrate all aspects of contemporary life' (Deuze, 2011, p.137), and that media phenomena can 'not be seen as somehow located outside of lived experience' (Ibid, p.138), then ontologically speaking, we are (the nexus for) cross-platform; within the '*mediation of everything*' (Ibid, p.140, original italics) any position that isolates medium from medium becomes troublesome. As does any position that attempts to separate media from our lived experience; here we both shape and are shaped by media. At this point we are faced perhaps with an unmanageable all-encompassing conceptualisation, and being in need of firmer footings from which to operate, for much of that which follows cross-platform media can be appreciated as being shaped in light of those texts, technologies and user experiences most commonly seen as media – and whilst this

chapter part is predominantly industry-facing, the one that follows turns to these ‘texts, technologies and user’ perspectives as headings under which to address cross-platform media.

Cross-platform in Practice

Looking at children’s factual television productions like *Blue Peter* (1958-), which were created within a BBC once locked into treating media (like radio and television) as separate entities, we recognise intriguing hints of what would later come to be described as cross-platform. Led by its television broadcast, *Blue Peter* consistently organised charity campaigns that reached out to the off-screen ‘real world’. It published (until 2012) a regular print annual and offered various other audience interactivity (like phone-ins, makes and competitions). It has been, for much of its existence, open to the audience and encouraged ‘its viewers into activity’ (Buckingham et al., 1999); there being a palpable sense that anyone could be part of *Blue Peter* (although this was not always un-troublesome – as the show’s ‘fake caller’ debacle demonstrated (Goggin & Spurgeon, 2008)). It seeded spin-off shows like *Go With Noakes* (1976-80) and its own distinct website, with this in turn leading to the creation of other websites like *Me and my Movie* (2007-10) (designed to encourage children to make their own films). *Blue Peter* is clearly accessible as an experience that spans multiple platforms, even if the television show is the dominant medium that others rely for their existence and rationale. *Blue Peter* would perhaps have once been described as distinctly screen based, yet children’s television ‘has never been an isolated medium. Right from its earliest days, it has been surrounded by a range of other texts in other media’ (Sefton-Green, 2002, p.185). For much of *Blue Peter*’s history then, it could also have been addressed as inherently cross-platform, in that it moved off the screen, and in this way it should be unproblematic to recognise productions that moved on to the screen, from book to television for example, as cross-platform.

Children’s media texts have long ‘leapt successfully from page to screen’ (Bromley, 2002, p.211), but they also have a deep history of moving in the other direction; with, for example, *Andy Pandy* (1950-52) books just as much a part of a child’s media repertoire as the broadcast television show itself (Ibid). With much of children’s media being rooted in adaptation (in one direction or the other) (Weedon, 2008) practitioners will, knowingly or

not, have worked in what is effectively a cross-platform world for most of their careers – even if a good deal of the media engagement is, unlike much contemporary cross-platform media, asynchronous. *Harry Potter* (1997-) the highest grossing film series of all time (Box Office Mojo, 2011) for example, started life as a short print run book, and similarly *Horrible Histories* (1993-), *How to Train your Dragon* (2003-) and *The Gruffalo* (1999-) were all conceived within publishing before they moved to screen, and stage, and beyond. Taking an alternative path, Disney's *The Lion King* (1994-) started life in the cinema before migrating to stage, video games, books and toys (amongst other media).

There are long established links between on-screen media and toy manufacturing (Kline, 1993; Kline et al., 2003); '[e]ven in the early days of television, children's programming generated spin-offs, and shows that now are recollected with sentimental nostalgia (e.g., BBC's *Muffin the Mule* and *Sooty* from the 1950s) were money spinning franchises in their day' (Goldstein et al., 2004, p.2), and returning to Disney, *Mickey Mouse's* success on screen in 1928 led to multiple magazine and newspaper 'strips'. When we look at the *Care Bears* (1981-), (adapted from greeting card, to toy, to screen and back again), *Transformers* (1984-) (which began as a line of toys before moving on to television, comic books, video games and more recently big budget films) or following a slightly different trajectory the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1984-), (who started life within a comic book before crossing platform), we are witness to how 'the companies responsible for these properties were quick to capitalise on their success by translating them to other media' (Ibid). Here however it is worth noting the intentionality, or otherwise, of those that created these texts.

Cross-platform Becomings and Phenomena: Pokémon

Pokémon was initially released as two linkable videogame cartridges in 1996, it went on to span Anime (animation), Manga (comic books), trading cards, CDs, toys, books and more. It is inherently cross-platform in that:

Every "text" (including commodities such as toys) effectively draws upon and feeds into every other text. When children play with Pokémon cards or toys, for example, they draw upon knowledge and expertise they have derived from watching the TV shows and movies, or from playing the computer games: each play event is part of a broader flow of events that crosses from one medium or "platform" to another' (Goldstein, et al., 2004, p.2).

Yet Nintendo, its creators, initially 'had no plan for *Pokémon* beyond developing another successful Game Boy cartridge. The comic book, the television show, and the trading cards were not part of *Pokémon's* original marketing strategy, it was only on [being introduced to later markets...] that the roll outs of the various products were fully coordinated and integrated' (Tobin, 2004, p.10). By the time Jenkins wrote on *Pokémon* in 2003 he saw a franchise that '[b]y design [...] unfolds across games, television programs, films, and books, with no media privileged over any other'. If Jenkins, observing the high point of the franchise, sees it as being cross-platform 'by design', then the lessons of *Pokémon's* early roll-outs were well learnt by Nintendo. In 'becoming' cross-platform *Pokémon* perhaps operates as a post hoc template for later cross-platform development practices.

The research question looks to children's media that spans platform, but there will of course be examples of media that appear platform specific or bound. If a production is a success however, it will soon step across platform - and in some ways this process could even be said to be symbolic of that success. *Horrible Histories* at first glance could stand as effective exemplar of contemporary cross-platform; it started out as a book series, before it became a stage show, and then a television show and website (with there being multiple other iterations along the way). It might be worth pausing to note however that there was a six year lag between the publication of the first book and the first stage show, and then another ten years before the live-action television series first aired. For much of its early existence *Horrible Histories* was publishing only; like *Pokémon*, it is only in retrospect that it comes in to focus as a template for other (more synchronously viable) children's media productions.

In this difficult-to-map space of cross-platform becomings and intentions it is hard to find any solid ground from which to 'read' cross-platform as a whole. Writing in 1991, Kinder saw the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* as a 'commercial supersystem' (p.3); one 'constructed around a figure or group of figures from pop culture' (Ibid, p.122). She went on to suggest that in order to qualify as a 'supersystem', a franchise should: 'cut across several modes of image production'; have diverse appeal, targetable with diverse strategies; 'foster collectability'; and be a 'media event' (Ibid, p.123). Obviously there are limitations in her definition (restricting it to images or the character-led for example), but she does appear to be striving to describe a 'something' that we later come to define as cross-platform.

Buckingham and Sefton-Green, when discussing *Pokémon*, note the obstacles inherent in trying to pin-down and define it, as they note that in 'popular debates, Pokémon is most frequently referred to as a "craze"' (2004, p.12); they go on to argue that it is 'clearly not just a "text", or even a collection of texts [...] that can be isolated for critical analysis' (Ibid). To them *Pokémon* is a complex 'cultural practice' that sits above and outside other readings, and they turn ultimately to the 'rather more neutral term' (Ibid) phenomenon to find some conceptual purchase. Acknowledging cross-platform as *phenomena* may allow us to see cross-platform to be that we experience it to be, rather than all that we believe it to be; a reading that bypasses the over-privileging of any one platform and sits comfortably with the dialogic phenomenological orientation of this study. It may feel natural to address cross-platform through the lens of what we consider its 'lead' (or dominant) platform to be, or the lens of our own academic interests (or even the order of our initial engagement with that media), but picturing media as being television first, or web first for example, would feel counter to the spirit of this study. Phenomena as a term does then appear to offer much in helping to mitigate any impulse toward platform focussed readings.

It could be argued of course that 'media phenomena' is potentially too loose a conceptualisation, yet the alternatives, like the practice skewed 'franchise', could be said to point towards potentially siloed ways of thinking. In similarly adopting the phenomena as a broad conceptualisation here, cross-platform becomes something that spans, or even supersedes, platform; it takes shape 'beyond the medium' (Berger & Woodfall, 2012), yet is rooted in each of its constituent parts. Usefully the term phenomena may also allow us to comfortably encompass those physical 'real world' aspects of cross-platform that would not always be included within traditional interpretations of media. Beyond its accommodating width phenomena also arrives light of pre-conditioning discursive rhetoric, and may also help soften any hint of the deterministic in the term cross-platform itself.

Cross-platform in Dialogue: Star Wars

Following a trajectory that, initially, appears to run contrary of *Pokémon's*, *Star Wars* (1977-) started as a film before it established itself in the multiple media spaces it now inhabits. On *Star Wars'* cinematic release in the late seventies however it had occurred to no one to construct a complete fictional universe to support it (Brooker, 2002; Rose, 2011).

George Lucas, who headed up the development of *Star Wars*, may have envisaged a rich back-story to the film, but the flood of spin-offs, in offering little direct link to the original movie's narrative, demonstrate a distinct lack of coherence in the early stages of *Star Wars*' development. Those individuals who forged a connection with the initial film may have been able to consume multiple toys and other ancillary products (like trading cards, costumes, models, lunch boxes, etc.), but the original wave of merchandising 'did nothing to help tell the story of the films' (Kappel, 2004, p.183).

Lucas notably demonstrated a lack of diegetic awareness when he approved *The Star Wars Holiday Special* of 1978, a two hour television 'variety' show that featured awkwardly non-diegetic moments, such as Princess Leia, a key character in the *Star Wars* 'narrative universe' (Genette, 1980), singing along to the film's title music. This confusion is also apparent in the 'magic' used within the *Ewok* cartoons (1985-87) and movies (1984; 1985), and in the way that Princess Leia and Luke Skywalker were at one point seen to develop a 'physical' relationship prior to it being revealed that they were brother and sister (in 1983's *Return of the Jedi*) (Rose, 2011). As late as 1994 'fantasy' Centaurs and Werewolves featured in the *Star Wars* book *The Crystal Star*.

Star Wars may have eventually become a more deliberately shaped cross-platform phenomenon, but it did so in a rather haphazard fashion, and it was only in the almost accidental success, and second film trilogy solidification of Lucas's vision (White, 2012), that a path was suggested for others to follow. It would be difficult to map the full extent of the (now 're-booted') *Star Wars* phenomenon. Beyond film, it spans toys, books, comics, television (animation and live action), games (on all major computer, mobile and gaming platforms), stage shows, and much else, yet *Star Wars* is now transmedially consistent and coherent across the many platforms it inhabits (something that is unlikely to change with its ownership shifting, in 2012, to Disney (a company that has recently done much to unify Marvel's *The Avengers* (1963-) comic book story worlds on screen).

As discussed in more depth later, *Star Wars* operates as a stimulus for deeply engaged fan communities, with fans being pictured here as those users that are explicit in expressing their engagement with particular media phenomenon, and that position themselves as being

more than just 'consumers' (Hills, 2002). This reading is not exclusive to those that 'appropriate' texts, as Jenkins would see it (1992), but is also open to those that 'play along' with corporate intentions. Whether they consider themselves fans or not, *Star Wars* weaves in and out of the everyday lives of many people, and is the subject to regular intertextual referencing, often for comedic value, within other media. In film, for example, *Star Wars* was integral to Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs* (1987) and the trailers for *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999). Television comedies *Glee* (2009-), *Robot Chicken* (2005-), and *Family Guy* (1999-) have all parodied *Star Wars*, whilst it has been repeatedly 'homaged' by *The Muppets* (with the 1983 *Muppet Magazine: Battle of the Space Heroes* featuring Muppet characters playing the parts of *Star Wars* characters). *Star Wars* also regularly appears within advertising – like the VW's Beetle spots *The Bark Side* and *The Dog Strikes Back* (both 2012). Within these examples *Star Wars* usefully demonstrates how media phenomena can be in dialogue with each other, and in turn, how it becomes even more problematic to conceptualise cross-platform media in isolation, and specifically to this study, how a platform specific research stance would perhaps be limiting.

What is Doctor Who? Cross-platform Intentions

Having just examined media that developed from gaming and then cinema, we now turn to consider examples born from television. *Doctor Who*, like *Star Wars* and *Pokémon*, could similarly be said to have developed in an (initially at least) haphazard fashion. It was originally created in 1963 by the BBC as a television show, targeted at 'an audience aged fourteen' (BBC, 2013a), with a public service broadcasting (PSB) led requirement to educate (Hearn, 2013). Within a year of its first broadcast it could be said to have become cross-platform in being joined by its first print sibling, *The Dalek Book*, as well as Dalek badges, costumes, toys and even sweet-cigarettes (Bignall & O'Day, 2004). The many annuals, comic books, novelisations, audio adventures and toys that followed, helped provide *Doctor Who* 'fans with the ability to relive the television stories... [but also to] flesh out the stories in far greater depth' (Perryman, 2008, p.22). Television, of course, is *Doctor Who's* home platform, but as Berger (2010) notes, it was the deeply committed fans that populated *Doctor Who's* non-broadcast media spaces that kept it 'in cultural circulation' during its 1989 to 2005 break from the television screen (p.67). *Doctor Who* survived during this period across toys, games, books and even film. Quite compellingly the *New Adventures* series of *Doctor Who* books (1991-1997) that spanned the time off-air (published by Virgin, and not the BBC), with their

open submission policy, even allowed for the work of a number of fan fiction writers to enter the 'official' canon (and this included the work of future *Doctor Who* executive producer Russell T. Davies) (Perryman, 2008).

Doctor Who was far from dormant when it was off the broadcast airwaves, it clearly lived on as a cross-platform phenomena. Between 2001 and 2003 the BBC also kept (what they now retrospectively call 'Classic') *Doctor Who* alive online with a series of web episodes that culminated in the animated *The Scream of the Shalka* (the last pre-re-launch offering from the BBC). Perryman suggests that the manner whereby *Doctor Who* thrived during its absence from the airwaves might have been the reason why the BBC chose it to operate as a 'flagship for transmedia storytelling' (2008, p.25) – one that could promote 'practices that eschew passivity for participation and static simplicity for multiplatform complexity' (Ibid, p.22). When it did return to television screens, it came loaded with all the accoutrements of transmedial cross-platform, this might as readily have been due to the ways in which *Doctor Who's* new producers had journeyed through the fan fiction ranks, and thus saw the possibilities inherent within non-television based storytelling.

Doctor Who re-launched in 2005 just after the BBC had acknowledged the web's status (beyond television and radio) as its third medium, and appeared 'to embody the BBC's new cross-platform policy' (Berger, 2010, p.66). The television series returned alongside a clearly integrated and complimentary range of (what once could have been described as) ancillary merchandising. This included magazines and toys, as well as games and a 'downloadables' heavy website. *Doctor Who*, after a history of sometime conflicting development, now operated 'within a far more coherent matrix of texts distributed on a range of media technologies, which functioned collectively to provide an intentionally multi-platform experience for the audience' (Evans, 2011, p.24); even if Julie Gardener, its executive producer on its re-launch, did see its cross-platform success, like that of *Pokémon* and *Star Wars* before it, as being a 'bit of an accident' (cited in Belam, 2007).

Post re-launch *Doctor Who's* transmedial narrative (or what has been described as its diegetic 'Whoniverse' (Britton, 2011)) has reached in to some interesting spaces. In 2007 the BBC launched television productions *The Sarah Jane Adventures* for a child audience and

Torchwood for a more adult one. Both of these featured characters that crossed over from the tentpole *Doctor Who* television show. There have long been spin-off shows (Bellamy et al., 1990), but rarely have they been 'spun-off' in such a deliberate manner, and in as compact a timeframe, as the BBC enacted here. Neither *The Sarah Jane Adventures* nor *Torchwood* projected as much off-screen presence as the *Doctor Who*, but they both intriguingly (in their web and other media faces) operated, admittedly on a smaller scale, as cross-platform tentpoles in themselves.

The BBC continues to promote a non-television *Doctor Who* presence, with a narrative rich website and prequel video webisodes (web episodes). The re-launch team also initially created a weekly mobile accessible episode, or in the language originally used by the production team, TARDISode (BBC News, 2006). Although limited in their success at the time these videos did offer a template for later web based offerings; the most recent of which being the *Pond Life* (2012) series-bridging shorts created as character and narrative lead-in to the broadcast television episodes that followed. These webisodes operated as far more than just teasers or trailers for upcoming television broadcasts (with there being distinctly separate promos created for this purpose), they also provided some measure of diegetic link to previous storylines, whilst also giving the more dedicated fan some extra narrative detail. In a similar fashion, the BBC (between 2010 and 2012) released a series of five downloadable games that were narratively consistent with the television broadcasts, whilst as part of its early re-launch non-television provision *Doctor Who* offered mock websites that sat both within the television show's diegesis (like the 'in-show' *whoisthedoctor* site, as 'created' by the character Mickey) and in more transmedial spaces (like the UNIT site, which sat playfully just outside the broadcast narrative).

These non-broadcast faces of *Doctor Who* share nothing indispensable in understanding the 'television version' of the narrative, but they do add a little transmedial embellishment, at the edge of the storytelling, for those that wish to engage more deeply. However weighted to one platform a media phenomenon may ultimately appear to be, it would be difficult to see the likes of *Doctor Who* as 'just television', or picture the cross-platform face of *Doctor Who* as being little more than marketing designed to drive attention towards the television broadcast. Yet, for *Doctor Who*, television clearly operates as its lead platform or main point

of focus for the phenomena as a whole. A recognition that cross-platform may be 'platform led', triggers us to look for those that step across platforms in a more intentional, more story led (Doty, 2004; Kappel, 2004) and more 'conceptual' fashion.

Both *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who* sit firmly within drama, yet educational, factual and entertainment may similarly inform an understanding of cross-platform. *Sesame Street* initially aired on American television in 1969, with its aim being to 'prepare children for school and to spread a message of tolerance for diversity' (Morrow, 2006, p.3) - *The Monster at the End of This Book* (1971) tie-in publication, featuring one of the show's characters, was released shortly after. The book has since had two direct sequels, been issued as an audio book and a Twitter 'conversation'. It has even been referenced across other non-*Sesame Street* media (with for example an episode of adult drama *Supernatural* (2005-) being named after it), and its success helps show how comfortably *Sesame Street* spanned platforms from its very early existence. Yet, as a recent meta-analysis of *Sesame Street* and children's learning suggests, to those in the academy *Sesame Street* is 'exemplar of children's educational television programming' (Mares & Pan, 2013 p.140), not children's educational media. Of course, *Sesame Street*, in being created by The Children's Television Workshop, is avowedly television, but it is interesting that we struggle to look past its genesis.

The Children's Television Workshop were initially cautious to not overly commercialise *Sesame Street* beyond its raison d'etre within television (Jenkins, 2013), yet in acting as a 'child's primer on popular culture' (Morrow, 2006, p.3), it reached far beyond its 'home' platform. For Jenkins:

Sesame Street reinvented children's television, embracing rather than running away from the properties of its medium, incorporating tricks from advertising, parodies of popular culture, songs and skits, into something which encouraged the active engagement of its young viewers. Yet, far less has been made of the fact that *Sesame Street* from the very start encouraged its young fans to follow it across media platforms - from television to records, books, stuffed toys, public performances, feature films, and much more (2013, p.4).

The recent *Once Upon a Monster* (2011) Xbox 360 motion sensor based game notably demonstrates the ways in which *Sesame Street* can now reach in to the lives of children (or children step in to *Sesame Street*) through multiple media forms, yet, looking at the non-

television faces of *Sesame Street*, it is hard to picture a time when it was anything other than cross-platform, even if it may have only come in to focus as being so quite recently.

Big Brother (2000-) operates as another useful example of how that, which might once have not been seen to be cross-platform, can latterly come in to focus as such. Although nominally an adult show, *Big Brother* holds a strong appeal for child audiences (Woods, 2008). It was developed from within factual television, yet in some ways it could be said to be more fundamentally and intentionally cross-platform, than it is television. Broadcast television is clearly *Big Brother's* tentpole or 'centre of gravity', yet without its telephony voting mechanic the show would not exist in its current form - the two platforms being completely reliant on each other. Beyond its tightly interwoven broadcast and telephony, *Big Brother's* online presence is perhaps optional to its being, but in its live streams, and wrap around content, its web offerings provide immersive interactive possibilities that have significantly fed into making *Big Brother* what it is. It may indeed be possible to picture *Big Brother* as bridging a 'conceptual' space between media platforms; with it just as much inhabiting the porous diegesis of the cross-platform world as it does the broadcast house itself. It could however also be argued that *Big Brother* is no more deliberately cross-platform than *The Eurovision Song Contest* (1956-), a pan-national talent competition created under the auspices of the European Broadcasting Union, which, even with its stage production and integral telephony, has historically, and quite comfortably, been described as a television event. The manner whereby we may choose to define two, structurally quite similar, productions in distinctly different ways, triggers us to ask if the nature of our initial engagement with media, and the rhetoric that surrounded that engagement, can near permanently shadow our understanding of it.

BBC Children's and '360 Degree' Development

Expectations within UK commissioning circles are that producers need to fully acknowledge cross-platform, and come offering something beyond a broadcast show (Steemers, 2011); to do far 'more than tack the suggestion for the program website on to [the] proposal' (Lees, 2010, p.138). As Matt Locke, one-time commissioner at Channel 4 Education suggests, producers must be 'platform agnostic', in that they put the idea first and the platform follows (cited in Parker, 2009).

The UK television industry's acceptance of cross-platform has been characterised 'by the introduction of '360-degree commissioning' and by the development of websites and other digital offerings capitalizing on popular content brands' (Doyle, 2010, p.2). A 360 degree approach being one in which commissioning, development and production teams 'ideally' set out to look in *all directions, across all potential platforms*, throughout a proposition's development, and that 'from the earliest stages of conceptualization, content decisions are shaped by the potential to generate consumer value and returns through multiple forms of expression of that content and via a number of distributive outlets' (Ibid).

Major broadcasters have become progressively more reliant on event and spectacle, rather than platform-bound programmes (Ytreberg, 2009), to set them apart. These events have the potential to act as 'big pillars of the schedule' that can then feed a multitude of other platforms (Cowley, cited in Strange, 2011, p.138), and here Strange highlights a cross-platform 'commissioning and production imperative that increasingly requires practitioners to produce and exploit content for screens and sites away from the traditional TV screen and schedule' (2011, p.132). Producers appear to readily celebrate a shift in thinking here, with one noting that:

the big change has been, it used to be television series that one produced, purely storytelling, and now it's about concept, an idea that kids can follow wherever they're going. Whereas a TV series used to be the hub of the wheel, that's now just another spoke. You've got television series of the games, for the toys, you've got to play patterns... They're buying into an idea, and we're trying to create ideas that can move equally across all these different media (cited in Steemers, 2011, p169).

Much of the rhetoric that surrounds cross-platform may conceal unreconstructed practices however; after all, it is possible to work in CBBC development and still see the CBBC website as 'spin-off' to television (Sharp, 2009), and even Julie Gardner, executive producer of *Doctor Who* on its 2005 re-launch, is insistent that '[t]he TV show has to be number one, because if that doesn't work, nothing does' (cited in Belam, 2007). Gardner's pragmatism is well founded of course, but it does reinforce a vision of the BBC as being an organisation inherently broadcast-first in nature (and as is still encoded within its name).

The BBC's values are founded on 'the highly educative and somewhat paternalistic vision' (Nikoltchev, 2007, p.110) of its first Director General, John Reith; with the organisation's mission statement still being to 'enrich people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain' (BBC, 2015). In this we can recognise 'programmes' as holding primacy institutionally, even when a want to inform, educate and entertain could be answered in non-programmed/non-broadcast ways. In a move against a broadcast-first vision, the BBC has however demonstrated clear cross-platform ambitions. As far back as 2001, Ashley Highfield, then Director of New Media and Technology at the BBC, stated that the organisation 'will only commission shows that come with online and interactive elements attached' and that '[t]he days of commissioning *programmes* are over, we are now only commissioning *projects* that have levels of interactivity' (cited in Vickers, 2001, author's Italics). He declared that 'regardless of genre, all our interactive applications begin from the ground up at the time of the programme's commission. In this way they are not considered 'bolt ons' to the linear programme' (cited in Miller, 2008, p.268), with interactivity here being the buzzword of choice for media engagement that sits beyond the television.

Highfield's position headed a period in which the BBC could be said to be decentring broadcast. With this shift being institutionally formalised in response to the *Graf Report* (2004), an independent review into the BBC's online activities' impact on the 'market' - the outcome of which was that online content would be tied to broadcast offerings (and that the BBC should stop creating stand-alone, web based, content). On the surface the ensuing policy change appeared to restrict the BBC's online activities, yet in forcing the organisation's focus on to existing content and brands it helped map out a cross-platform future in which television, radio and online were seen to actively work together. The *Graf Report* may not have positioned television as being divisible from the TV set, but the BBC's *Creative Future* strategy (that followed in 2006) explicitly addressed on-going shifts in the technological landscape when it acknowledged distribution possibilities beyond the airwaves, and signalled a move towards a more cross-platform vision. *Creative Future* explicitly promoted 360 degree commissioning and positioned audience reach at its core, as it attempted to redefine the BBC's public service ambitions for a digital age.

In heralding the structural reorganisation that ensued, the BBC's *Creative Future* rhetoric claimed that 'the best content should be made available on every platform at the audience's convenience' and a 360 degree approach would enable 'creative coherence and editorial leadership across all platforms and media' (BBC Press Office, 2006). As Mark Thompson, then Director General of the BBC pronounced during his 2006 Royal Television Society Lecture:

"We can deliver much more public value when we think in a 360° degree way, rather than focusing separately on different platforms or channels. So wherever possible we need to think cross-platform: in our commissioning, our making, our distribution".

The BBC could be said here to have mapped out a path for other PSBs to follow. Their strategic response to a changing, digitised and often on-line technological landscape (and users' expectations within it), can be seen as being a timely one; after all, '[i]n a world of personalised media where users are potentially freed from the tyranny of schedules, taking what they want, the BBC can no longer afford to see itself as simply a broadcaster' (Smith & Steemers, 2007, p.50).

The *Graf Report* and the subsequent *Creative Future* strategy implementation helped establish on-line (alongside radio and television) as the BBC's third medium, yet in explicitly stating that the BBC should not create web only offerings, it perhaps also permanently framed on-line as subsidiary, or subordinate, to its elder siblings. Rather than de-centre television, the BBC could be said to have formalised a vision in which broadcast tentpoles other media. Following a similar line of argument, Bennett and Strange (2012) suggest that after espousing the grand rhetoric of 360 degree commissioning and development the BBC's approach has substantially been watered down, with cross-platform now meaning little more than near traditional linear content being delivered across different devices. Their argument awkwardly rests on downplaying the non-broadcast face of the BBC, and instead fully focusing on delivery mechanisms like iPlayer, yet it is possible to find some measure of agreement with their position when, on returning to *Doctor Who* for example, one considers the ways in which the BBC seems to have lost momentum in the creation of mobile and web content. The transmedial websites (like the aforementioned *whoisthedoctor* for example) have long been abandoned (the last of the 'tie-in sites being made for series 3 in 2007), as have the once prominent *Doctor Who* comic and trailer maker on-line applications and the *Doctor Who: Adventure Games*.

The 2013 renaming of BBC's 'Vision' division, 'Television', and the 'Audio & Music' division, 'Radio', demonstrates a distinct return to a platform bound approach. With the BBC's 'Future Media' division also now sitting under the remit of the newly created position of Director of Strategy and Digital, online and other non-traditional BBC provision appears to have been officially relegated to a supporting role. The BBC may argue that this move offers television and radio the 'proper focus and attention to keep them up to the creative mark' (Hewlett, 2013), yet in light of large cuts in BBC funding it also hints at a further retreat from online spaces unless they serve a direct strategic function that benefits television and radio. We could see a reassertion of television and radio supremacy (or 'linear legacy' as Bennett and Strange describe it (2012)) as being consistent with the ways in which an organisation like the BBC is beholden to weigh up the costs of creating non-broadcast content against the potential benefits of connecting with a few hard-core fans, but we might just as readily address a deprioritising of non-broadcast content, in the case of *Doctor Who* in particular, as reflecting the profile of a maturing production – one that concentrates on the platforms that appear to offer most 'reward'. The BBC could be said to have experimented and honed its cross-platform practice to best serve its audience, and more broadly speaking we could also see these developments as part of the BBC's oscillating engagement with the 'new'.

There are those within the BBC that still appear open to a platform agnostic approach. Joe Godwin, Director of BBC Children's from 2009 to 2015, for example talks of their 'programming and outreach activities' (2012), rather than focussing on television or online. BBC Children's 360 degree commissioning and development processes are avowedly conceptual, with the department's response to *Creative Future* being to bring (initially at least) an 'interactive executive' in to the commissioning team, and from then on all productions were conceived, in theory at least, as inherently cross-platform, and could have potentially ended up on any platform. BBC Children's move toward operating in a manner that looks decidedly beyond television has helped CBBC (the BBC's 'multiplatform offering for 6-12 year olds' as it is described within the PSB's rhetoric (BBC Media Centre, 2012)) deliver some notable examples of cross-platform media. These include *Escape from Scorpion Island* (2007-), which weaves web accessible puzzles in to its television game show mechanic, and *Relic: Guardians of the Museum* (2010), the children's media offering from the BBC and the British Museum's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010) project.

The second of these may be of particular interest in helping us examine a conceptual 360 degree approach, in that *Relic: Guardians of the Museum* operated as the children's television game-show off-shoot of a much larger bi-institutional project; one that sat between radio, web and the physical space of the British Museum itself. *A History of the World in 100 Objects* was broadcast on BBC's Radio 4, and in it Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, discussed major historical objects, whilst a parallel physical representation of each object being discussed was offered on the companion BBC website – a site on which users could engage further with the project, and even upload images of objects that they personally deemed to be of historical significance. At the heart of the project sat a countdown of the British Museum's most significant artefacts, yet the countdown itself, in being conducted on radio and the web (but interestingly not on television), left the radio reliant on the affordances of the web to create a visual rendition of the artefacts, and the web, in turn, enriched by the depth of comment afforded by the radio.

The Relic: Guardians of the Museum game-show acted as a means of engaging children in the *A History of the World in 100 Objects* project, the British Museum, and history more generally. Yet in being perhaps only peripheral to a much broader project, and having originated from outside BBC Children's, it might not offer full clarity as an exemplar of the department's 360 degree approach, even if it operates effectively across platform. *Deadly 60* (2009-) (winner of a BAFTA for best children's entertainment show in 2011) on the other hand, was created within BBC Children's 360 degree approach, and serves to demonstrate how a 'concept', in this case a list of the world's most dangerous animals, has been delivered across platforms in a way that acknowledges the particular affordances of each platform.

From the audience's perspective *Deadly 60* began in 2009 as a pre-recorded broadcast television show. A live show, *Live 'n' Deadly*, followed in 2010 and *Deadly Art*, an animal based craft show, in 2011. *Live 'n' Deadly* connects with the audience on location and in a similar, but grander fashion, the production also runs road-shows where members of the public can interact with the show's presenters and various (less) deadly animals. These later television and event productions can be pictured as 'spin-off' manifestations of the success of the original television iteration of *Deadly 60*, and offer little expression of the 360 degree nature of its genesis. However in *Deadly 60*'s immersive web offerings, that launched

alongside the broadcast show (and whereby children can, amongst many things, play online games, watch video extras, access craft downloadables, message the show's presenters and take part in votes), we recognise a fuller expression of *Deadly 60*'s 360 degree origins. *Deadly 60* as a phenomenon sits across web, print and toy iterations. A child is as able to engage as readily with its multiple non-broadcast faces as it is the television show itself, and through its location and road-show 'real world' connection possibilities it offers a sense of it being very much an 'event' (even if it is one without a fixed time and date).

For each new CBBC production, Children's BBC creates an on-line presence to sit alongside the television broadcast. Some productions of course invite a deeper engagement with non-broadcast media than others; for example the 'find the mole' game-show *Trapped* (2007-10) warranted the development of a web play-along that mirrored the television show's mechanic, whilst comedy drama *M.I. High* (2007-) airs alongside diegetically-consistent web gaming. With its combined live internet and television mechanic, another CBBC production, *Sam & Mark's TMI Friday* (2010) (*SAMTMIF*), could be recognised, like *Deadly 60*, as an 'event'. *SAMTMIF*'s website featured a clock count-down as tangible focal point to each show's Friday television transmission. Children could interact with the *SAMTMIF* production on-line throughout the week's build-up to the Friday broadcast, being able to vote, upload content and engage in conversation asynchronously with the broadcast; in some small way they could feed their voices into both the website and the live television show. The broadcast show itself shouted loudly about its liveness as it encouraged both asynchronous and synchronous 'second-screen' television and computer participation. In cross-platform phenomena like *SAMTMIF* we can then discern many of what could be said to be the headline markers of cross-platform in practice, in particular, a sense of event and (multi-screen/platform) user interactivity (with interactivity spanning both synchronous and asynchronous engagement). These markers might, in combination, seem neoteric to an adult interpretation, but it may be worth highlighting at this point that from the perspective of a child, little of this is likely to appear new-found or exceptional.

Towards a Model of Cross-platform

Highlighted so far are two (admittedly porous and cross-cutting) ways of addressing the development of cross-platform media, the 'platform led', and the 'conceptual', with the 'platform led' starting life within a (single) medium, before going on to inhabit multiple media spaces. In this way phenomena like *Pokémon*, *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who* were born to gaming, film and television respectively, before spanning media. The majority of cross-platform media encountered historically could be said to have been created in this way, being adapted to other platforms. The second way of addressing cross-platform, the 'conceptual', as discussed above in relation to *Deadly 60*, *SAMTMIF*, *Big Brother* and *The History of the World in 100 Objects*, is developed from a core 'idea' that could be said to exist in 'the space between platforms, and finds utility in appropriate platforms' (Woodfall, 2011, p.208). We can maybe picture this conceptual form retaining coherence regardless of what platforms are, or are not, incorporated within it.

As media organisations push to create value from older IP, a third means of addressing cross-platform media may be coming in to focus – what we could call the 'combinational'. We can see this as a cross-platform bringing together of once distinctly standalone tentpoles, rather than just intertextual touching. Here we note the ways in which characters and narratives from separate story worlds are woven together, with media phenomena that cross diegetic thresholds in this way including the *Alien* (1979) and *Predator* (1987) comic book franchise clashes that culminated in the *Alien vs. Predator* films (of 2004 and 2007), and the pre-mentioned Marvel comic book story worlds that fed into the *Avengers Assemble* film (2012). Within media made specifically for children, the animated leads of films like *Snow White* (1937-) and *Pocahontas* (1995-), who once sat within their own diegetic spaces, now exist within the combinational diegesis of *Disney Princesses* (2003-), a media phenomenon that spans cinema, television, resort, live events, toys, gaming and the web.

As touched on previously, it is possible to further demarcate cross-platform media in to those phenomena that predominantly offer a 'synchronous' connection across platforms, and those that are more 'asynchronous' (with the same media phenomenon being capable of offering affordances that span both). Here it is possible (as expressed in the matrix that follows (Figure 2.1)) to picture a concept driven phenomena like *Deadly 60* as offering a

mostly asynchronous connection with its users, in that a user is not likely to watch the broadcast show at the same time as making an animal mask, or attending an *Deadly 60* event. Whilst *SAMTMIF*, an equally conceptual production perhaps, can be seen to offer both synchronous and asynchronous affordances, in that a user might engage online as they watch.

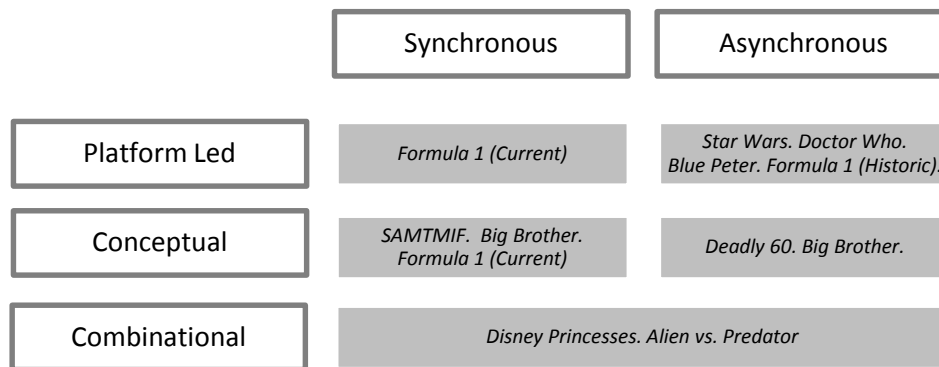


Figure 2.1. Matrix of Idealised Cross-platform Media

Some users may interact with media in multiple synchronous and asynchronous multi-screen ways, whilst others may be content to just watch a weekly television broadcast, and here sits a potential disconnect between how a media organisation may understand the nature of what they produce and the ways whereby a user might. If a user’s first in-depth connection with *Deadly 60* is through television, then to them, maybe it is television - yet from the position of those that created *Deadly 60*, within BBC Children’s 360 degree commissioning and production processes, it is more so conceptual.

A child may intriguingly come with little, or no knowledge of the ‘origins’ (or lead platform) of a specific media phenomenon, and their main engagement with that phenomenon can potentially be sited far from these origins. Depending on the nature and order of their connection to that media, each user forges a unique understanding of the nature of the media they connect with. Someone who visited the cinema in 1977 to watch the first outing of *Star Wars* is likely to recognise it as ‘film franchise’ for example, and they will therefore probably picture the *Star Wars* phenomena as a whole in quite different ways to those whose first interaction with it was through Cartoon Network animated series, or the *Star Wars* Lego toys and video games.

As a user engages with each platform to a greater or lesser extent, the way in which they perceive media may be prone to change over time however. A sporting event like *Formula 1*, in most likelihood, would have historically been experienced through only one platform at a time (Figure 2.1), yet contemporary fans of motor sport can not only watch or listen to the 'traditional' race itself, but are also able to engage synchronously - accessing feeds that follow individual drivers, offer course maps, list race positions, statistics and 'news', as well provide room for both user and 'expert' comment. Here we see a media phenomenon start out as platform led (and asynchronous), but then evolve towards the more conceptual (and synchronous); maybe in this, we can picture a trajectory that in some ways becomes another marker of a 'successful' cross-platform media phenomena.

Any attempt to create a model of cross-platform media has to acknowledge that with the landscape and our understanding of it being in flux, media may span conceptualisation in multiple, overlapping and possibly conflicting ways. Any idealised boundaries are highly porous, and contingent not just on the affordances offered by producers of media, but also the manner whereby users experience media. With children's media regularly developed to operate 'beyond the medium', and children readily able to access media through multiple screen, toy, event and publishing means, it would appear strange perhaps for them (and us) to address their media choices through the prism of just one platform; to a child, all media may be conceptual.

Cross-platform as Practice

Depending on its intentions, and outcomes, much media that sits across platforms can of course be addressed as 'marketing' (or as part of what Dwyer (2010, p.121) quite cuttingly describes as a 'selling machine'); with content, wherever it is sited, pointing consumers towards a lead (or easier to monetise) platform, often television in the case of children's media. Steemers (2011) pictures pre-school children's cross-platform for example to be (and likely to remain) distinctly television led, and that to some media organisations:

online or mobile platforms are seen more as promotional space than as revenue generators, as means of getting *programme* brands into the public domain or a precursor to discussions with potential funders and licensees (p.172, author's italics).

Yet even if we acknowledge that the intent of marketing may be to point consumers to a lead platform or brand 'spaces' (Lury, 2002), a marketing act on one platform can still 'sell' the broader phenomenon; a marketing push for the television face of *Horrible Histories* for example, also potentially points children towards its books, magazines, and other iterations. Marketing departments have long strived to project unified messages across multiple platforms (Buckingham, 2002), whilst children's media, in particular, increasingly operates alongside (or within) highly intertextual 'integrated marketing' (Goldstein et al., 2004, p.2), in ways that ultimately value message above media platform. Here it becomes difficult to differentiate between cross-platform and effective marketing - to an extent that any attempt to map out a fixed distinction between the two becomes forced and perhaps ultimately holds little utility, and we are moved therefore to accept a reading of cross-platform in which marketing may be 'motive'.

In 2006 Jenkins wrote that media companies were in the process of 'learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments' (2006a, p.19). Yet here Jenkins failed to fully recognise the ways whereby many organisations have long worked to extend their IP across multiple platforms (Ibrus & Scolari, 2012), as Disney's business practices clearly illustrate.

Cross-platform practices could be said to be the almost inevitable outcome of media organisations adopting strategies of 'multisector and multimedia integration' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.31) and to some cross-platform marketing and transmedia storytelling is now the industrial norm (Hardy, 2011). Adopting a cross-platform strategy is appreciated as a logical and often necessary step, for both those organisations forging external alliances, and those that aim to gain benefit in-house from integrated business practices (Dettki, 2003; Ots, 2005); whilst cross-platform has become increasingly significant to traditional broadcasters (Perryman, 2008; Erdal, 2009; Kjus, 2009) - and even though the BBC could be said to be in 'corporate retreat' in some ways, here we note how many of its aforementioned productions have operated as testing ground for UK cross-platform.

Organisations like Disney and DreamWorks, long implicitly producers of cross-platform media, now talk explicitly about 'making products and content' (Deuze, 2013, p.172). Jeffrey Katzenberg, CEO of DreamWorks Animation, promotes a 'leveraging' of their media brands across 'movies, television, home entertainment, consumer products, digital, theme parks and live entertainment channels' (cited in Dickson, 2012). Whilst Anne Sweeney, president of Disney-ABC Television Group, suggests '[w]e're giving people more quality and options than ever before, and they're responding: tuning in, logging on, downloading, streaming, buying, renting - devouring our content any way they can get it' (cited in Dredge, 2011). It is interesting here perhaps that Disney's executives consider a cross-platform strategy as a means of 'unleashing' their media, with their rhetoric still reflecting a traditional producer to consumer model.

The aim of this chapter was to explore and partly delineate the current cross-platform landscape from a broadly practice-facing perspective, as well as to foreground an argument that, whether from a practitioner's or child's position, (successful) children's media is inherently cross-platform. Beyond the readings expressed above however there are multiple theoretical positions from which cross-platform can be considered, with the following setting out to conceptualise cross-platform within three cross-cutting perspectives - the textual, technological and user.

Chapter 1. Cross-platform Media

Part 2. Perspectives on Cross-platform

From Bakhtin to Batman – Textual Perspectives

In considering cross-platform from the perspectives of the textual, technological and user, the following section begins by addressing the ‘openness’ of cross-platform media texts, whilst also questioning the place and stability of the author and narrative in complex platform spanning texts. Here, cross-platform media is seen as being pluralistic, in constant flux, near unmappable and porous to multiple understandings.

Even though he did not directly reflect on media beyond the novel, this chapter initially turns to Bakhtin, who saw texts as boundless and open to multiple cross-cutting readings - and as such his thought is considered to hold much utility in addressing the complexity of the cross-platform media landscape. Bakhtin suggested that categorisation or demarcation is ‘contradiction ridden’ and ‘tension filled’ (1981, p.272), and much of the following could be read as pushing against any fixed or unitary understanding.

Digital Dialogism

In his *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1984) Bakhtin suggested, when discussing the novel, that the interaction of all the voices *within* a text creates a ‘polyphonic dialogue’; one in which each voice has its own validity and there is no absolute truth (or at least truth is something that sits across multiple voices). Bakhtin turns this argument *without* when he asserts that we experience the novel as part of a broader active relationship with other books and authors. The novel, and by extension all other media, and significantly thus, life itself is shaped within a plurality of interconnected ‘utterances’ (Ibid). Utterances here being the basic unit of communication; with each utterance in ‘relation to other utterances’ and part of a socially constructed chain of knowledge, meaning and understanding, formed in relation to otherness (Todorov, 1984, p.60), ‘not self-sufficient’, and unfinalisable.

Utterances are in dialogue (but not dialectically) with all past, present and future conceptions; '[e]verything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others' (Holquist, 1998, p.428):

It is that which insures the primacy of *context over text*. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, physiological - that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve (Holquist, 1998, p.428, author's italics).

There are those that have stated 'text is everything' (Agejev, 2003, p.437), but Bakhtin's heteroglossia, as a contingent (many accented) decentring discursive struggle that stands distinct from, and ultimately overrides the monoglossic (or singularly accented), sits both within and astride text. Bakhtin usefully suggests that there is on-going interaction between all meanings, and that all have the potential to inform and change each other (an idea that has been revisited, far more narrowly, under the guise of 'intertextuality' (see Kristeva (1980) in particular)). In this way engagement with any one platform or text becomes 'punctuation' to an on-going lived experience (Kress, 2000); we recognise each of the multiple utterances of cross-platform media as bearing a measure of authority, and that cross-platform offers a polyphonic 'digital dialogism' whereby each platform, and each utterance, upon each platform, operates relationally. No one platform is sacrosanct and inviolate, as no one platform can be considered in isolation or finalised. Bakhtin leaves us comfortable with the suggestion that texts (however we demarcate them), and by extension media platforms, are polyphonic, polysemic and permeable - being therefore open to multiple readings, re-readings, cross-readings and writings.

Co-Authors

Barthes offers some measure of support here when he demarcates texts in to those that he considered 'readerly', in that they are passive and offer little by way of a challenge to the reader, and 'writerly', in that they are active, engage the reader in a co-production of the text and promote a plurality of entrances and meanings (1977). In *The Death of the Author* (1977) Barthes rejects literary criticism's practice of validating an author's biographical context (their politics, background, and so forth), whilst arguing that the idea of an 'auteur' (with its emphasis on a distinct unitary creative force) should be rejected and in turn replaced

with the idea of a 'scriptor' (which hints at the less personal and more generic word 'scribe' - a person prepared to write for anybody, or re-work existing texts). He fights the critical urge to constrain both text and author, or indeed to shackle them to each other:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash[...] Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing (Barthes, 1977, p.146).

Text and author become situational and negotiated, and Barthes in this way could be said to join Bakhtin in acknowledging an open dialogic unfinalisability. Gadamer's hermeneutics (1976), whereby 'the text is performed by the reader' (Risser, 1997, p.168), sides not with the author, and similarly Kierkegaard, prone to pseudonymity (or polyonymity) (Westfall, 2007) himself, was explicit in stating that even within his own 'authorised' writing, he was 'without authority'. Kierkegaard regarded himself 'as a reader of the books, not as the author' (1998, p.12) - and here his authorial meaning-making can be seen as an unstable deferred act that awaits the presence of (or dialogue with) the reader.

There is a counter impulse to (re)ennoble the author, notably from Benjamin when he argues that:

In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an "ideal" receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art, since all it posits is the existence and nature of man as such. Art, in the same way, posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its works is it concerned with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener (1992, p.71).

Yet this near adulation of the author comes as little surprise from a theorist immersed in a 'negative critique' of audience and popular culture (Tulloch, 1995, p.25). Foucault, adopting a perhaps less one-sided approach, can also be said to (re)affirm the significance of an 'authorial' core creator. Though not directly intending to challenge Barthes' de-centring of the author (Gallop, 2011), Foucault, by bringing the author's 'oeuvre', or greater body of work, in to play, does just that (1994). When he returns the author to primacy however, Foucault claims to do so by necessity, rather than with any great conviction to an 'author-god' (Barthes, 1977); and usefully he does acknowledge that text (the authorial 'creation') is

not 'restricted to the confines of its interiority', but reflects an 'unfolded exteriority' (Foucault, 1994, p.206), with what-is-written having both an internal and external facing ontology. This is demonstrated in the way that Foucault introduces the 'author function' (Ibid, p215) - a complication and extension of the authorial that is both potentially 'transdiscursive', in that a writer's voice can reach beyond their oeuvre, and is assignable beyond a solitary author (yet perhaps leads to a hunt for the original author). Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) appears to latterly assert a 'desire for' a return to the author, and between these two (what now appear to be less opposed than expected) readings, it may be possible to reconcile the 'author' as both singular and plural, and significantly, unfixed.

A traditional conception of a unitary author/auteur still holds sway within some media spaces (the novel or 'art house' film for example), but would be considered outmoded in others (like news or comic books (Udhir, 2012)). Within film we still see work ascribed, perhaps for marketing clarity, to one author-director (or occasionally producer), yet Manovich usefully reminds us here that 'contemporary film productions [...], like medieval cathedrals, involve thousands of people collaborating over a substantial period of time' (2002). If we return to Bakhtin, and accept texts as a polyphony of meaning and voices, framed and informed in relation to otherness, any argument for the unitary author within film, or even a novel, can become deeply problematic; this leads us back to an appreciation of how Barthes' 'death of the author' empowers a 'birth of the reader' (or viewer, or user), in which the reader assigns meaning to a text (from within a Bakhtinian matrix of social forces), and texts draw on previous texts, contexts, meanings and norms. The reader is perhaps led by an author, but not constrained by them, and text can police meaning making, yet meaning is not fixed by the text.

Text may act as a guide, but as Gadamer (1976) reminds us meaning making is dialogically negotiated between text and 'reader', and meaning therefore can change from reader to reader and from day to day. This position moves us far beyond the text bound ideal 'implied reader' (of Iser (1980)) and in to acknowledging the reader as active individual. When the author is no longer the 'author-god', text is opened up to multiple and active meaning making (Barthes, 1975). Cross-platform media, by its very nature, is highly unlikely to sit under the creative control of just one individual; multiple voices will inform the production

process both within and without, and any understanding of cross-platform media would benefit by acknowledging a dialogic co-authorhood. If we picture an 'ideal' cross-platform phenomenon, it becomes very difficult to conceive of a situation whereby that phenomenon would not be embedded in a writerly dialogism; indeed Manovich, addressing the interactivity that is common to much cross-platform media, suggests that through their engagement with media, the user clearly 'becomes the co-author of the work' (2001, p.66).

Digital De-stability

In the midst of this polyphony and possible confusion we are triggered to ask if we can call upon a unitary source text (particularly when addressing the complexities of cross-platform) and are we perhaps led to question our understanding of text in a quite foundational sense. Even though texts under the readings shared to this point are highly complicated, they would still appear to require some measure of boundary, to start and stop, and to have an inside and an outside. We may also expect them to be definable by genre, have a platform to sit upon (novel, film, game, etc.), a title, and (as already problematised) an author of some kind. Yet cross-platform media practice appears to challenge many, if not all, of these markers of what is, or is not, a text.

Derrida has usefully done much to destabilise preconceptions on texts - with his 'book' *Glas* (1974) in particular, 'opening up' the term. *Glas* 'defies linear exposition' (Hartman, 1981, p.2) as it presents two works printed across two adjacent columns; on one side of the page a philosophical piece on Hegel, and on the other a piece on French writer Genet. The 'text' is disrupted by shifts in typographical style and inserted quotations, with neither column interpretable in isolation. Here philosophy and literature are in active dialogue as they feed, inform, limit and open up to each other, with these complications challenging any fixed conceptualisation.

Looking at *Glas*, we can perhaps agree that it has boundaries (however porous, seemingly illogical and fragmentary), genre(s), a title, and it also appears to have an author. Derrida places this 'authority' in doubt though by offering the reader multiple signatories to the work, whilst the title could be considered an awkwardly unusual one for a philosophical text

(*Glas* meaning (a death?) knoll in French (Megill, 1987), meaning glass (something to drink from or look through) across much of northern Europe, and being homophonic in French for ice (glace) or even ice cream). Genre here is similarly destabilised across a complicated interaction of: literature; essay; exegesis; dialogue; commentary; art; and perhaps even joke (Royle, 1995) - in a way that forces us to picture genre, and by extension texts, within a broader overlapping and interacting assemblage. Derrida persuades us that each reading of a text is an act of creating a new text, and each translation something neoteric (2002); with *Glas*, and any other text therefore, becoming an 'almost' text, a text in flux, a text challenged, laid bare and inverted (as perhaps we can also see in how he begins with a 'finis' (finish) within his *Aporias* (1993)). The creation of a text is a process of deferral of meaning whereby we (all) act as translators or mediators (Derrida, 1988). As well as perforating boundaries between texts, genres and consequently perhaps even academic disciplines, Derrida challenges the core 'ownership' of ideas (Leavey, 1986). In raising questions around truth and knowledge his work also brings us back to the unfinalisable co-relational writerly pluralities of Bakhtin and Barthes.

Derrida, Bakhtin, Barthes and to an extent Gadamer help us map out an active dialogic and unbounded perspective from which to conceptualise cross-platform media. In accepting the socially located place of both (co-)author and user of texts we can picture cross-platform as a (digitally destabilised) polyphony of utterances that share the potential to feed off of, and inform, each other. Of course it would be foolish, and perhaps ideologically naïve, to offer up cross-platform media as some Habermasian (1991) ideal 'public sphere' where all players have the potential to offer equal voice, yet it might be just as foolish to picture cross-platform as simply author or platform bound; cross-platform can be distinctly writerly (picture games, toys, or the internet), and even seemingly passive readerly media may offer opportunities for writerly activity (a 'back-channel' Twitter discussion to a television broadcast for example).

Transmediality, Diegesis and Rabbit Holes

Barthes saw an ideal 'writerly' text as offering a plurality of potential entrances and meanings, something that Jenkins echoes when he suggests that those who engage with platform spanning narratives are able to access them through a 'rabbit hole' (2006a, p.124)

of their own choosing. Jenkins opts for the term 'transmedia narrative' to describe deliberate storytelling interactions as they 'unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the [narrative] world' (2006a, p.334), and he draws a clear distinction between planned transmedia narratives, and those that are more 'accidental' (2003). Kinder, as touched on in the previous chapter, noted how a synergistically led 'commercial supersystem of transmedia intertextuality' (1991, p.3) accreted around characters like the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Jenkins readily adopted Kinder's 'transmedia', but instead of seeing characters as the text's centre of gravity as she did, he instead turned his attention to the expansive narrative worlds, or universes, that they inhabit (with the discourses of transmedia often seemingly reliant on such 'spatial' terms (Saldre & Torop, 2012)).

Whilst reflecting on *The Matrix*, Jenkins highlighted the ways in which it integrated 'multiple texts' to create 'a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium' (Jenkins, 2006a, p.95) and here we can revisit texts as encoded 'activity of production' (Young, 1981, p.31) that envelops an 'entire storyworld as we know it' (Gray, 2010, p.7). *The Matrix* as a phenomenon spanned three live-action feature films, *The Matrix*, and two sequels, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003). It also comprised of a compendium of animated shorts, *The Animatrix* (2003), as well as a computer game, *Enter The Matrix* (2003) and *The Matrix Online* (2005), a MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game), all of which were intended to take '*The Matrix* story beyond where the film trilogy left off' (Doty, 2004, p.1).

The two film sequels and the computer game were developed as a unitary project, with each part of the production telling a different aspect of *The Matrix* story. Although it was not necessary to watch the films in order to play the game (or vice versa), the games and films, when experienced as a totality, are designed to offer a richer diegesis with which to engage with, and deepen connection to *The Matrix* as a holistic experience. A small example of this diegetic connection, or transmedial synergy, is recognisable within *The Matrix Reloaded* film, when a character exits a scene empty-handed and returns sometime later carrying a package; it is only through playing the *Enter The Matrix* game however (where users take on the role of supporting characters from the film) that it becomes clear how the character

obtained this package. Each utterance of *The Matrix* operates across 'a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension' (Hills, 2002, p.104); Murray saw these expanses as 'encyclopaedic narrative' (1997), whilst Hills, with more brio, adopts the term 'hyperdiegesis' (2002).

Here then we can consider transmedia to encompass the core diegesis (or primary tentpoled narrative universe), like the aforementioned television face of *Doctor Who*, and compatible narrative spaces, like the *Doctor Who* tie-in websites. Cross-platform more broadly thus would incorporate the diegetic and hyperdiegetic as well as the extra- and contra-diegetic. The extra-diegetic being said here to be that which sits outside the narrative universe, and the contra-diegetic referring to linked, but 'contradictory', narrative universes (like the 1996 *Doctor Who* television film and the *Dr. Who and the Daleks* films of the 60s, in both of which The Doctor is anti-canonically half-human). This reading on the extra-diegetic run slightly counter to literary theorist Genette's (1980) interpretation of the extra-diegetic as being that which sits outside the diegesis, but can also include storytelling (by an external narrator) that acts to frame a primary narrative. Genette's inclusion of the external narrator within the extra-diegetic is perhaps useful however, in that it moves us to recognise the extra-diegetic as distinct from the non-diegetic (that which has no connection to the diegesis), and thus allows us to see the extra-diegetic as that sitting outside the intended narrative. In this way then we can picture a child's story-play engagement with a media phenomenon as potentially incorporating, extending and challenging any diegetic demarcation. This brings us back to Jenkins perhaps, when he differentiates between the planned and the accidental; to him it is the intention to tell stories across platform that makes media transmedia, and this narrative intentionality becomes a significant point of difference with the broader conceptualisation of cross-platform.

The Matrix (at least after the release of the first film) clearly spans platforms in a deliberate and managed sense and, in recalling how the early iterations of *Doctor Who* and *Star Wars* lacked for a sense of their diegeses deliberately spanning platforms, we can see how media phenomena, even if cross-platform in nature from almost their inception, can often take time to shape up as more recognisably transmedia. *Batman* (1939-), by means of distinction, may

serve as an example of a phenomenon that curiously lacks for a broader sense of transmediality (Brooker, 2012), and as yet appears to not have reached a clear narrative unity across platforms. Of course, it is cross-platform in its multiple comic, television and film 're-boot' iterations, but throughout *Batman's* ricocheting journey between high camp and darker tones, there appears to be no stage at which, as a franchise, it has been 'unified' stably under one transmedial narrative in a fashion similar to that of post relaunch *Doctor Who*, or post second trilogy era *Star Wars*.

As when earlier questioning whether a child would address media by its platform of (perceived) origin, and in noting that they are capable of flattening (or contemporising) media history and accessing transmedial narratives in an order and fashion of their choosing, here it could be argued that from a child's perspective, there may be no clear distinction between cross-platform and transmedia. Just like adults, a child can engage in 'playful participation' (Jenkins, 2013, p.7) with texts, as they find and co-opt the aspects of a cross-platform phenomena (however disorganised and disunited) that they find most attractive; as textual gatherers children are free to weave their own meaning in and out of potentially conflicting diegetic spaces. In the same way as we might accept an adult's ability to negotiate a path through the multiple narrative and character inconsistencies of the animated, comic book and film iterations of *Batman* for example, we should therefore also be able to acknowledge a child's agency in managing diegetic tensions.

Transmedia narratives can offer distinctly different pathways and experiences to individuals depending on the nature of their platform engagement. Through *Doctor Who* webisodes and mock websites, or spin-off shows like *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, a child may be able to deepen their connection to *Doctor Who*, as a phenomenon, in a way that neither overly complicates or undermines its core broadcast television narrative, but those that access these transmedial expressions of *Doctor Who*, may experience both the television face of *Doctor Who*, and the phenomenon as a whole, in quite different ways from a television only *Doctor Who* audience. Transmedia narratives, with their writerly (and 'rhizomic' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)) 'rabbit hole' points of access challenge an 'authors' ability to dictate the transmedial path an individual takes, and with audiences perhaps able to enter and exit diegeses at a point of their own choosing, transmediality and 'narrative closure' could be

seen to be awkwardly incompatible. Russell T. Davies, who led the team that brought *Doctor Who* back to television in 2005, is clearly aware of this dilemma (and the BBC's implicit policy approach to it) when he highlights that '[i]f you had to buy a BBC novel in order to understand the [*Doctor Who*] plot as transmitted on BBC1, then we would be breaking the BBC's guidelines' (cited in Perryman, 2008, p.36).

Returning to a cross-platform TV-centrism, it is possible to argue that cross-platform phenomena, like *Doctor Who* (from an institutional and production point of view), are likely to prioritise a core diegesis on one lead platform, and that other platforms therefore become home to a devalued transmediality. In this way we can picture a core diegesis as perhaps offering a welcome space for clear narrative closure in a near stand-alone fashion, whilst the transmedial utterances have the freedom to either stand-alone or work with narrative elements from within the core diegesis - with the assumption being that the majority of the audience will have some measure of engagement with this core diegesis, as it tentpoles the other platforms. (Transmedial) cross-platform may appear at times to be without definable beginning and end, and run counter to an impulse to historicise and delimit, but in practice however, it may be prone to be otherwise. This perhaps leads us towards the awkward conclusion that even if the rhetoric says otherwise (as is common within the BBC's '360 degree' pronouncements), cross-platform is rarely, if ever, truly conceptual in nature, and we should not allow ourselves to be distracted by seeing cross-platform as some non-hierarchical ideal, in which all utterances have equally validity.

Parerga and Paratexts

Many of the texts that surround a core diegesis do little to expand diegetic space, but instead introduce, frame, and offer an invite in to the diegesis. Here we turn to those often more peripheral and sometimes transitory media that surround texts in a less transmedial fashion. In Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* (1987) he (auto-dialogically (Rapaport, 1997)) reflects on Kant's revival of the Greek term 'parergon', something Kant describes as being 'only an adjunct and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object [like] the frames of pictures or drapery on statues' (2008, p.51). In this light parerga enclose and bracket an artistic work, whilst focusing attention on it. Kant feared that 'if the ornamentation does not itself enter into the composition of the beautiful form - if it is

introduced like a gold frame to win approval of the picture by means of its charm - it is then called finery and takes away from the genuine beauty' (Ibid). (Slightly blinkered to the other hand(s) at play in the act of framing) Kant suggests that unsympathetic 'ornament' can detract from value and meaning - and here we see a warning for supporting texts that are ill conceived (and span platforms) without full consideration of, or even in conflict with, the larger 'picture' (or diegesis).

For both Derrida and Kant parerga are 'something outside the work proper, a supplement that nevertheless stands in close relation to what is deemed essential' (Cheetham, 2001, p.18). Kant recognises a readable distinction between frame and picture, whereas Derrida highlights the neither intrinsic nor extrinsic liminality of the frame/parergon. Derrida is uncomfortable with Kant's belief that art has a core nature, and that we can apply universality to it, as this would assume delineation can be made between the inside and the outside of art. To Derrida, the outside defines and helps form the inside and is therefore part of it; the 'frame' fails to absolutely delimit the aesthetic object, even if it can suggest where it begins and ends. If we accept Derrida's lack of distinction between frame and picture, it becomes difficult to categorically and permanently demarcate between a film and its 'marketing materials' for example, or a television broadcast and its presence on other platforms. One could be said to shape the other - as reflecting on how watching, or not watching, a promo/trailer for a television production or film may affect a viewer's experience of that media may suggest. Under this reading our interactions with media would therefore appear to be only mappable in a transitory sense, completion and closure is again destabilised, and any attempts at creating a fixed demarcation, medium from medium, becomes troublesome.

To resolve what seems like an impasse at this point we return to Genette (1997) and briefly touch on his conceptualisation of 'paratexts', those ancillary texts, both autographic and allographic (as written by someone other than the author), like titles, prefaces, interviews and reviews, that surround a written work, and form a 'threshold' or gateway to it. Even though he did extend paratexts to the 'real', like an author's age, Genette's reading was limited to the literary. Gray usefully however broadens the interpretation of paratexts to include the 'hype, synergy, promos, and peripherals' (2010, p.4) that frame contemporary

cross-platform media phenomena. These paratexts mediate our relationship with core texts, yet 'are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create [further] texts, they manage them, and fill them with many of the meanings we associate them with' (Ibid, p.7); in this way paratexts (as Derrida would suggest) sit both outside and inside texts and operate within a polyphony of utterances (in the Bakhtinian sense).

Paratexts, like covers, promos and posters, may in fact intriguingly predate any engagement with the core text (Ibid). Returning to *Doctor Who*, we can even playfully overturn a reading of *Doctor Who* as being 'television first', when the *DR. WHO. An Adventure in Space and Time* listing, in the November 21st 1963 edition of the *Radio Times* (BBC, 2013b), preceded the television broadcast by a number of days; as *Doctor Who* existed in print, in however a limited fashion, prior to its television airing, it could be argued that it was on broadcast that it became cross-platform. Paratexts introduce and inform texts, with Gray seeing texts, and by extension paratexts, as being a strictly 'contingent entity' (2008), in flux, and as part of a matrix of intertextual interactions; it is here perhaps, in accepting complexity and contestability, that it is possible to finally come to terms with the open, dialogic, unfinalisability of cross-platform media and the multiple diegetic and non-diegetic spaces they can support.

Under this reading, cross-platform may, as touched on previously, be left uncomfortably short of catharsis, unwieldy and in perpetual 'beta'. Yet from the perspective of a child, who can co-opt, shape and cross-pollinate texts at will (as any number of child made YouTube *Lego Star Wars* animations can help demonstrate), a state of permanent 'in media res' might be considered a positive, in that a favoured (hyper)diegeses can potentially remain actively open and alive across the multiple media spaces that children connect with. However happy we may be from a textual perspective to adopt a vision of children's cross-platform media as being in flux, near unmappable and porous to multiple textual interpretations, it is worth recalling that cross-platform practice may not be so unbound, but as Jenkins suggests, it is shaped by its 'tools and technologies' (2006b, p.135) and it is to those technologies that foster cross-platform that we now turn.

From Convergence to John Carter - Technological Perspectives

It would be all too easy when considering cross-platform media to slip in to the trap of considering the 'pipes before the people' (Lilley, 2009); the technological before, and above, the individual. With the term cross-platform itself having a determinist ring to it, the aim here is to counter any tendency towards technological determinism with a 'user' led perspective (as explicitly expressed later within this chapter). Buckingham usefully reminds us here 'the majority of young people are not interested in technology in its own right, but simply in what they can do with it' (2007, p.41); to a child the technology they engage media through is then perhaps moot compared to their favoured practices. The following will endeavour therefore, in accepting that each platform comes with its own particular body of affordances (Fisch, 2013), to consider cross-platform in a non-platform specific manner. That said, in being 'testing ground' (Murphy, 2011) and 'home' to many of the cross-platform practices touched on so far, television operates as a starting point for much of the discussion here.

Convergence & Fragmentation

In what Turner (2009) calls a post-broadcast era, television is no longer the sole preserve of once monolithic media organisations. The 'flow' of linear broadcasting has been supplemented by a more negotiated relationship between producer and consumer; one that is often sited far from being the entertaining piece of furniture of old. Contrary to Corner, who once described television as 'self-contained' (1999, p.124), no medium (old or new) could be said to be completely 'stand-alone'; television, for example, operates 'not in isolation, but [as] one of a number of information and communication technologies [...] embedded within a technical and consumer culture' (Morley & Silverstone, 1992, p.201). In its traditional form television journeyed around the home (from living room, to bedroom, to kitchen), before it stepped out of its 'box' on to the desktop, laptop, mobile (phone) and tablet; it may be possible to hold on to some conceptualisation of television as a distinct medium, yet it has become increasingly difficult to consider any one platform in isolation.

As the borders between technological devices become ever more porous, differentiation comes in screen size, interface, levels of mobility, interactivity and perception. Any demarcation between television and film, for example (long complicated by commonalities

within their production and distribution ecologies), is hard to fully maintain. Both can now be recognised as ‘content’ (of differing narrative shape); with a film often just as accessible on computer, mobile and television screen, as it is in a physical ‘cinema’. Broadcast media producers may still see television as being core to all they do (with anything other than television as little more than ‘television overflow’ (Brooker, 2003; 2004)), yet Roscoe suggests that:

Television can no longer be understood as an autonomous medium, but rather as being connected to other screens (Internet, mobile phone) and cultural sites (sports fields, theme parks, sets)[;] Television programmes are no longer produced (or engaged with) in isolation from other media texts (2004, p.364).

As an aggregator of content (and affordances), mobile devices, like the mobile phone, can bring ‘TV to your pocket’. Mobile has become significant enough as a delivery platform that it challenges any fixed delineation of what is, and isn’t, television (Turner, 2009). Goggin argues that mobile now operates as a companion platform to the internet and broadcast media (2011); it is (and may continue to be) deeply disruptive to established practices, and tellingly ‘[t]he last time a communication technology had such a large effect on so many people was [...] a half century ago when commercial television was introduced’ (Katz & Aakhus, 2002, p.3).

Beyond its interplay with television, it is worth noting how mobile (both ‘phone’ the ‘tablet’) offers multiple locative, casual, synchronous and asynchronous gaming affordances to cross-platform media (in a manner that traditional console gaming does not); and in this way, mobile has reshaped the conceptualisation of gaming itself (Hjorth, 2011). This study avoids any detour in to addressing gaming separately, but it does however acknowledge play and gaming as implicit parts of much cross-platform media, noticeably so within that made for children. Here we can picture the ‘join anytime’ quizzes that once populated BBC Children’s Red Button provision, and the ‘play along at home’ mechanics of gameshows like *Trapped* or *BAMZOOKi* (2004-10) (with its integral downloadable creature fighting/building game), rather than the mono-platform closed gaming of once non-networked console games. With media readily portable the conceptualisation of mobile itself becomes far from inviolate; with mobile blurring the distinction between different life spheres (Elliott & Urry, 2010) and with the individual potentially ‘permanently connected’ (to the internet) (Jarvis, 2010) the term ‘mobile’ could become either meaningless or all encompassing.

As with mobile, we can picture the internet serving an agglomerative function; content that spans text, sound, stills and video (as well as movement and touch) are drawn together on to one platform. Gunter (2010) asks whether television will utilise the internet to enhance its market position, or conversely, if the internet will destroy television, with the question, hyperbolically set, implying that the internet, once described as 'the defining medium of our age' (Levinson, 2004, p.xiv), has the potential to absorb television in its entirety (and both film and television can be argued to have become 'content' here). Siapera argues that television has done little to make full use of the internet's potential, stamping it with the televisual (2004). The internet however can be seen to operate in conjunction with other platforms and in 'remediating' (McLuhan, 1964; Bolter & Grusin, 2000) other media forms, it also arguably stands as an 'archive' of cross-platform difference (in that when engaging with the internet, we may still recognise a distinction between media, like film or television, even if that perception is potentially based on historical precedent alone). Rather than vision here an oppositional relationship between internet and television, the reality may be that, as an all absorbing, decontextualising and recontextualising remediator of 'old' media, one becomes, in part, the platform for the other, with television now perhaps more a form, which can sit across multiple platforms, than a delivery mechanism in itself. This returns us to an old (and recurring) media/medium distinction, and rebalances the field 'according to content-centric, rather than platform-centric, models. Such a proposal provocatively insists that content no longer represents merely the filler for industry pipes but, rather, that it now constitutes the media industries' structural logic' (Murray, 2003, p.16).

Cross-platform was, until recently, sparsely addressed within the literature, with recent texts still often approaching the field from a platform specific position (see Shimpach (2010), Kackman et al. (2011), Bennett & Strange (2012) and Pertierra & Turner (2013) as examples of those that recognise 'cross-platform' from a television led perspective). Often discussion is more commentary than critical, steeped in 'the discourse of novelty' (Carpentier, 2011a, p.528), targeted at a broader (often practitioner) readership (see Rose, 2011, or even the partly crowd sourced Davidson, 2010), and often veer towards reifying (and celebrating) cross-platform's conceptual sibling, trans-media narrative. As such we here rely on a limited number of (possibly over-aided) scholars to help locate cross-platform as a phenomenon, and it is to the most prolific of these, Jenkins, and his conceptualisation of 'convergence' (2006a)

as a way of understanding the contemporary media landscape, that we are perhaps forced to turn, even if to ultimately reject the terms utility (or even validity).

As the UK parliament's 2012 inquiry in to 'Media Convergence and its Public Policy Impact' suggests, convergence as a term has attained a broadly understood (instrumental) meaning, with the related call for evidence describing media convergence as 'the phenomenon of traditionally distinct media activities coming to overlap, and therefore to a process which is dissolving the frontiers between previously separate industries' (2012). This reading is skewed towards interpreting media convergence from an economic perspective (or more specifically, as an industrial realignment), and may helpfully highlight why Silverstone saw convergence, with its many potential meanings, as a 'dangerous word' (1995).

Coming in to focus in the 70s, convergence was initially considered (by the likes of Pool (1983) and Negroponte (1996)) from a technological perspective (Baldwin et al., 1996; Parsons & Frieden, 1998; Gordon, 2003), then later from the perspective of 'content', 'industry' (Preston, 2001; Rolland, 2002; Murray, 2003) or 'business strategy' (Wirth, 2003). It was only later that convergence began to be accepted, not just as a technological or market event, but as a 'symbolic practice' (Faberjord, 2004), 'social process' (Knight & Weedon, 2009), 'ideological position' (Dwyer, 2010) and even 'biological function' (Steinberg & Murray, 2011). Jenkins considers convergence to be as much a cultural act as anything else, and sees a paradigm shift:

from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture (2006a, p243).

This top-down/bottom-up dialectic implies a tension, or even a clash, of sorts, but to Jenkins (with an optimism that matches Habermas' (1991) belief in a socially positive public sphere) 'convergence culture', sitting in that contested space between individual and institution, holds vast potential. For Jenkins then convergence is more than a term, it is a project (shaped almost in denial of the market) or even at times a manifesto for emancipation.

Whilst discussion on the rhetoric of convergence may have some significance in any examination of cross-platform, it is necessary to remember that cross-platform is not just an expression of 'emergent media' (Macnamara, 2010) convergence, or 'old media' remediated (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) within neoteric media environments, it is part of a broader oscillating process, and antithetically the metaphors 'divergence' (Roscoe, 2004), or even 'fragmentation' (Dwyer, 2010), may be just as valid - with convergence meronymic of a far more complex process. It might be possible for example, within the *Star Wars* and *Angry Birds* (2009) combinational cross-platform clash that led to the appropriately named *Angry Birds Star Wars* (2012) game, or the coming together of *Star Wars* and Lego, to see convergence in progress, yet it could also be just as easy to vision a battle here between the centripetal forces that draw media together and the centrifugal forces that send them flying into their 'component parts' (O'Donnell, 2011, p.282).

Drawing the argument back to the platforms on which media sits, Vogel similarly, in adding to McLuhan's four 'laws of media' (in which a sense of medium equilibrium balances a heightening experience in one medium with a diminishment of another (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988, p.viii)), argues that 'every successful form, immediately after introduction, rapidly fragments' (Vogel, 2011, p.43). He uses cable channels and video games by means of illustration, and describes a process of fragmentary entropy that progresses until 'economic energy' is exhausted. Convergence doesn't necessarily lead to stability, it operates 'in dynamic tension with change' (Pool, 1983, p.53), and in this way it perhaps becomes a one-sided misreading (of diminished utility), and here should be recognised as only part of a far more complicated and on-going holonymic oscillation between convergence and fragmentation.

Determinism, Agency & the Craft in Technology

Technological determinism presupposes that there is a linear, causal connection between technological and social change, with technology often presumed to be culturally and ideologically neutral ([Leo] Marx & Smith, 1994) in a way that potentially prevents a critical exploration of the relationship between society and technology. From Marx (1848) to Innis (2008) there have been those that could be said to hold free-will denying deterministic views on the impact of technology, with some, like Mesthene, optimistically, and perhaps naively

(McDermott, 1997), claiming that by giving us 'more choices', 'more opportunities' and 'more freedom', technology allows us to 'be more human' (Mesthene, 1970, p.110). This equating of new technologies, particularly media technologies, with greater human freedom has been a refrain for many, for example McLuhan (1962, 1964), Habermas (1991), and Levy (1997), and one revisited by more recent populist writers like Negroponte (1996), Jarvis (2009) and Leadbeater (2009)).

The affordances of new technology may indeed revolutionise the media landscape - for the better. Yet such hopeful and sometime hyperbolic readings suffer for an awkward simplicity and underplay the structural muscle of media organisations, whilst also perhaps overplay the ability or desire of people to use technology for 'ideal' means; it 'would be naive to assume that powerful conglomerates will not protect their own interests' (Jenkins, 2006b, p.136) over and above those of their 'consumers'. Some may vision 'a world without gatekeepers, others a world where gatekeepers have unprecedented power' (2006a, p.18) - as is often the case, the reality may sit (or even ricochet) between the two. For all the rhetoric that surrounds individual agency (and Giddens (1984) would remind us that 'true' agency should be seen as having the want and the ability to act), media are still firmly in the hands of big business, particularly that media intended for children (Cook, 2005). Only the most affluent and determined of individuals will have full access to the technological resources that allow for these utopian 'freedoms'.

The word technology derives from the Ancient Greek 'techné', and following Heidegger (1977) it might be usefully here to briefly retrace the word's lost meanings. To the Greeks, techné not only referred to the skills and activities of crafts people, but also intriguingly to the 'arts of the mind' (p.13), and correspondingly to Heidegger, it 'belongs to bringing-forth, to poiésis; it is something poetic' (Ibid). In having shed the poetic from technology, contemporary interpretation however turns its back on the art of the mind - the humanity within technology. This study aims accordingly therefore to balance an appreciation of the technological (in the modern sense) affordances that supports cross-platform, with an acceptance that technology, and the media that are enabled through it, are inherently social in practice; all technologies are human craft embedded within a matrix of social interactions. The technologies that enable media are 'no longer a place apart', they operate 'inside the

“body” of everyday existence’ (Jones, 2014, p.18). It could be foolish however to discard outright all deterministic concepts (after all ‘the elevator made the skyscraper possible’ (Levinson, 1997, p.4)) and here there may indeed be some benefit in quietly acknowledging a soft determinism, in which technology becomes a lived experience (McCarthy & Wright, 2004) that makes ‘things possible [...] rather than the technology inevitably and unalterably creating that result’ (Levinson, 1997, p.4).

Interactiv(ity)

Rejecting the binaries of technological and social determinism, and asserting the place of the ‘person within the pipes’, would tend to complicate any readings for the ‘new found’ within media technologies. This comes in particular focus when returning to ‘interactivity’, in that it is often seen to be neoteric, but in many ways can be considered nothing new (Huhtamo, 2000; Knight & Weedon, 2009; Carpentier, 2011a/b). Although we may be able to map a shift toward more synchronous engagement, traditional audiences have long been able to make choices within, and contribute to, media (with a child’s drawing sent in to the *Blue Peter* gallery being in some small way illustrative of this). Manovich usefully does much to disassemble what he describes as ‘the myth of interactivity’ here, when he argues that any computer/media engagement is, in effect, interactive, to the extent that the word itself becomes almost meaningless (2001), and that ‘interactive media’ as a term is likewise awkwardly tautologous. To help demonstrate how by extension all media/human engagement can be appreciated as interactive, Manovich draws on how we ‘interact’ with art (and how the user fills-in the information ‘missing’ within the work (Ibid, p.71)).

Whether interactivity is new or long-standing, there are ‘myriad ways people engage with all kinds of media, from talk about and around media to actually reworking media messages’ (Bird, 2011, p.503). It has permeated widely, and could be said to offer many exciting opportunities for expression, personalisation, entertainment and creativity that were not as clearly evident within previous media technology paradigms; whilst the accelerated and expanded affordances of newer interactive technologies (like ‘red button’, ‘smart television’ or second-screen mobile apps), coupled with user expectations of interactivity, and an awareness of these expectations within practice, have arguably led media organisations to recognise the user as far more than just a ‘receiver’ of media. However exciting the

possibilities for interactivity may be though, genuine interactive co-creation of media and meaning is arguably not the norm, with interactivity rarely extending beyond that which is 'permitted' (Cover, 2006).

Cross-platform media environments at times provide little more than what looks like interactivity, as users often only follow a pre-ordained path of righteousness through the media 'mechanic'; a position the children who once used *Adventure Rock* (the virtual world 'sandbox' launched in 2007 by the BBC) expressed when they become frustrated with its restricted social interaction (Jackson et al., 2008). Jenkins warns us here that 'the interactive audience is not autonomous' (2006b, p.135) and that it still operates alongside potent media industries. In this light it becomes difficult to position interactivity as a direct precursor to agency and it appears that there is a distinction to be made between the two. For all the structural restrictions that may limit an individual's interactive freedom within media however, users are capable of following, or leading, media across technological platform (and out in to the physical world) in potentially interactive, participatory and social ways – and in the practices of the 'digitally connected user' it may be possible to see individuals claim agency within, bypass, or even override the authorial wishes of media organisations.

This study has taken place within a period in which socially-networked communication and digital media technologies have transformed traditional entertainment practices, and (as noted in the preceding chapter) interactivity became something of a commissioning buzzword, if not a production necessity. Within the Facebook and Twitter feeds that inform the talent show *The Voice* (2010-) for example, and in *Big Brother's* integral telephony, platforms have been linked conceptually, synergistically and often synchronously. This synchronicity is significant to much event based media in particular, with sports and talent show events providing much cross-platform multi-screen interaction.

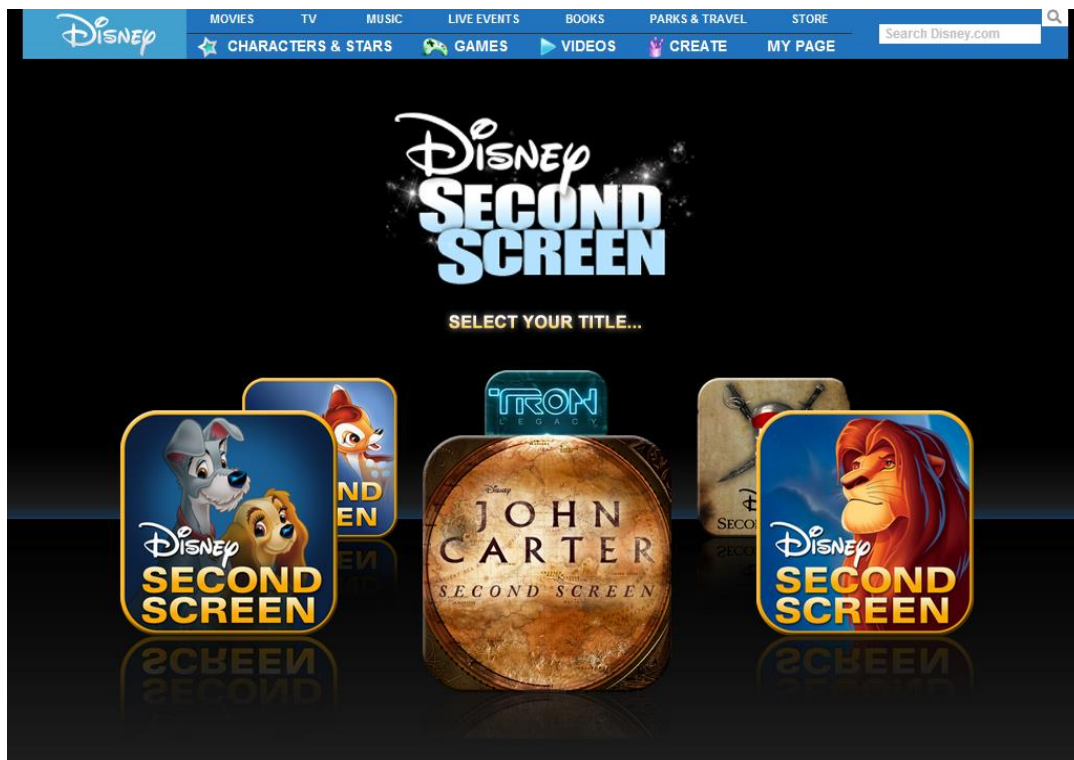


Figure 2.2. Disney Second Screen Application

Synchronous and asynchronous multi-screen possibilities are now regularly promoted by the likes of Disney as they offer internet content that supports and feeds in and out of its 'lead' media; with, for example, *Disney Second Screen* (2011-) (Figure 2.2) offering a downloadable computer/tablet application that can link through automated audio or visual cues additional (often transmedial) content to a number of their film releases. In the case of the second-screen provision for the sci-fi film *John Carter* (2012) users could, as the director of the film Andrew Stanton (2012) states, 'explore the entire world of Barsoom' through accessing syncable behind-the-scenes footage, animated journals, world maps, timelines, visual effects labs, trivia, artwork and film clips. In many ways much of this material is little more than 'DVD extras', but with the differentiation here being that it is often specifically designed to be used synchronously across media platforms, like television and tablet for example. Looking at the scale of those involved in developments of this nature (HBO offer a similar synced service through their 'Go' second-screen offering), it is perhaps worth noting that only larger resource-rich media organisations have the means to consistently create impactful cross-platform interactivity at this level of complexity. Even if unofficial 'back-channel' audience multi-screen engagement (through Twitter, Miso, or any number of fan sites for example) can be said to offer opportunities to play against the wishes of the larger media organisations

(Harrington et al., 2013), it would be difficult for smaller independent organisations to create offerings that can compete here.

In side-stepping a technologically skewed conceptualisation, and addressing interactivity as socially situated, it becomes strikingly difficult to picture media as being anything other than inherently interactive (Downes & McMillan, 2000) (and, as argued earlier, cross-platform by near default), yet we are drawn to question whether the user has agency within interactivity. Indeed, as with many of the proceeding discussions, interactivity could be said to be 'part of an ongoing struggle between producer/consumer or author/audience, and one that may well be reaching a culminative point in which the distinctions between these two collapse usefully and productively' (Cover, 2006, p.155) - after all lived experience is inherently interactive. This perhaps triggers a reassertion of a dialogic reading of cross-platform whereby meaning is shaped within an unfinalisable polyphony of utterances. Acknowledging the tensions within this complexity, it is to a user perspective of cross-platform media that we now turn.

From the Participatory to Harry Potter - User Perspectives

Contemporary audiences are rarely considered to operate as a 'mass' that unquestioningly receives a 'flow' of media messages (Williams, 1974). Indeed as 'many-to-many' models balance once dominant 'one-to-many' broadcast mechanics (Livingstone, 2004) it becomes increasingly difficult to vision the 'mass' at all (Napoli, 2010). As historical production and consumption binaries blur, and with 'the rearticulation of the audience into the 'produser'' (Carpentier, 2011a, p.518), professional producers of media could now be seen to operate alongside a 'former audience' (Gillmor, 2004; Rosen, 2008) of users - or more awkwardly, 'viewers' (Roach, 1995; Harris, 2002). In this way, audiences are no longer understood as just viewers (Bird, 2003; Shimpach, 2010) or 'as mere consumers who passively accept anything the media offer, but as active individuals and members of social groupings who consume media products in the context of their personal and social goals' (Ball-Rokeach & Cantor, 1987, p.17).

This study acknowledges that each media platform comes with its own phenomenological and aesthetic qualities (Lury, 2001), and a potentially unique set of affordances; the

audience's active cross-platform media experience is therefore always contingent on 'the media form' (Shimpach, 2010, p.62). It might feel appropriate to consider traditional radio from an 'audience' perspective, whilst for more 'obviously interactive' platforms, like the internet or mobile, it may be more fitting for the platform to be addressed from a 'user' perspective. By means of recognising however that an individual can operate (to a greater or lesser extent) as an active user across all platforms, and the development of user-facing practices (e.g. 'Red Button' television or 'Smart TV') on platforms that would once have been framed within an audience research paradigm (e.g. television), this study explicitly adopts 'user' as a central means of understanding how both individuals and groups engage with media as far more than passive 'consumers'. Of course asymmetrical power relations between user and industry mean 'audience' remains a 'meaningful and important way [for us to] account for the relationships with the 'entrenched corporate organisation'' (Dwyer, 2010, p.132), yet détente may be found in picturing audiencehood as the act of the user.

Liveness & Territories of the Self

Abercrombie and Longhurst distinguish between three types of audience: the 'simple' or 'original audience' (as McQuail describes it (1997)) of those that are physically at an event; the dispersed mediated 'mass' audience; and the 'diffused' always-on audience of those that access content through 'a fusion of different forms of the media' (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p.76). They argue that we have moved through these types combinationally, and into a spectacle/event/performance paradigm, where media are resources, or tools, rather than texts encoded with 'dominant' meaning. In this way audience activity is not limited to resistant decoding ('reading against the text'), but can include intervention in the text (van Bauwel & Carpentier, 2010, p.229). Here, instead of a receptive captive audience, we witness the emergence of multiple active audiences that can communicate, consume and co-opt through their platform(s) of choice. Within the co-location of performance and spectator experience that cross-platform media can offer, we may see a return of some form of original audience, as users are able to position themselves intimately inside the 'liveness' and spectacle of media phenomena (Ytreberg, 2009) (like *Deadly 60* or *Big Brother*) in a manner that may even outstrip a 'simple' live-audience's.

Here we turn to Goffman's (1971) 'territories of the self', in which he mapped out the physical and ideal spaces over which an individual can be said to have some measure of control. These spaces include: situational territories, like a public garden; fixed territories, like a house; and egocentric territories, like pockets or even letters. Through the multiple platforms they inhabit cross-platform media phenomena can bridge this taxonomy, in both asynchronous and synchronous ways; with media and user potentially connected through an ontology of liveness (or even livingness). A shared screen, like that of the domestically located family television, may sit somewhere within Goffman's situational and fixed territories of the self, whilst a bedroom television or personal computer could be said to span fixed or egocentric territories, and more intimate 'permeable' and seemingly interactive platforms like mobile may sit more fully within an individual's egocentric territory. In being accessible across television, the internet, and mobile, a cross-platform media phenomenon, like *Big Brother* for example, could be said to bridge these multiple territories of the self. Whilst the act of permitting others, like a *Big Brother* housemate, into the more personal egocentric territories of the self could be said to reduce the psychic distance between media, media 'personality', and user; and in turn, users may then also reach out and claim some measure of ownership of those phenomena that promote interactivity and agency (Woodfall, 2011).

Agency & Canonicity

This chapter started by looking at how fixed interpretations of text are challenged by Barthes' 'writerly' conceptualisation, and by a Bakhtinian position whereby all media are said to be created within a co-constructed dialogic polyphony. Through acknowledging these perspectives, and the blurring of the lines between audience and author, we are led to reject simple producer/consumer binaries. Buckingham (writing with Goldstein and Brougère (2004)) describes how children actively hone skills and become 'seekers of information... across different media and modes of communication' (Goldstein, et al., 2004, p.3), yet any knee-jerk celebration of a child's agency across platforms is balanced by a warning (when writing with Sefton Green) that the 'doers' of *Pokémon* are contained within a perhaps skewed dynamic, and that:

The practice of collecting the cards, or playing a computer game, is to a large extent determined by the work of the designers - and, indeed, by the operations of the market, which make these commodities available in particular ways in the first place. The rules that govern these particular

cultural practices are therefore not, by and large, open to negotiation or change (Buckingham & Sefton Green, 2004, p.12).

In this complicated space it is necessary to remain keenly aware of multiple cross-cutting power relationships, and that user 'agency' may wash up against 'structure'. Begin cautious of binaries here however, and returning to the near 'accidental' success of much early cross-platform media, we can see cross-platform development as a co-construction that both follows a market logic and admits user agency.

Returning once again to *Doctor Who*, which on its re-launch in 2005 was positioned according to Perryman as an experiment in providing 'extra-value content and narrative complexity for both a hard-core fan base and a mainstream audience' (2008, p.33), we can see how a now avowedly transmedial *Doctor Who* allowed 'passive audiences to simply sit back and enjoy the parent show in blissful isolation, while at the same time [offered] active, migratory and participatory audiences opportunities to engage in a rich, and extended multimedia experience' (Ibid, p37). *Doctor Who's* producers offer both a 'mainstream' and a many rabbit-holed 'nichestream' route through narrative. Whether in the complex narrative spaces offered by *Doctor Who*, or more obviously interactive and participatory phenomena like *Big Brother*, in being able to connect with media in an order and manner of their own choosing, users share the potential to override what once might have appeared to be sacrosanct production editorial calls; they are capable of weaving 'together their own meanings and pleasures, as well as, [in the case of *Big Brother* in particular, can] for the first time perhaps directly act upon the very creation of media personalities themselves' (Woodfall, 2011, p.209). Media organisations can in no way guarantee control of an individual's engagement with, and progress through, any media phenomena; to Roscoe (2004) *Big Brother's* audiences are 'as much producers of the text as they are consumers of it' (p.366), whilst Jones, in her fan study of *Big Brother*, suggests that audiences engage with 'multiple delivery platforms to create [...] meaning', and in turn actually 'own the process of viewing' (2003, p.404, author's italics).

It is possible to picture cross-platform media phenomena as offering users the freedom to navigate away from a production team's preferred pathway, and on to a negotiated, or even contested one; with media then becoming part of a demotic and dialogic circuitous process whereby the user has the potential to overrule the producer (and any fixed distinction

between the two becomes problematic). Even though he could be seen as mirroring institutional rhetoric, the Executive Producer of *Springwatch* (2005-), Tim Scoones, describes the large scale cross-platform wildlife phenomena as being as much 'a conversation' with its audience as it is storytelling (2008), and in the likes of *Springwatch* and *Big Brother* (at the factual end of the production spectrum) and *Doctor Who* (at the drama end) we witness complicated user/producer dialogues that may appear weighted towards practice, yet in which the user has much agency (including, not insignificantly, the 'interactive' choice to 'switch off' or select alternative media).

Shimpach argues that as producers have 'attempted to follow their audiences (through time and space) by dispersing across multiple platforms (accessed at the viewer's discretion rather than on the network's schedule)' (2010, p.53), they have become beholden to the will of the audience. This vision perhaps offers too great a sense of agency to the user however, and it is in this space that Cover (2006) recognises potential for 'a tactical war of contention for control over the text' (p.141); an on-going struggle between producer-authorial wishes (for narrative closure for example), and user desire for textual control. Maybe this is too adversarial an interpretation, but the implicit question remains, are users really being offered any more than what Chaney calls 'the illusion of equal participation' (1996, p.19)? And when they are, do they have the resources and motivation to utilise that agency?

In multi-iteration, multi-authored, media texts like *Doctor Who*, *Star Wars* or even *Sherlock Holmes* (1887-) this tension reflects on canonicity, with canon here being that which, in a negotiated act between fans, counts 'as part of the fictional world' (Parkin, 2007, p.247) or helps establish a diegetic continuity, rather than representing those texts, set from 'on high', that feed in to a 'grand intellectual scheme' (Casement, 1996, p.125). Any media organisation will, by near default, want to hold on to ownership and control of the IP that it considers to hold value, but that control of characters and narrative, has the potential to run counter to the wishes and expectations of the audience. *Doctor Who* fans, for example, have questioned the canonicity (Cornell, 2007) of the New Adventures books that spanned the Doctor's break from the television screen, as well as that of the transmedial websites that the BBC created in the early days of the 2005 relaunch (Perryman, 2008). Fan discourses of canonicity (and here we remind ourselves that fans may picture themselves as being other than just

'consumers') police both the borders and body of a text. In the case of *Doctor Who* it might be possible to argue that during its years off-air, with the fan voice became dominant, it become a more 'writerly' phenomenon; since its re-launch however, and a reassertion of the BBC's 'authority', *Doctor Who* has perhaps drifted back towards being more 'readerly', with the user now constrained by an official, if multifaceted, diegesis.

Between an impulse for an 'officially' approved canon (see Parkin, 2007) and a counter urge to declare canon dead (Cornell, 2007), the producers of *Doctor Who* stand reluctant to make pronouncements on canonicity (Davies, 2005; Cornell, 2007), even though BBC Worldwide, who manage the global rights to *Doctor Who*, are swift to challenge encroachment on *Doctor Who*'s IP (picture for example how they clamped down on fan created *Doctor Who* knitting patterns (BBC News, 2008)). Here we become aware of a marked tension between the BBC's corporate understanding of *Doctor Who*, and the 'fan born' habits of the production team. Ultimately the relationship between fans and the BBC could be considered an adversarial one, with Hills (2010) questioning whether it is the producers or the fans that actually 'own' *Doctor Who*. Perryman however recognises a fan/producer collective engagement as having helped create a sense of 'continuity and consistency' (2008, p.24) within the re-launched *Doctor Who* that previous producers had failed to achieve. The occasional disharmony or disconnection in the canon potentially 'incites and invites' fans in (Hills, 2010, p.55)), and Harvey (2012) tracks the ways in which contradictory textual spaces, like *Doctor Who*'s, can be fixed (or 'sutured' as he describes it) through fan producer dialogue, with this being a rejection, in part, of Buckingham's, structure over agency, non-negotiability. Canonicity may appear to be skewed towards the current television-led production, but ultimately *Doctor Who*'s canon is not only that which has been broadcast on screen, or created officially by the BBC itself. Indeed, as Parkin reminds us, canon is more 'a concern of fans rather than the makers of the series' (2007, p.258), a reading further complicated of course by 'fans' currently being at the heart of the *Doctor Who* re-launch production team.

For *Star Wars*, canon can be said to sit more within the hands of the producers, with Lucasfilm (latterly) creating an encyclopaedic hierarchical 'Holocron' that acted as 'a collection of the entirety of the *Star Wars* universe' (White, 2012, p.108), and Disney then 'resetting' the *Star Wars* universe in its entirety, by 'officially' excluding all bar the two film

trilogies and the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008-2013) and *Star Wars Rebels* (2014) animated television series from the canon. Even with the creation of an 'official' hierarchical canon however, Lucas has long admitted canonical tension in 'that the fans own [*Star Wars*] now' (Rose, 2011, p.75). He may be overstating the case, and Disney does appear determined to assert their newfound 'authority', but in fan-created work, like the parodic short film *Troops* (1997), fan-producers have co-opted the *Star Wars* narrative universe to create films that are arguably more canonical than many official *Star Wars* iterations. Indeed, in a similar way to how writers of Doctor Who fan fiction came to join the BBC's production team, the producer of *Troops*, Kevin Rubio, has since been welcomed in to *Star Wars*' professional production community, having written for the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* series and *Star Wars* graphic novels). Brooker (2002), when discussing *Star Wars* fan fiction, describes how users, in creating their own texts, are 'extrapolating from the films, filling in spaces..., but always using the primary text as a baseline' (p.133), yet this baseline, to a fan, may be a faint one, that they are quite capable of striding over with some purpose.

In discussing 'unofficial' fan created paratexts, Gray suggests that fan fiction, fan art and fan video are capable of 'challenging or supplementing those created by the industry' and 'carving out alternative pathways through texts' (2010, p.143). In this way, fans can:

actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced text which provide the materials for their own cultural productions on the basis of their social interactions. In the process, fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead, they become active participants in the construction and circulation of meanings (Jenkins, 1992, p.23-24).

Here, we turn to recognising canon, and the agency that it reflects, as a negotiated, or even contested, dialogic act between media organisation and user. Power may appear ultimately to sit with those that hold the intellectual property rights to a text, but fans are just as capable of policing that text's canonicity. As the vast numbers writing *Harry Potter* fanfic suggests (with for example almost half a million *Harry Potter* fan created stories currently uploaded to fanfiction.net), users actively seek to claim (at least part-) ownership of the characters and stories within their media of choice, and here the combined affordances of cross-platform media allow users to play their part in what could be described as a textual negotiation (as opposed to Jenkins' 'textual poaching' (1992)). Even with a more 'open' media phenomenon like *Harry Potter*, with its large and committed fandom, and an author, J. K. Rowling, who encourages fan fiction (Schwabach, 2011), it is worth reflecting on how

swift Warner Brothers (who hold the film rights to *Harry Potter*) were to take legal action against *Harry Potter* fan-created websites (Ibid; Rose, 2011).

Cross-platform media and its users clearly operate, as Hautakangas reminds us when discussing *Big Brother*, as part of a 'culture industry':

it is produced and broadcast within the economic and political structures and conventions of commercial TV production and from that perspective, the roles and power relations between production and reception are far from being completely new or transformed. From a critical point of view, it is possible to see the participatory aspects of "new media" as an ever more efficient way of producing subordination and "false consciousness": it can be argued that by foregrounding the surface level of volatile participation and the freedom of (consumer) choice, the structural power relations and the ideological "interpellations" are masked (2010, p.230).

In, what is again, a structure over agency reading, what looks from a distance empowering, may instead represent the co-opting of audiences to the profit motive, and even when users go beyond the creation of normative paratexts and move in to the more transgressive realm of parody for example, content owners could be said to still benefit in some manner, with the act of creating parody itself a form of deep engagement that can potentially deliver further market awareness. In this way we could go as far as to suggest that (free) creative labour is harnessed here by the creative industries (Petersen, 2008), and are perhaps in turn reminded of Gramsci's provocation that hegemony and cooperation can walk hand-in-hand (1971). Acts like parody may appear oppositional, but there are media organisations that can be said to encourage it (and its less transgressive siblings) to their own ends. As Rose suggests, when highlighting how the producers of *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* pragmatically accommodate a measure of fan created content, smart media owners have learnt to not 'attack the audience for trying to connect' (Rose, 2011, p.97).

One should not consider the co-opted user as having little to gain within this relationship however. Media, and its creation, can play a positive role in people's lives, with individuals able to use it to help satisfy their own preferences and 'needs' (see Katz et al., (1974)). Users appropriate media as they see fit, something demonstrated within the cosplay (costume play) at any *Star Trek* (1968) convention, or in how adult male fans (or 'Bronies' as they call themselves) have latched on to the re-launched *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (2010-) animated children's television series (a toy led phenomenon that was created explicitly for

girls by Hasbro in 1984). Here we are warned of a conflict between the producer's target audience of young females, and adult male appropriators - particularly as the adult male users tend to have greater access to the tools of media creation, and are likely to create media that pulls in a direction not to the tastes of a younger female audience, or the owners of the *My Little Pony* IP. Both the *Drink This Beer* (2013) parody video, and the *Watchponies* (2011) 'mashup' (combination of *My Little Pony* and the 18 rated *Watchman* (2009) film), that were distributed on the *BronyVids* YouTube channel, help demonstrate this tension.

For Giddens agency 'refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place', and to him 'agency implies power' (Giddens, 1984, p.9). Here perhaps it is worth noting that many of the media phenomena discussed so far are popular with a proportionally small body of resource rich, often adult, fans, who have engaged with, and in some measure shaped, their media of choice, and it is of some significance then that younger children in particular are unlikely to be as active (Jenkins, 2006a). Not all media phenomena have such notably engaged and forthright fans as the likes of *Doctor Who* and *Star Wars*, with both having fandoms that revel in their knowledge and are also perhaps quite aware of their agency. Here then there is a possible distinction to be made between those users with more fanlike habits and those that sit nearer to traditional conceptualisations of audiencehood - as Silverstone (1994) suggests it is worth asking how significant activity is, not if it exists. As users traverse multiple media phenomena in parallel, and with different levels of engagement to each (to one being an active 'fan' or 'user', to another 'audience?'), any fixed demarcation offers questionable utility.

Participatory Culture

Though often conflated Carpentier notes a distinction between 'interaction with media production' and 'participation in media production' (2011b, p.193); participation being seen to refer to the engagement of 'nonprofessionals in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media decision-making (structural participation) [that] cannot be equated with 'mere' access to or with interaction with media organisations' (Ibid). A distinction between interactivity and participation brings us to consider the former as offering little more than the promise of the later, and Carpentier suggests that in awkwardly

confusing the two we are prevented 'from noticing that in the present-day media configuration the maximalist forms of participation have remained rare whilst at the same time the opportunities for interaction have structurally increased' (2011a, p.529).

Jenkins, slightly blinkered to these distinctions, has been quick to celebrate the possibilities inherent within the making, sharing and connecting society that digital media technologies can afford; affordances that he saw as heralding an emancipatory 'participatory culture' (2006b). He is careful to note that the ability to create one's own media has been both enabled, and constrained, by on-going technological and economic changes (2002), yet he still celebrates a move 'away from a world in which some produce and many consume media, toward one in which everyone has a more active stake in the culture that is produced' (2009, p.12). Many have been swept along by a Jenkinseque optimism (see Shirky's (2010) 'cognitive surplus' for example, or Gauntlett's (2011) 'making is connecting' provocation, that in crafting 'things', whether online or off, we can increase our wellbeing), yet as a self-professed 'fan', with the time, tools and motivation to play an active part in the (co-)creation of media, Jenkins often appears to revel in the wonders of his new participatory culture without fully acknowledging that the 'access to activity' that he benefits from is a minority pursuit.

In this light it is perhaps worth stating that media producers are quite capable of absorbing (and re-voicing) the rhetoric of the participatory and 'audience activity' (Sundet & Ytreberg, 2009), whilst at the same time offering new ways to monetise it, and that the promotion of 'user participation' is now a key strategic aim for media organisations (Enli, 2008). Even when individuals do have full access to activity, we would be naïve to assume that it will be used, or used in the manner that is expected. Keen (2008) interestingly counters a utopian rhetoric with his own hyperbolic warning that the tools of participatory culture enable and valorise the parasitic over the creator (Google over Disney, for example), and destroy professionalism (he draws on a distinction between bloggers and journalists here). Habermas similarly (2006) suggests, referring specifically to the internet, that we are losing the ability to focus past the unedited and both Siegel (2008) and Lanier (2010) have developed quite congruous, if even more dystopian, arguments.

Whether it has been created 'independently' or in response to established media phenomena, user generated content (UGC) can be said to be significant (as the one billion plus active visitors to YouTube would attest). UGC's 'natural home' may seem to be the internet, yet much professional media practice has migrated towards internet based distribution channels. UGC, and the practices that surround it, further complicate any distinction between 'expert and amateur' (Philippe, 2010), and if the definition of UGC can extend to the creation of supporting paratexts (like a Tweet for example) many cross-platform media phenomena could be said then to draw heavily on UGC as a means of gaining attention and engagement.

Even though UGC can bridge both the interactive and the participatory, we (again) should be careful not to vision the enabling of some pure expression of audience agency; and here Schäfer argues that any unbridled celebration would be:

somewhat premature and rather unbalanced, because it often neglects the fact that underlying power structures are not necessarily reconfigured. Although the new media practice challenges some established business models, it does not necessarily make the industries exploiting those models disappear. In the cultural industries, traditional companies not only adapt and attempt to change business models accordingly or develop new ways of earning revenues; it is also evident that new enterprises emerge and gain control over cultural production and intellectual property in a manner very similar to the monopolistic media corporations of the 20th century. The powerful 'cultural industry' is therefore not overturned by an alleged revolution of users (2011, p.10).

Here, it is possible to picture how a newer media organisation like YouTube, in that it offers a platform for UGC, has based its business on creating value out of a user's experience and endeavours (or 'prosumption' (Rizer & Jurgenson, 2010)). Under the guise of participation, media organisations could be said then to have co-opted UGC (and similar potentially non-hegemonic heterotopias (Foucault, 1984), like alternate reality gaming or micro-blogging) for their own means, and provocatively put, the user here has become audience, content and distribution mechanic. Petersen (2008) recognises this as an industrial 'piggybacking', on what he describes as 'loser generated content' - that which is created by those who are 'so in thrall to big media and technological 'coolness' that they accept the disciplining of their creative activities' (Bird, 2011, p.512).

Jenkins offers a warning here when he suggests that media organisations ‘who fail to make their peace’ with audience expectations of having agency within their media of choice will ‘face declining goodwill and diminished revenues’ (2006a, p.24). Users may be (or have already become) accustomed to a sense of agency within cross-platform media, but the vision at media organisations like Disney appears to claim total mastery over their media brands, and would be unlikely to hand over the actual ownership of content (or even make way for users to voice agency within it). Warners tellingly enacted legal battles with fans in order to hold on to absolute control of their IP (see for example their approach to *Harry Potter* fan made websites), and even those, like George Lucas, who have not been as heavy-handed in their response to fan media, still only leave room for others to ‘co-create’ within strictly marshalled parameters.

It seems that in a time in which the affordances of media technology have freed users to ‘appropriate and recirculate media content in powerful new ways’ there has been ‘an alarming concentration of the ownership of mainstream commercial media’ (Jenkins, 2004, p.33). We should be careful not to assume that users will ultimately win any struggle for heightened agency, or overall control, of media; after all, as Arsenault and Castells argue, the ultimate goal of any media organisation is ‘the commodification of mediated culture and the subordination of all forms of communication to profit making in the market place’ (2008, p.743). Horkheimer and Adorno, intriguingly once similarly foresaw a coming together of all media under one banner; a cross-platform ‘triumph of invested capital’ (2011, p.42) over the agency of the individual:

Even the technical media are relentlessly forced into uniformity. Television aims at a synthesis of radio and film, and is held up only because the interested parties have not yet reached agreement, but its consequences will be quite enormous and promise to intensify the impoverishment of aesthetic matter so drastically, that by tomorrow the thinly veiled identity of all industrial culture products can come triumphantly out into the open, derisively fulfilling the Wagnerian dream of the Gesamtkunstwerk – the fusion of all the arts in one work (Ibid).

When aligned with the preceding discussion, and one of the central arguments of this thesis, that media are cross-platform by near default, this ‘fusion’ makes for uncomfortable reading, and it may turn out to be quite telling that only the larger resource-rich media organisations are perhaps capable of gaining traction within cross-platform media environments.

(Un)finally

Cross-platform may seem to open up many exciting opportunities for user agency, and undermine fixed concepts of ownership and author, but very few users would be capable, for example, of creating content to rival the BBC's Olympic output, or are able to marshal the resources necessary to match a contemporary cinema blockbuster – with this thought coming in to particular focus when one considers the resources available to most children. Counter to any utopian readings cross-platform texts, due to scale, market impetus and (structural and technical) complexity, may offer the user less agency over the text than they might have had over small scale traditional 'standalone' texts. The majority of users will only have the means to dance at the edges of a typical cross-platform media phenomena. Yet in accepting that users can potentially claim agency, in some form, within media (even if that agency is structurally/technologically restricted) we are drawn back to balancing any pessimistic interpretation with a more open dialogic reading that cautiously celebrates 'polyphonic possibilities'. This chapter, appropriately enough, can be seen as little more than a body of utterances, one that offers only an inchoate and partial vision of cross-platform as a heteroglossic and unstable social practice - and discursive construct. Yet as Jenkins neatly reminds us when discussing the ever shifting media landscape, 'writing a totalizing account [is] a logical impossibility' (1999); cross-platform media cannot be pinned down to one snapshot understanding, it is far too complex for that. The following chapter will similarly look to reject any totalising and unitary understanding when it addresses children and their place within research.

Chapter 2. Children and Media Research

Part 1. Children and Childhood(s)

The research question looks to children to voice their media preferences in a cross-platform manner, and in turn for those that produce media for children to offer their position on these preferences. Although research with adults is far from being unproblematic, research with children is fraught with particular methodological difficulties: children's voices may be drowned out by those of parents, teachers or researchers; there are multiple language and conceptual obstacles; there are barriers to trying to illuminate children's own views; and there are highly problematic adult/child power issues within any research interaction (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) - whether these be observation, questionnaire, focus groups, or potentially 'intimidating' one to one interviews (Dockrell et al., 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000; Roberts, 2008; Gallagher, 2009). Even research which sits far beyond the borders of positivism is often shaped by the perceived need for a sense of generalisability, with the idea being, that we as researchers can then build models that speak for all. A scientific generalisability could be seen as little more than statistical gamesmanship however; we may attempt to classify and predict behaviour, but can we really make grand pronouncements on behalf of individuals, as if they talk with a single tongue? Children 'do not speak as one - just like adults, they have different experiences, opinions and modes of expression' (Thomson, 2008, p.4). When one considers research with children, generalisability perhaps becomes all the more questionable.

Children sit within multiple, ever shifting, life worlds. We cannot address the research question and children's experiences without acknowledging the complexity of the very idea of what constitutes a child, and in turn, how children are positioned within society - and research. It could be argued that the ten and eleven year olds that participated in this study sit almost uncontestedly within middle childhood (as comes in to particular focus when we consider CBBC's societally ordained PSB requirement to address 6-12 year old children (BBC Media Centre, 2012)). Yet we only have to look at how conceptions have changed across time and place to realise that we cannot pin the child, or childhood, down to just one

definition. This is something however we are readily drawn to do. The United Nations (UN), under the *Convention on the Rights of a Child* (UNCRC) (1989), has for example arbitrarily defined anyone under the age of eighteen as a child - as if adulthood can be achieved and childhood left behind with the tick of a clock. This essentialising act alerts us to the predominantly adult construction of childhood, and the temporality of its status; whilst it also highlights the ways in which, as conceptualisations of child and childhood shift, the actual lived experience of being a child also changes.

Historical and Psychological Accounts

Childhood can be interpreted in many ways. There are telling arguments that it only came in to being within the last few hundred years and that there was a time before the 'invention' of childhood – or at least childhood as it might be recognised today (Postman, 1982). Aries (on interpreting historical artwork) for example suggests that 'in medieval society the *idea of childhood* did not exist' (1962, p.125, author's italics), and children were simply seen as small adults; to Aries it was just in infancy that a young person was recognised as being substantially distinct from the rest of society. It was possibly only in the 19th century, when the lives of young people in the West shifted from being centred around work, to being centred around education (Postman, 1982; Hopkins, 1994; Jenks, 2005) that childhood came fully in to focus. Postman argues that childhood was ultimately a by-product of the printing press, the spread of literacy, and, in turn, the need for education (1982).

These visions of a childhood 'invented' are perhaps flawed (for concentrating on artwork alone in Aries' case (Pollock, 1983) or being too Western facing in the case of Postman), and indeed we can challenge much of their argument by looking back to clearly expressed concepts of childhood within Ancient Greek and Roman culture (Jenks, 1996):

Roman law at the time of Justinian specified three age-periods of childhood: *infantia* when children are incapable of speech, *tutela impuberes* when, prior to puberty, children acquired a tutor, and *cura minoris* when, after puberty, young persons have not yet reached their maturity and required the care of a guardian (Archard, 1993, p.26).

Young people were considered discrete, developing, and in need of education, within a scenario that would seem fitting to contemporary understanding. Here then it becomes difficult to agree with those that argue there was a time before childhood, but the position,

however ahistorical, does usefully highlight how childhood, and the relative significance of childhood, is historically and culturally contextual.

Childhood has been understood differently, often distinctly so, across history, and 'always relates to a particular cultural setting' (Jenks, 1996, p.7). The experience of an 18th century 'child' in England may sound 'adult' to modern ears, not just in that a child might work for a living, but that they make a claim for independence:

At seven years of age I was set to work in the silk mills, where I toiled from five o'clock in the morning till seven at night for the weekly sum of one shilling. This paid for my board and lodgings, and rendered me independent of my father except for the clothes I wore (Cited in Hutton, 1799, p.60).

Historical accounts of the lives of working class children in the late 18th century map out an existence of (often brutal) work, little schooling, and few rights. Even though it may look, in working, that children enjoyed the 'freedoms' of adulthood, they were seen to belong to their parents, and 'might actually be bought and sold or otherwise disposed of' by them (Hopkins, 1994, p.1). A contradiction between being recognised as a small (but competent) person, and yet still at the whim of adult society, resonates through many historical accounts, and is something we may still recognise today, even if we may have constructed an idealised vision of (a less competent) child to span the conceptual uncertainty of a young person's physical growth.

Even with recent history we have been witness to shifts in how adults judge the competences of children. For example the vast majority of 7 to 8 year old children, until relatively recently, were allowed to travel to school without parental supervision - something that has become a rarity (Mayall, 1994). Here we can also note a shift in societal attitudes (and law) to the physical 'punishment' of children. Recent cross-cultural accounts expose distinctly different understandings of the ways in which children are treated physically, within Tongan society for example parents show very little tolerance for a child's inability to act in a manner considered adult, to the extent that parents physically punish young children in a way that can appear harsh to outsiders (Morton, 1996). Within Inuit communities however physical or verbal punishment is rarely used, instead adults tend to ignore a child's misbehaviour (Condon, 1988).

In light of what seems to be the highly contextual nature of 'childhood', it is intriguing that the study of the 'child' has long been 'the territory of developmental psychology' (Hogan, 2005, p.22) - a tradition that operates as if an individual can be measured against a universal conceptualisation of what a child is. That the child can be understood in relation to standardised cognitive, physical and social norms (Ibid). Even though many within Developmental Psychology have come to accept 'the child as active rather than passive', and capable of 'organising and constructing his or her own interpretations of the world' (Corsaro, 2011, p.12), much Developmental thought reflects a foundational tendency to concentrate on 'examining' and 'predicting' a child's development, as they age. Children's experiences are not comprehended as significant in themselves, but more so as 'symbolic markers of development' (Prout & James, 1997, p.10). Under a 'deficit model of childhood' (Taylor, 2000, p.22), which considers children to be 'incomplete, immature and irrational beings who acquire maturity and rationality over time' (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p.5), Developmental Psychology tends to address childhood as a time 'of incompetence relative to adulthood' (Archard, 1993, p.30). In this scenario development is a 'unilateral' process whereby the child is 'shaped and moulded by adult reinforcements and punishments' (Corsaro, 2011, p.12). Here the child is conflictingly seen to be both acted upon, but also somehow isolatable from the context of everyday life.

Much Developmental Psychology owes a debt to Piaget's staged model, whereby children pass through cognitively distinct stages of internally programmed development, before they go on to obtain full adult 'competence' (e.g. Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, 1964). Piaget's work indicates that these stages span the ages 0-2, 2-7, 7-11, and 11 years onward. The children that participated in this study, being ten and eleven old, can be said to span two of these stages, the first of which, the 'concrete operational stage' (that children pass through between seven and eleven) perceives children as able to structure logical thought (Piaget, 1954); yet in predominantly living in the present, and with understanding shaped around direct experience (Piaget & Inhelder, 1948), children are seen to struggle to conceptualise beyond that which is concretely in front of them. Children in this way have some comprehension of the metaphorical, and are able to understand the motivations and feelings of others, but more complex abstract thought is said to remain largely out of reach. The second study spanning developmental stage, the final 'formal operational' (that children are said to enter from eleven years old) positions the individual as being capable of

conceptualising beyond the here and now; as sharing the same capacity for complex hypothetical and abstract thought as adults (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958).

Even though an inherently western construct (Beazley et al., 2009), which assumes ‘the universality of Western logic’ (Vourlekis, 2009, p.188), Piaget’s model has been seen as applicable to all. This universalising trait fails to address the ways whereby children within different cultures, at different times, develop different competencies. Serpell (1979) for example found that Zambian children surpassed British children in their abilities in creating 3-D wire models, whilst British children surpassed Zambian children when drawing (with there being no noticeable difference between the two groups when modelling with Plasticine). These results were interpreted not in light of universal developmental markers, but instead as reflecting the manner whereby the context of a child’s everyday life shapes development. Argument over time has shifted towards recognising Piaget’s staged thought as broadly underestimating the ability of younger children to reason (Gopnik, 2013) and intriguingly overestimating the abilities of many adults (Newman & Newman, 2007). Even though there is still some support for a staged developmental model (Johnson, 2008), from early childhood onwards children are now considered to be able to think and reason in a manner broadly similar to adults, but perhaps confused by the unfamiliar, or irrelevant, children can appear less cognitively able (Goswami, 1992). In this scenario the only significant difference between children and adults is that children are still developing metacognition and their abilities to self-regulate their thoughts and behaviour (Goswami, 1998). Children are therefore considered capable of solving ‘analogies prior to the formal-operational period’ (Ibid, p.23), and from an early age they have been seen to show concern for the welfare of others (Hepach et al., 2012) in a manner that would contradict much of Piaget’s thinking.

Rejecting Piaget’s model may feel inevitable, but as a heuristic to understanding qualitative differences between adults and children (Corsaro, 2011), and between children of different ages and abilities, it may still hold some utility; there are benefits in reminding ourselves that the complexity of children's thinking tends to increase across time (Morra et al., 2008). Some children, as with some adults, will not be as ‘comfortable’ with abstract thinking as others, but it is worth noting that a child’s ability to handle complex abstract thought is likely to develop, and become more nuanced, with age. It may not seem fitting to accept a strictly

delineated model of child development, yet in focusing briefly on a staged model we are prompted to consider the ways in which children differ, for example (turning discussion to this study) in how they might follow complex plotting across media platforms, or in how they might understand complex abstracts such as an 'audience' or 'morality'.

Developmental Psychology has moved away from looking at the pre-eminent individual first, and toward recognising child development as a socially located process. This social turn was triggered in part by the thought of Vygotsky (1978; 1986), who saw children's development as a 'result of their collective actions and that these actions take place and are located in society' (Corsaro, 2011, p.15). In this scenario a child is seen to be participatory within their own development, and in turn, they are not just shaped by society, but also actors within shaping society. Piaget did acknowledge the place of social experience in a child's development, but ultimately he was interested in internal structures (2001), not inter-relational (or intersubjective) ones. Vygotsky however was concerned with what happens '*between people*' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57, original italics) and suggested that development was not something that occurred just within the brain of the individual, but instead happened relationally between the child and society, through society's 'cultural tools' for meaning-making (1978). In this way the tool of language, and by extension dialogue, becomes a means of shaping development, and being. Giddens argues that a child 'begins to develop a sense of self in response to the social context of early experience' (1991. p.52), perhaps it would be more fitting to say that self is shaped in relation with, not response to, social context. Through accepting experience as relational and dialogic we are turned, in a Bakhtinian sense, toward seeing being as co-being; child in society, and society in the child, with language as the relational tool. In acknowledging the developmental significance of the interplay between a child and their symbolic/cultural tools (like language), we are also alerted to media as relational tools; tools that can shape development and understanding – and here we are back to picturing media within a dialogic phenomenology.

It some ways it matters not how those that have researched within Psychology consider the social in relation to child development – in ultimately resorting to standardising universalising approaches the tradition stands as 'a denial of children's agency' (Buckingham, 2000, p.51) and has 'failed to adequately describe and understand children's ordinary lives

and active participation in social worlds, or in other words, to research their subjective experience' (Hogan, 2005, p 22). Considering that this study looks to the views of its participants, adult and child alike, yet its design includes a Psychology born Q Technique card sort, it is at this point that it seem fitting to reject any vision of an acted upon, essentialised and unitary child, as visioned within Developmental Psychology, but instead valorise children as social actors in their own right

The 'Construction' Of Childhood

Early discussion touched on the cultural and temporal specificity of childhood, and that beyond certain biological 'markers', childhood may be shaped, and understood, relationally. Here we become alert to the ways in which we understand the child, the concept of the child, and the concept of childhood - and how conflation and reifications across these concepts, can feedback in structuring ways. The child, simplistically put, is a physiological immature human, whilst childhood denotes the 'general state of being a child' that operates in binary with adulthood (Gittins, 2009, p.37). Childhood may offer an interpretive frame to the early years of human life, but it could also be addressed as 'a social artefact, not a biological necessity' (Postman, 1982, p.143). Childhood is neither natural nor universal; unlike infancy, it is historically and socially constructed (Jenks, 1982; 1996). We share the experience of having been a child, and thus claim some knowledge of what childhood is – or was (Jenks, 1996; Gittins, 2009), and perhaps we then also share an understanding that as a 'totalizing concept' (Jenks, 1996, p.6) a child is unlikely to be able to step out of it to any great extent. The constructed delineation between childhood and adulthood (particularly when one notes the contemporary structural requirement for schooling for example) is not easily challenged, even if actual boundaries can be shrouded in ambiguity (Valentine, 2003).

What we call a child is firstly a 'child-for-an-adult' (Kennedy, 2006, p.3). Childhood both sits in opposition to, and is created by adulthood:

When we described a child, we are in one very important sense not directly describing his or her nature, but one characteristic of the relation between the adult and a child. There is no such thing as a "child" apart from an "adult" to observe it (Ibid).

As a malleable concept childhood has 'been constructed via separation and othering, and through disidentification with shifting imaginaries of adulthood' (Kraftl, 2008, p.82). It is

shaped by what is missing; a negative-space category constructed in light of an absence of adult traits, even if some of these 'adult' traits only come in to focus on the 'creation' of childhood:

The difference between the two positions indicates the identity of each; the child cannot be imagined except in relation to a conception of the adult, but interestingly it becomes impossible to produce a well defined sense of adult [and adult] society without first positing the child (Jenks, 1982, p.10).

Childhood is created by the adult, yet childhood brings adulthood in to being. This leaves child and adult, childhood and adulthood, as interdependent, yet childhood is lacking in relation to a somehow fully formed adulthood. Here we are alerted to the dangers of recognising childhood only in relation to its binary opposite, in that 'difference' (Christensen & Prout, 2005) or 'similarity' (Punch, 2002) come to encapsulate the relationship between them.

Which Childhood?

Childhood at times is used as a catch-all. Yet for the child it is far from 'homogeneous, not least because of the evolving capacities and physical growth of human children. It is perhaps the most heterogeneous stage in the life cycle' (Beazley et al., 2009, p.368). A contemporary overarching concept of childhood would cover birth to 18 years of age (Valentine, 2003; Montgomery, 2009), but within that broad-sweep sits an often contradictory complex framework of formal and informal delineation, that has been shaped around different, mainly instrumental, purposes.

To some the 'child' proper is sandwiched between the helpless infant and the young person on the threshold of their maturity' (Archard, 1993, p.26), yet there are many childhoods as lived, and many childhoods as conceptualised (James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 2004). We tend to:

divide up the life course in different ways, and have vastly differing expectations of the abilities of, for example, a six-year-old. Such expectations often contrast with western categorisations of age and highlight that they are not natural or fixed, but are, in fact, a very particular cultural construction (Lucy, 2005, p.56).

Childhood for education purposes has variously been broken down into infancy, early childhood, middle childhood and late childhood, but with a lack of agreement as to where these boundaries lie. Often connotative of 'deficit', words like minor, underage, adolescent, youth and juvenile also come in to play when addressing aspects of childhood - again with little agreement.

Under English and Welsh common law, a child is someone less than 18 years old, yet under Scottish law childhood ends at 16, even when the age at which one can vote stands as 18 across the UK. In England and Wales anyone under 10 is not considered to be responsible for acts that would otherwise be considered criminal, and between 10 to 17 old young people are treated in law in different ways to adults; 16 and 17 year olds in particular are seen to be in a 'transitional stage between childhood and adulthood' (Allen, 1996, p.46) and hence 17 year olds 'are treated as adults for remand purposes but not for sentencing' (Ibid, p.59). This graduation of responsibility is demonstrated in how a 16 year old within the UK can legally have sex, marry and join the Army, and reflects a time within very recent history when a 16 or 17 year old would have been considered 'effectively' adult. This ambiguity cautions us against uncritically accepting any vision of a universalised child that 'captures' everyone under a certain age.

Childhood is something we 'grow out of' (Jenks, 1996); it is 'a moratorium' (Qvortrup, 1994), or period of 'quarantine' (Christensen & Prout, 2005), whereby children sit outside of the 'freedoms' of adulthood, until they have reached some societally pre-ordained moment of maturity. Up until then:

Children are incomplete - immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial, acultural depending on whether you are a teacher, sociologist, anthropologist or psychologist. Adults, on the other hand, are complete - mature, rational, competent, social, and autonomous unless they are 'acting-like-children' (MacKay, 2003, p.28).

With acting like a child often recognised in disparaging ways, this dismissiveness or 'disregard' (Jenks, 1996) locates childhood as being little more than a time of physical growth and socialisation (that can be said to operate in light of a 'dominant culture', and awkwardly 'ignores the interactional nature of adult-child relationships' (MacKay, 2003, p.27)). Indeed Durkheim saw children as separate and incomplete, and childhood as a time where 'the

individual, in both the physical and moral sense, does not yet exist, the period in which he is made, develops and is formed' (1979, p.150); in this scenario the child is not a whole person, 'not a complete work or finished product – but *a becoming*, an incipient being, a person in the process of formation' (Ibid, original italics). If we are drawn to recognise children in this way, it is no wonder then, through a 'denial of [a] child's personhood' (Lucy, 2005, p.56), that children occupy a subordinate and marginalised position within society (Lucy, 2005; Corsaro, 2011), and in turn, that childhood brings with it connotations of 'dependency, powerlessness and inferiority' (Gittins, 2009, p.37).

This less-than-adult status sees childhood as a time when children are shaped toward future adult roles, when they are socialised - by society. This emphasis reminds us that from within adulthood then comes a 'duty' to prepare a child for their adult selves, but also to protect them from those 'harmful' aspects of existence that they might not be prepared for (Holloway & Valentin, 2000) (and here we should remind ourselves that what may or may not be harmful can be said to be as much a social construct as childhood itself). As touched on earlier, children have not always been as 'valued' as they may be now, and perhaps shockingly to a modern ear, the death of a child to some was once a 'minor event' (Zelizer, 1985); as one 19th century writer tellingly recalls:

We have had a sick child, who, sleeping or not sleeping, next to me, with a pasteboard partition between, killed my sleep. The little bastard is gone (cited in Rosen, 1994, p.77).

To the Ancient Greeks, if a child was mourned 'it was because they were perceived to have lived no purpose, having not reached adulthood' (Cunningham, 2005, p.23); it was the 'potential' that was mourned however, not the child. Children are still perceived as 'charged with potential' (Jenks, 1996) (to be adult), but at the same time we also picture children as 'ideals' in themselves (Mathews, 1994) - with this idealisation, or even idolisation, of childhood feeding back in to a rationalisation for (further) protection.

Childhood is an often sentimentalised (Holland, 1992; Derevenski, 2000), near 'sacred' (Cook, 2009), repository for hope (Kraftl, 2008); it is a 'time of sexual innocence and happiness' (Lucy, 2005). Yet as well as being said to be innocent and essentially good, children have also been positioned as 'tabular rasa' (Locke (1996), or more ominously, as 'ambiguous' (Frankel, 2012), 'waif', 'hooligan', 'too knowing' (Holland, 2008), 'toxic' (O'Connor, 2013), 'bestial' and

'corrupt' (Jenks, 1996). The two-fold message here is that we must protect children from the world, as well as protect them from themselves: and we become witness to 'an active struggle to maintain childhood - if not actual children - as pure and uncontaminated. The ultimate, if paradoxical, fear is that children will be deprived of their childhood' (Holland, 1992, p.14).

The discourses of innocence and protection come to shape policy on children (Meyer, 2007) (and the representation of children); children are said to be in 'need' of protection, as well as some measure of state guidance and control (and here we might look to the PSB origins of much of the children's media discussed to this point). Needs however, in being subjective and contextual, make insecure footings from which to build justification for protectionist policy. Though quotidian, they are difficult to define beyond rhetoric. They have variously been seen, in an essentialist sense, as objective, determined, universal and 'pre-cultural' (Slater, 1998). In being presumed to be both 'natural' and 'necessary' to the wellbeing of a child, they have been co-opted uncritically in to the discourses that surround childhood:

Children's psychological 'needs' are at the heart of contemporary public concern, part of the everyday vocabulary of countless numbers of social welfare workers and teachers, policy-makers and parents. Conceptualizing childhood in terms of 'needs' reflects the distinctive status according to young humanity in twentieth century western societies. It is widely regarded as a progressive and enlightened framework for working with children. It gives priority to protecting and promoting their psychological welfare, by contrast with former times and other societies (Woodhead, 1997, p.61).

To Woodhead however the top-down rhetoric of needs draws on a 'spurious objectivity' (Ibid, p.49). He is not suggesting that children do not have needs, but that policy shaped with regard to needs reifies just one understanding of what they may be.

It is at this point that perceived needs, in being presumed to be intrinsic and universal, can become rights in themselves, and then these rights in turn are embedded within political and legal frameworks. We can picture how the reification of a need can establish the discursive conditions whereby it becomes necessary to protect a child from being deprived of that (new-found) need. Here then childhood becomes a fully fenced-in 'protected' stage of life, during which a child is ordained with 'the right to a childhood of innocence and freedom from the responsibilities of the adult world' (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p.2). Conflictingly

however, in being given the right to protection, children lose 'social or personal autonomy' and become contained within 'social dependency, asexuality and the obligation to be happy' (Derevenski, 2000, p.5). The (needs driven) rights put in place to protect children, further solidify a constructed childhood, and even though children can be said to benefit in many ways from these constructions, they are also further hemmed in by them.

Rights & Policy

Models of childhood shaped in light of 'protection' leave little room for children to voice their own perspectives; within the UK for example 'adults, be they parents or professionals, [have] dominated decision-making' (Taylor, 2000, p.22) in a way that subjugates them to their parents (Archard, 1993), and adult society more generally. There are multiple claims within policy for the rights and agency of children to be respected, but there is a contradiction here, in that the establishment of these rights can also restrict a child's agency and position children as 'belonging' to policy. In light of this 'top-downism' we are turned here to question who owns childhood? And we are unlikely to answer that it sits in the hands of the child. Normative discourse would suggest that children are effectively 'the property of their parents' (Lansdown, 1994, p.33), yet in the way that the policy and legal frameworks of the state limit children's (behavioural and geographical) freedoms, society, and the state more specifically, can be said to also claim a measure of ownership.

Parents' rights 'over their children are not inviolate' (Lansdown, 1994, p.33), and indeed the law clearly positions the rights of parents as subordinate to the protection and well-being of the child (see the Children Act (1989) for example). Here we recognise the state as holding a 'right to intervene to protect children's interests' (Ibid). Any intervention here would however be enacted through the rhetoric of parental responsibility (or more so, a failure to perform a societally sanctioned duty toward the child), rather than from a recognition of a child's voice or capacity for self-determination. Recognising parents as having a deontological responsibility toward answering the needs of children, may laudably have a sense of the bottom-up and child-focussed about it, but we could also argue that the path toward protection has left the state with ultimate ownership over childhood. Not just possession of those children that might be appreciated as being in most need of protection and support, and hence sit within some form of state 'guardianship', but also ownership of

the rest of childhood, who are swept-up within the general imposition of 'protectionist' policy and law. State involvement may appear progressive here, in that it perhaps allows for the vagaries of individual parenting situations and may indeed offer much to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of children. Yet we should remain alert to the ways in which a protectionist stance can 'perpetuate the structural vulnerability of childhood rather than seek to provide children with greater opportunities for taking control of their lives' (Lansdown, 1994, p.42); measures ostensibly set out to protect children paradoxically attenuating the experiences and voices of children.

The UN *Convention on the Rights of a Child* (UNCRC) (1989) has formalised a child's 'right' to be listened to and participate in matters that affect them (Article 12). The convention also states that 'the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration' (Article 3) - a seemingly child empowering statement. Yet there is a danger here that the best interests of the child become shaped from within an adult construction, not in light of the views of children. Public service broadcasting stands no less implicated here perhaps. Particularly when one considers that BBC Children's, however open its rhetoric may now be, was created and shaped from within a particular paternalistic and protectionist stance (and notably does not allow room for children to voice themselves in the same way that 'adult' BBC does for its audience). Ultimately we again see policy as extenuating a fissure between childhood and adulthood, and as one model of childhood becomes further reified and essentialised (Hampshire et al., 2012), children are left permanently 'dependent on adult protection and incapable of taking responsibility for their own decision-making' (Lansdown, 1994, p.36) or voicing themselves. Here research, that turns to the 'voice' of children (as is the case in this study), should be particularly cautious towards any positioning of children as dependent or possessions.

Chapter 2. Children and Media Research

Part 2. Children and Research

The message to emerge from much of the preceding discussion is that we should look to destabilise any vision of childhood as a stage in 'deficit', and significantly we should recognise the voices of children as 'worthy' in themselves, whilst also remaining alert to any universalising of childhood. This chapter will extend this 'one model' caution toward explicitly arguing for interdisciplinarity across this study, and against conducting research from within any one tradition. There are 'methodological voices' worth hearing within the history of research (and the following discussion considers those that are of perhaps most significance to shaping this study and addressing the research question), yet no single tradition, discipline or approach should be said to claim 'ownership' of research that addresses children and their media. In a similar manner to which we may look to undo unitary and universal visions of childhood, we are equally triggered to question established approaches to research.

The Powerless Individual/Mass

'The history of media research is far from linear or straightforward' (Buckingham, 1993, p.8) and any narrative of that history can be mapped in many ways. Media research can loosely be seen however to have travelled from addressing what media might do to people (in light of either being powerless isolated individuals, or as part of a homogenous mass), through to looking at what people 'need' from or 'do' with media (with the individual here holding some measure of agency within their relationship with media).

Much media research has flown under the banner of 'audience' research, and within audiencehood we can picture how people are both acted upon and are actors in their own right. Earlier argument within this thesis positioned audiencehood as the act of the user, and favoured the term 'user' over audience member, in that it fully recognises the agency of people. There was however also a quiet acceptance that audience is far from a defunct conceptualisation, and if adopted critically, can still act as a useful heuristic to addressing the

manner in which people engage with media (even if we should remain alert to the social construction (Schrøder et al., 2003) or theoretical nature of audiences (Allor, 1988)). Audiences have been recognised in multiple ways, to some they are a market phenomenon to be sold to (McQuail, 1997) or 'a manipulable mass' of alienated individuals' (Schrøder et al., 2003, p. 25). To others conversely audiences are a public 'of informed citizens concerned with their democratic rights and obligations' or 'interactive partners' (Ibid) that are 'actively constructing meaning from the media rather than simply receiving it' (Buckingham, 1993, p.8).

Conceptualisations are being reshaped, and complicated, in light of new technologies and practice, and when 'compared to audiences of the broadcast era, these new audience groups are ephemeral, engage in fragments, and are more goal orientated' (Nightingale, 2011, p.8). Amongst this shifting complexity there might be some benefit in acknowledging Livingstone's suggestion that audience should be pictured as something that sits conceptually between media and the individual (1998) – 'audiencehood' not as a container for people, but as the act of media use. Much research historically however has tended to position people within audiences; as being receivers of a 'flow' of media messages (Williams, 1990), and as such, under some readings, they are therefore presumed to be somehow 'herdable'. The audience is recognised as impressionable, compliant and vulnerable, particularly in the case of child audiences (Holland, 1992) – and here the fears that are expressed in relation to an adult's relationship with media, become amplified when discussion turns to the 'endangered' and 'powerless' child.

From early fears for the effects of comics, television and cinema, through to more recent anxiety surrounding video gaming, there has been recurring public unease for the negative influence media may have on children. Popular discourse regularly turns to the potentially negative influence violent media might have on children. A direct cause and effect reading triggers us to ask, what will watching this programme 'change' in a child, or more portentously, will 'our children's futures be made better or worse by this onrush of new technology?' (Tarpley, 2001, p.548). Anxieties are as much shaped around platform as they are on any particular content, and it is possible to recognise the ways whereby newer media technologies, like the internet or mobile phones, can be swept up within a society's concerns.

There is much causal confusion aired, with the US Surgeon General's call to action on *Childhood Overweight and Obesity Prevention* (2008) for example, stating that '[s]edentary behaviors such as television viewing, computer use, and video game playing often replace vigorous physical activity in children' and are directly implicated in childhood obesity. The overly- deterministic tone within pronouncements of this kind does not however appear to limit their impact on wider discourse – and here perhaps we are triggered to undertake that research which offers alternative (and perhaps balancing) ways in to visioning children's media engagement.

Under the 'Media Effects' tradition, research has shown a preoccupation with seeking out evidence of media's influence on an audience's behaviour, with there being a tendency to focus on media that is said to harm children; just as in public discourse, there has been a particular interest in children and 'media violence' (for example Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Christensen & Wood, 2007; Perse, 2008; Sparks et al., 2009). Broadly American, and Psychology facing, Effects research is hypothesis led, and shares a tendency to concentrate on the 'standard techniques of survey methodology' (Gerbner et al., 2002, p49), whereby the quantitative measurement of questionnaire 'data' lends statistical significance to findings. These findings are then interpreted as 'proving' media affects people in some particular way, and generalised to a population – even if the research may have been shaped within a localised setting (Livingstone & Drotner, 2011). In a manner that seemingly undervalues the voices of its 'samples', the tradition has long tried to isolate the measurable individual from the complexities of lived experience. Indeed for experimental purity early, more behavioural, research excluded 'social variables' by moving research in to the lab. Later work within the Effects tradition began to acknowledge social context, but a tendency to assert that people, and children in particular, are in danger of being damaged by media, still runs through much research. Media Effects arguments, particularly in relation to American children, tend to fold in to an ongoing negotiation between parent and state, on the suitability, or otherwise, of media for children (Gunter & McAleer, 1997); notably however negotiation rarely features the voices of the children who are using that media. The tradition, in addressing a 'vulnerable object', fails to locate children as being able to use and co-opt media for their own means.

Academic debate within the UK has tended to share a slightly less negative understanding, with Buckingham (at times seemingly an isolated voice) for example, proposing a list of the potentially positive outcomes of media use (2007). These include: the development of language and cognitive skills, pro-social behaviour and moral values; opportunities for social interaction, civic participation, identity development, creativity and self-expression; learning spaces and the development of the ability to sustain attention; an expression of cultural value and an awareness of social issues; as well as entertainment and relaxation possibilities. Readings of this sort feel quite refreshing when aired next to perhaps darker negative Effects led ones, yet it is useful to remind ourselves that they can tend toward the same causal confusion, and in turn be co-opted in to deterministic rhetoric (of the likes of Prensky (2001) or Tapscott (2009)).

Much contemporary research, particularly in relation to children and media, could still be said to resonate with Effects, and within the current media literacy discourse for example, it is possible to hear (possibly repressed) echoes of implied causality. Media Effects research, both in terms of imperative and method, has been widely discredited (Gauntlett, 1995), and strictly quantitative audience research has come to be 'viewed with considerable suspicion' (Deacon & Keightley, 2011, p.302)), yet it still holds much sway within public, and, to an extent, academic discourse. Within the complexity of lived experience it would be very difficult to argue that any one thing directly leads to any one other thing – life, phenomenologically speaking, is far too complex for that. This should not however blinker us to the possibility that media may indeed be able to cause a negative effect, a positive one, or some combination – just that we should be cautious of claims to 'prove' it.

The Privileging of the User (or the Text)

Within discussion to this point we have considered the ways in which children have been addressed in light of what media might do to them. Thought here could however be said to be 'back to front'. If children can be presumed to be able to claim agency within their day-to-day lived experience, we should be questioning not the 'effects' media may have on children, but what effect children have on media; children are as free as any adult to share their own preferences, and do what they will with media. Effects research can be said to privilege the media over the user, yet audiences have long been considered to have agency

within their media use. Uses and Gratifications research for example is explicit in describing the audience as using media in a goal directed manner (Katz et al., 1974), whilst both Eco's Aberrant Decoding (1972) and Hall's Encoding/Decoding (2005) models rely on an audiences' ability to claim some measure of control over meaning.

Uses and Gratifications, which rose to prominence during the seventies, was born as a reaction to, or evolution from within (Schröder et al., 2003), the Media Effects tradition. As an approach to research it turned Effects on its head, in that it posited an 'active audience', who, through engaging with mass media, were seen to seek to satisfy various individual, and social, 'needs' (Ibid) - with a body of 'motives' for media use constructed to help explain the satisfying of these needs. The passivity of Effects is replaced here by a 'pull' mechanic, whereby: people are recognised as able to use their own initiative in sourcing media; these media 'compete with other forms of need satisfaction'; audiences are capable of expressing themselves within research; and value judgements are suspended whilst 'audience orientations are explored on their own terms' (Katz et al., 1974, p.22). Here however behaviour can tend to be universalised and what may only be 'media preferences' are uncritically confused with 'core' human needs.

For all of the tradition's claims to acknowledge the social side of a user's engagement with media, much thought here feels like lip-service when one considers the broadly quantitative nature of the research. It is as much reliant on the survey methodologies that 'carve social reality into measurable units' (Schröder et al., 2003, p.38) as the Effects tradition. For example, the fieldwork for Greenburg's (1974) study in to the 'gratifications of television viewing' for children was broken in to a stage in which 80 children were asked to write an essay on "why I like to watch television", and a stage that was shaped around a survey questionnaire. Following the impulses of the Uses and Gratifications tradition Greenburg saw a factor loading of the questionnaire data as being the primary output for analysis, with the statistical correlations between variables laid out to 'prove' the findings. Frustratingly there was no appreciation that the participant essay 'data' may have helped enrich the study - and here the tradition's ambition to recognise audiences as capable of expressing themselves, on their own terms, within research falls down.

In a similar manner, within a study on the introduction of television to the children of a remote community (Brown et al., 1974), researchers simplified potentially rich interview interactions down into simplistic questionnaire-based statistical gamesmanship. Seemingly illuminated by multiple tables and figures, the findings failed to share on the voice of a single child - as if the effect of the television mattered, not the children. Both these studies could be said to have forgotten the people behind the data – and this project’s research design was shaped in part as a ‘re-voicing’ response to an approach that appears to care more for understanding media, than understanding media use and the people that use it.

There are areas where Uses and Gratifications is still recognised as being of some utility (for example Birnie and Horvath’s study in to internet use (2002), and Joinson’s on the motives behind Facebook use (2008)), but broadly speaking the approach has lost momentum. For its unfulfilled promise however, the tradition did usefully introduce us to the ‘active’ audience, able to express themselves, on their own terms. The ‘selective’ and ‘involved’ media user (Levy & Windahl, 1984) of Uses and Gratifications informed much thought that followed, ultimately though, as well as ‘losing track of’ the people, the tradition can be accused of underappreciating the ‘supply side’ (the hows and whys of media creation), and in turn it may have played in to the hands of the media organisations that offer ‘need provision’ (Carey & Kreiling, 1974, p.230). In looking to create overarching taxonomies of media motives, in a generalised (and generalisable) sense, it can be said to have failed to recognise the significance of content in itself, and here then we are turned from an approach that ultimately ‘fails to consider how audiences perceive and interpret the content of messages carried by the media’ (Gray, 1992, p.4), towards addressing that thought which sees the significance of the media message (as conceptualised mainly through the ‘text’), and is not blinkered to the respective power of those that use media and those that contribute to its creation.

Cultural Studies in particular has much to say on the power individuals hold in relation to media messages, with Hall’s encoding/decoding model (2005) worthy of note. Hall’s model was primarily intended as a critique of ‘behavioural’ claims made within Media Effects and Uses and Gratifications research (Procter, 2004). In challenging the discourses of ‘effects’ and ‘needs’, Hall turned debate towards the everyday lived experience of the audience; media

as used within a social context. Here he addressed the ways whereby media texts are interpreted by users – with neither the text nor the user necessarily being privileged over the other. To Hall though the text is an ‘encoded’ product of the social and political context of its creation; the text’s producers are implicated in reflecting society’s hegemonic discourses. Audiences may accept the text, as presented to them, from within this ‘preferred’ (hegemonic) reading, yet texts are however considered polysemic, having multiple potential meanings. Audiences are also capable of ‘negotiating’ with preferred meaning, or even ‘opposing’ it. Here an encoding/decoding model ‘constructs audiences as fighters in a semiotic guerrilla war, snatching interpretations and creating space for themselves’ (Brooker, 2003, p.91).

Encoding/decoding, and the particularly British Cultural Studies that nurtured and transported it, can be said to be ideologically loaded toward recognising media texts as ‘a site of struggle’ (Fiske, 2010, p.17) in which oppositional acts are celebrated. Unlike in much research that preceded it, attention is paid to social context, but that context is problematically weighted toward the politics of class, gender, race, and so forth. Here the tradition, although embodied from its very beginning with a political agenda, is ultimately flawed, in that it ‘did not explore its own ideological stance’ (Nightingale, 1996, p.22). It has concentrated on telling the stories of the seemingly oppressed and un-voiced; ‘focusing only on the operations of cultural power in marginal, hybrid and other ‘exotic’ audience groups’ (Ross & Nightingale, 2003, p.39).

Acts of appropriation within subcultures are no doubt intriguing and significant, but it is questionable whether they warrant the amount of research effort ascribed to them; ‘identity’ for example, may make a worthy area for study, but Cultural Studies, as a project, fails if it overly concentrates on just one aspect of the lived experience, and can only talk for the, often marginalised, user - not for all sides of the ‘textual transaction’. In that it possibly underplays, or even ignores, a supposedly hegemonic intent within media texts, encoding/decoding is perhaps somewhat ‘lopsided’. The original formulation for encoding/decoding intriguingly set out to question the ‘moment of encoding’ (Scannell, 2007, p.212) – the production process itself - but with academic access to practitioners said to be limited at the time, this ambition fell by the wayside. Without insight into the model’s

encoding of meaning, that encoding is presumed, almost by default, to be 'preferred', even if producers of media may be just as likely to operate in negotiation or opposition to hegemonic positions as audience members. In being apparently oblivious to the ways whereby producers may construct meaning through the text, the approach has developed 'a romanticisation of the free and unfettered audience' (Silverstone, 1994, p. 155), and becomes little more than a platform for marginalised 'audience talk'.

What Place Practice and Other Traditions?

Mainly under the heading of Political Economy, Marxist-led thought has long had much to say on the production of media, particularly at a macro level, where media are often understood to have 'the power to 'inject' a repressive ideology directly into the consciousness of the masses' (Morley, 1992, p.41) and audiences are visioned as 'absorbing uncritically and unconditionally the symbolic output of the all-powerful media' (Palmgreen et al., 1985, p.23). Here media speaks as if it comes one-voiced and it strictly represents hegemonic interests. Readings of this sort tend to concentrate on market structure and the power to influence, yet there is a scarcity of (de-politicised) research in to the day-to-day practices of those that actually create media, and even less research that has attempted to listen to the voice of both practice and user.

Noble's (1975) *Blue Peter* study, in which both producers and audience members were asked to reflect on a specific programme can be considered an exception. It initially set out to examine the factors that might exert an influence on the show's producers, with these including: their conception of the 'needs, interests and capabilities of their audience' (p.200); whether what they produced might be 'applauded by the workmates' (p.203); and their personal values. With the producers ultimate objective (in a way that chimes with a broader BBC ethos) seen to be to 'entertain and educate simultaneously' (p.180). After interviewing producers Noble then interviewed children (who had watched the show) at home and between superficial questions on whether they recalled and agreed with the running order of the production, they were asked if they were entertained and did they learn anything from it. The producers were then asked to picture the responses of their audience, and with there being some disconnect between them, the findings suggested that 'producers do not fully comprehend the unique televiewing world of the very young child' (p.203) (particularly in

relation to overestimating the capacities of child viewers, and misconceived the differing perspectives of different age groups). Even though this study was highly instrumental, in that its aim (being funded by the European Broadcasting Union) was to 'provide feedback' to producers, and the method was structured primarily around the voice of practice, in calling for the establishment of 'two-way processes' for research and production (p.203), the study did hint at the potential benefits of bringing producer and user together – and as such influenced the decision within this research project to address both the media preferences of child participants and the voices of children's media practice.

Bar a few exceptions (for example Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011)) contemporary research within the UK can still be said to underappreciate acts of production and the voices of practitioners (as if Cultural Studies' hegemonic, and 'one-voiced', practitioner is not worth addressing when there are far more intriguing, often niche, audiences out there). There are those however, like Buckingham (e.g. writing with Sefton-Green, 2004) and Messenger Davies (e.g. 2001), who have been open to the voice of children's media practice, but these few have generally shaped their research more so from the perspective of the audience or education, rather than that of practice. In the US there is a wider community of research that addresses children's media production practices (see Bryant, 2007), yet much of this work reflects US specific tensions between the market and advocacy for children's wellbeing. Within the UK however there is little research that directly addresses children's media practice on its own terms. Here we can turn, by means of exception, to Steemers' (2010a; 2010b) 'production ecology' work on pre-school television, Matthews' (2009) examination of children's journalism, and Jackson et al.'s (2008) research in to the Children's BBC virtual world *Adventure Rock*. The study in to *Adventure Rock* is of particular interest here, in that it was explicitly shaped around the voices of both users and producers. The design featured 'creative' workshops with children, and observations and interviews with the production team, 'so the producer intentions could be compared with user experiences' (Ibid, p.5). The structure of the *Adventure Rock* study usefully brought user and practice together, and as such fed in to the thinking that shaped this research project – and it is perhaps notable that the researcher himself was working within the CBBC Interactive team at the time *Adventure Rock* was being developed and researched.

There is a growing body of de-ideologised research shaped loosely around fan appropriation and a sense of media texts being in narrative dialogue (Jenkins, 1992, 2006a/b; Hills, 2002; Gray, 2010), but even though thought in this area touches on media texts which children may show an interest in, it does not tend to focus on media produced for children in particular. There is within these readings however a useful tendency to pay attention to the voices of both user and practice, even if, there is a shortage of research that goes beyond the second hand textual and hermeneutic, and actually engages with users (this is perhaps surprising in that within the hyper-connected spaces that writers tend to celebrate, practitioner and user are declared to be readily at hand). For all the promise of thought here however, it is more likely than not western (or even US) centric (Livingstone & Drotner, 2011), and, at the populist end at least, can be accused of a certain 'technological nowism'.

Method has moved centre stage for some, with ethnographic approaches acknowledging the significance of describing everyday lived experience, and encouraging a shift in focus 'from the moment of textual interpretation [towards] contextualisation of that moment' (Livingstone, 1998, p.3). In a similar turn, in some ways instigated by Buckingham (Buckingham & Sefton Green, 1994; de Block & Buckingham, 2010) and wholeheartedly celebrated by Gauntlett (2004, 2005, 2007, 2011; Awan & Gauntlett, 2011), 'creative methods' are recognised as offering 'agenda free' room for users to make meaning and voice themselves. Gauntlett suggests that in asking participants to 'make', many of the problematics of previous media research can be undone. Even though his thought is open to critique (see Buckingham, 2009), openness towards constructing research in 'creative dialogue' with participants can be said to align with the dialogic phenomenology of this study.

Media Studies, perhaps inevitably, may appear to say much to this research project, particularly in that it was conducted from within a Media School. Yet accepting Media Studies as a headline discipline under which to operate would be problematic, in that as an academic discipline it could be said to be more of a patchwork of other more established and strident disciplines, than one in itself. Media Studies has had many un-disciplining and decentring waves crash over it (Berger & Woodfall, 2012) - whether those waves be from Psychology, Sociology, Literary Theory, or, possibly of most significance, Cultural Studies. Even though

there have been unifying counter flows (Media 2.0 (Merrin, 2014) and Digital Humanities for example (Jones, 2014)), Media Studies has been left deeply territorial; rather than Media as a subject being open to interdisciplinary inquiry, we often struggle to 'peek out of our respective silos' (Ibid, p.122). Paradoxically this decentring may equally have left Media Studies as healthily interdisciplinary by nature. Its inherent tensions leave it pluralistic (rather than 'centrist' or 'integrationist' (van Leeuwen, 2005)), and thus it can be seen as a useful staging post from which to conduct research. In 2000 Buckingham asked if children's media culture was the 'orphan in the academy?' (p.49) and if lacking for a 'secure home', it was 'in danger of disappearing in between the disciplines' (Ibid, p.52), yet similarly this lack is also a strength. Any study that addresses children's media is likely to need to look across disciplines to avoid being pinned-down to one possibly blinkered orthodoxy and this study, however destabilising it may feel at times, takes an explicitly interdisciplinary stance. Indeed it would seem strange to address children's media from within any one research tradition, particularly if we accept a 'diversity of childhoods', and consider each medium to be in dialogue with each other. In a way that chimes with a Bakhtinian dialogism, no discipline, conceptualisation or methodology can be said to claim primacy (Korbin, 2010), and any quest for 'pre-emptive closure of problems and questions' (Cook, 2010, p.221), or to agree a finalised 'one approach' for research, would appear troublesome, if not futile.

Toward a Childhood Studies?

There has been a concerted effort in recent years to reassess childhood and how we construct research with children. The 'rallying call may have come from anthropology' (James, 2010, p.215) and to an extent was picked up within Geography, but a sense of a discipline in the making has formed around what has variously been dubbed 'The 'New' Sociology of Childhood' (Mayall, 2001; Prout, 2005; Holland, 2008) or the 'New Social Studies of Childhood' (Kraftl et al. 2012). Anthropology undertook much foundational work here in challenging a universalised child; for example, Schildkrout (1978) observed how children within the Hausa society in Nigeria (where women live in purdah) wander freely and engage in economic activity and caregiving.

Within what has come to be known as 'Children's Geographies' attention similarly turned to address the heterogeneous 'spatiality' of childhoods (Holloway & Valentine, 2000), with for example attention given to children's play spaces (Thomson & Philo, 2004; Glenn, et al. 2012; Ridgers et al., 2012) and 'children's reduced opportunities for outdoor play' (Kraftl et al., 2012, p.3). Significantly Children's Geographies, in highlighting the spatiality of childhood, reminds us that when we speak of 'Western' childhoods we speak for less than 10% of those under 18 on the planet (Beazley et al., 2009); when we refer to children generally, we tend to mean Western children, and by Western children we probably mean US or UK children. Here however we should remain alert to the ways in which children, wherever they are, increasingly exist within a media culture that can span continents as easily as it can platforms. A child that may once have been isolated from the childhoods of others is now likely to be aware of a diversity of childhoods (whilst paradoxically this awareness may simultaneously be softening the edges of that diversity).

Research historically has tended to consider children to be unreliable informants (Hogan, 2005), with views that are immature, and 'not to be taken seriously' (Thomson, 2008, p.1). On one hand children were 'an object of scientific enquiry, and a target of governance' (Mayall, 2001, p.xi), whilst on the other, they were there to be observed and categorised - with the role of the researcher being to analyse and interpret children and their behaviour, not as members of the same species, but as humans in the making. New Sociology/Social Studies of Childhood approaches were born as a response to these perspectives. They move us away from conducting research *on* children, toward constructing research *with* children (Thomson, 2008; Lobe et al., 2008; Corsaro, 2011), and share an impulse to 'give voice' to children (James & Prout, 1997). Childhood is recognised here 'as a social phenomenon freed from the value-laden instrumental preoccupations of developmental and educational approaches' (Holland, 2008, p.37), and following James and Prout (2005), Kraftl et al., (2012) propose that researchers should address the social construction of childhood, challenge any tendency to universalise, recognise children's agency and foreground children's own perspectives:

Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes (Prout & James, 2005, p.8).

Under these new readings childhood should be valued for its own qualities, rather than as a way-stage to adulthood, and children, in this scenario, are complete individuals (rather than partially formed adults) with their own perspectives. In a corrective of previous universalising and objectifying habits, this triggers us to acknowledge that children are capable of 'providing expert testimony about their experiences, associations and lifestyles' (Thomson, 2008, p.1).

Recent years have witnessed centripetal forces at play in the shaping of a Childhood Studies. This (proto)discipline appears to be formalising many of the imperatives of the other 'new' childhood facing approaches, and positioning itself as an interdisciplinary (James, 2010) rallying point for those that share sentiment, whatever traditional discipline they journey from. In particular Childhood Studies recognises children as the 'unit of analysis', and that their 'life conditions, activities, relationships, knowledges and experience[s]' hold direct significance (Alanen, 2001, p.12). Research shares a 'widespread commitment to first-hand accounts of children's lives' (Gagen, 2010, p.213):

One could argue that the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies has built its very *raison d'être* around the notion of children's voices. By accessing the otherwise silenced voices of children – by giving children a voice – and presenting them to the rest of the world, researchers hope to gain a better understanding of childhood (Spyrou, 2011, p.131).

Much of this thought seems fitting to the spirit of this study, yet there is perhaps a concealed return to ideology at work here. Childhood Studies, according to Alanen, is an avowedly political act, meant 'to help in improving the social standing of children and childhood in social life, and to enhance children's well-being in their actual everyday circumstances' (2011, p.147). It may appear appropriate, or even noble, to operate under such a 'moral imperative' (Spyrou, 2011), and set out to elevate the status and well-being of children, but in re-politicising childhood, Childhood Studies may have failed to fully critique its own ideologies; to question which 'construction of childhood' is a child's life improved in light of?

There is a sense of new field 'manifestoism' about Childhood Studies. Its claims for interdisciplinarity come embodied with the promise of methodological and epistemological freedom, yet we could question whether we are witness to the integrationist moulding of yet another 'discipline'. A pluralist coming together of disciplines may be said to offer rich

dialogic opportunities, but rather than being a 'touching' point, Childhood Studies could awkwardly be shaping yet another bounded disciplinary 'grand model' (with the 'reductionism and functionalism' that follows) (Livingstone, 1998, p.14). Instead of offering room for children's voices to be heard across disciplines, subject Childhood Studies could offer an echo chamber for a certain approach to research with children, that counterintuitively may lead to the 'intellectual islanding' of children (Curti, 2009). Intriguingly, in arguing against that research which has historically positioned children as 'objects', and creates 'knowledge' about children out of the reach of children (Greene & Hill, 2005; Hampshire et al., 2012), there appears to be a parallel danger that we may also be offering up a one-way model for research, whereby the rhetoric of child voice and participation has the potential to override all else. In light of these fears this study (just as it may be shaped by, but does not sit within other more established traditions) is clear not to sit 'inside' Childhood Studies, or any of the other Childhood-facing studies. This study is positioned as explicitly interdisciplinary, but aware of shared concerns and imperatives here - notably a recognition of a child's agency within all aspects of their lives, including research, and a desire to foreground children's perspectives (Kraftl et al., 2012).

Children's' Voice(s).

With research veering between that which treats the child as the focus of adult attention, and that which gives 'an airing to the child's own views and experiences' (Ellingsen, 2011, p. 126), it is perhaps telling that research in to children and media has been slow to ask children to voice themselves. The 'realities' of research with children restrict this 'voicing' of course, but as a methodological aspiration, acknowledging the place of participant voice would seem to resonate with an appreciation that children have agency within their own lived experience (and appears fitting to the dialogic phenomenology under which this study was shaped).

Children were once considered 'inarticulate' (Schramm at al., 1961). The expectation for example, that on being asked how they would change television, children would generally 'want more of the kinds of material they already see a great deal of' (Ibid, p.54). This scenario still resonates today, with one of the practitioners in this study suggesting that "Kids don't really have a clue what they want... And if you get them to come up with ideas for a show, it would be a terrible show". This vision of children as mere mimics, confused, and incapable

of voicing themselves, permeates much of the history of media research, and is motivation behind the more child centred methodological correctives discussed to this point.

Thomson describes voice as 'having a say' (2008, p.4), whilst Komulainen (2007) equates 'voice' with power. Voice in this way is an act of experience and meaning-making, as well as an articulation of agency; whether voice is vocalised, expressed through text or other means, it is the utterance of a social actor. To some vocal expression is however problematically recognised as offering 'true' insight in to consciousness and experience (Mazzai & Jackson, 2009), in a way that more mediated means of communication can perhaps not:

voice lingers close to the true and the real, and because of this proximity, has become seen almost as a mirror of the soul, the essence of the self. Qualitative researchers have been trained to privilege this voice, to 'free' the authentic voice from whatever restrains it from coming into being, and relating the truth about the self (Mazzai & Jackson, 2009, p.1)

A Bakhtinian reading would however consider voice to be dialogic, and reject a 'unitary, atomistic and authentic voice' (Eldén, 2012, p.68) that might speak an unproblematic authentic truth (Hampshire, 2012) that can be 'heard and then recorded, coded, and categorized as normative and containable data' (Mazzai & Jackson, 2009, p.4). There is no one voice, and no true voice. In a way that moves us to acknowledge a socially located polyphony, voice is 'multivoicedness' (Komulainen, 2007), with 'the 'voice' of children – even the 'voice' of one child [- being] far from singular and unitary' (Eldén, 2012, p.75). Rather than struggling to establish a neat and tidy research project then, we should 'invite' in the 'messiness' of children's diverse and conflicting voices (Ibid), whilst also remaining 'suspicious of simplistic, monolithic readings by adults that [...] assume all children respond in the same way' (Kinder, 1999, p.19).

Here children, just like adults, can be recognised as having a part to play in their own representation, and hence, within research. Not as part of an agenda toward protection or empowerment, but because research, as an act, can be said to benefit from the voices of its participant. It can be argued that 'knowledge about children's worlds is best produced by children' (Hampshire, 2012, p.220), and children's 'experience and 'voice' has its own independent value' (Ellingsen, 2011, p.127). Those that look to research under the banner of 'child's voice' however should take care to acknowledge the paradox within 'giving children

a voice' (Spyrou, 2011, p.131), and the parallel awkwardness of extracting, or 'tapping the views' (Hill, 2006, p.71) of children, as if children's views were something out there in the wild to be harvested, and interpreted as the researcher sees fit.

Towards the Participatory: Participant Voice(s).

To 'help' participants voice themselves there have been recurring and persuasive calls for research to become participatory, and indeed, with growing interdisciplinary support for participatory approaches (Cahill, 2007), some measure of participation is now common to much research with children (Veale, 2005). In the same way that a critique of participatory culture however leads us to draw a distinction between interaction and full participation, there is also a distinction, if at times a complex one, to be made between that research which is more consultation or interaction (Freeman et al., 2003; Hills, 2009), and that which can be said to offer structurally 'meaningful' participation whereby children are considered to be 'researchers in their own right' (Hampshire, 2012, p.220). This distinction highlights a contrast between that voice-facing research which leaves room for children to express their views and experiences, and sets out to 'honour' participant voices (Lather, 2010) whilst still working to the imperatives of the research itself, and that in which all parties participate fully and are able to claim shared and equal ownership of all aspects of the project. What 'participatory' actual looks like in practice however, can span that which encourages children to 'go out in to the field' and conduct research for themselves (for example, Porter and Abane (2008) asked children to conduct their own research on transport and mobility in West Africa), through to that research which supports participatory principles, but through structural and pragmatic reasons, can only take certain steps towards a fully participatory ideal.

Whichever imperative research may lean toward however, ultimately the researcher will tend to decide which voices are heard (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). The voices that we 'liberate' are always co-shaped by the researcher, in light of their research agenda (Mazzai & Jackson, 2009), and any act by the researcher can be said to de-voice the participant. Within this scenario research itself, coming loaded with intentionality, becomes problematic and the researcher is left perhaps afraid to research. Beyond the suggestion of only researching in a fully participatory manner (and this would impractically mean leaving the

focus of enquiry, method, and findings in the hands of the participants) an answer may lie in admitting, and accepting, the primacy of the researcher in the co-construction of voice; that from amongst the voices heard, the researcher is explicit that theirs takes the lead. Research in this way is a dialogic participant-researcher interaction (Hill, 2005), even if the 'ascribed authority' (Ibid, p.63) to actually conduct research sits in the hands of the researcher - and here the analogy to the orchestral conductor comes in to clear focus.

This foregrounding of researcher voice usefully alerts us to the ways whereby we are both capable of drowning out the voices of our participants, and using 'children's voices to carry [our] own messages' (Hart, 1997, p.40). Just as children's voices can be used as mere decoration, or tokenism (Hart, 1997) research should remain cautious of ventriloquising; of putting 'words in mouths'. Here we are reminded that children come with many voices, and the research act privileges the perspectives and experiences 'of certain children' (Hampshire, 2012, p.220); as voices are raised, 'others are silenced' (Kallio, 2012, p.85). Every aspect of research, whether it be question, conceptual orientation, design, fieldwork, analysis or description, acts to amplify, attenuate, mute, distort or modulate participant voice. Alerted to these issues this study then makes no grand claim for being able to access an authentic voice (whether children's or practitioner's), but rather, it sets out to make room for the construction of a body of subjective positions (that because of the particular experiences of the participants may be telling in relation to the aims of the research). There is no sense here in which the researcher can be seen as anything other than implicated in shaping meaning out of the participant's voices, but a measure of reflection and disclosure may help in mitigating these skewed relations.

Adopting participatory research habits would appear to align with a regard for participant voice, in that 'participatory approaches appear emancipatory and democratic, respecting children's agency as individuals in their own right' (Gallacher & Gallacher, 2008, p.499). Here however we should remain cautious for echoes of a top-down rights agenda perspective that might position children to hold the right to participate in research. A sense of manifestoism can however be said to have emerged within some children's research (for example Hill, 2005 and Beazley et al., 2009), whereby researchers claim that children have the right to be 'properly researched', that their 'perspectives and opinions must be integral to research' and

that methods 'need to be found, and used, to help children to express their perspectives' (Ibid, p.370).

Even though these sentiments appear commendable in many ways, researchers could be accused of resorting to platitudes, in that they fail to treat children just like other 'people' (a seemingly simple and desirable act). Recognising children as being 'entitled' to participate in research would seem curious if one did not make claim that adults have an equal 'right' to participate in research. We may feel the want to place participants' voice at the heart of our research, but to say this is any more desirable in research with children, than research with people generally, may leave us open to accusations of presuming children to be somehow lesser, and only able to express themselves with our help. Significantly (in that the vast majority of discussion has been shaped around the child's part within research, rather than the part of the general 'participant') this thesis itself may evidence the tendency to treat children as in need of more care and caution within research.

It could be argued that this study is orientated more towards being open to participant 'voices' than it is to full participation. It may offer room for participation, but the research participants have had no say in design choices or in how the research interactions are described. Those that took part in the study may have been called participants, not subjects, or samples, but they were not 'involved in defining the research questions and [took no] active role in both collecting and defining the data' (Beazley & Ennew, 2006, p192). Hence there is no claim that the study is fully participatory, but instead, in a return to 'voice', it can be said to operate more as a three way negotiation between the researcher, the child and the adult participants. All parties are seen to act within a dialogic relationship, where meaning-making is co-constructed, even if that moment of co-construction is perhaps fleeting for the participants, and the voice of the researcher is perhaps loudest.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Part 1. Conceptual Orientation

The previous chapter noted the ways in which childhood can be said to have been ‘constructed’, and this chapter, in offering conceptual underpinnings to the study, begins by weaving together a broader constructionism with the dialogism expressed to this point. At the heart of the study sits an appreciation that meaning-making is constructed dialogically, and the following sets out to consider a dialogic phenomenology, whereby the ‘description’ of experience is valorised, with an acceptance that an ‘interpretative’ hermeneutic detour becomes ontologically unavoidable.

From Dialogue to Constructionism

To Bakhtin ‘actual’ human experience is situated within a concrete ‘encounter between human beings’ and thus the ‘human situation is ‘participative’’ (Steinby & Klapuri, 2013, p.xvi). In this light the ‘subject’ of interest to Bakhtin is not the individual, but the I-for-the-other, other-in-I, and I-in-other (1993), and the act of being becomes an act of co-experience or co-being in which the ‘self is dialogic, a relation’ (Holquist, 2002, p.18). Bakhtin’s dialogic co-being chimes with the later constructionism of Berger and Luckmann, in that the ‘reality of everyday life[...] presents itself to me as an intersubjective world, a world *I share with others*’ (1966, p.285, author’s italics), but Bakhtin’s co-being sidesteps the potentially essentialising (and divisive) trap of addressing the I-and-other or Berger & Luckmann’s I-with-other:

Dialogism is a way of looking at things that always insists on the presence of the other, on the inescapable necessity of outsideness and unfinalisability. If Bakhtin is right, then nothing exists in itself and we live lives of buzzing, overlapping, endlessly ramifying simultaneity (Holquist, 2002, p.195).

It is within this dialogic complexity that this research project was shaped – any meaning-making is seen as contingent, open-ended and many-voiced. Earlier discussion on Bakhtin focussed on texts, but Bakhtin usefully extended his argument away from what is perceived by the eye through the human senses (Gardiner, 1999), toward lived experience itself; with

experience being a co-experienced dialogic construction that cannot be recognised as completely understandable, finished, or have 'fixed' labels applied to it.

Bakhtin saw dialogue as 'the means by which actual life situations structure themselves' (Holquist, 2002, p.61) and that 'meanings are constructed' from within dialogic utterances in a manner 'therefore open to many interpretations' (Smith, 1998, p.267); indeed 'there is no one meaning being driven for: the world is a vast congeries of contested meaning' (Holquist, 2002, p.24). Here we can appreciate how an (often contradictory) 'polyphony' of voices can challenge binaries and any attempts to argue for absolute truth; knowledge becomes relative, never unitary or single-voiced, always contestable, and, again, unfinalisable.

A constructionist position would similarly suggest that 'our shared versions of knowledge are constructed' through the daily interactions between people (Burr, 2003, p.3), and 'what we regard as truth (which of course varies historically and cross-culturally)' becomes our accepted way of understanding the world (Ibid, p.4). There is thus no self-evident; knowledge and being is situated, and shaped in light of other beings. Accepting knowledge to be a 'fabric of conventions' (Bailey, 2003, p.ix) might seem like a straightforward proposition, but if all knowledge is a construction, created within the positions, biases, motivations and ideologies of people, then we are left unable to address a singular 'truth' (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999) or, in turn, conduct research under any sense of 'objectivity'. As recordable and measurable absolutes become but relative then, we are invited to question if 'our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us' (Burr, 2003, p.3). If, as suggested by Berger and Luckmann, the experience 'of everyday life is taken for granted as reality' (1966, p.286), then objectivity is arguably little more than reified subjectivity, and 'the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity' (Ibid, p.60). Intriguingly, and tellingly for this study, if we continue to argue that knowledge and being are never unitary, it becomes difficult to establish any fixed demarcation between media platform, between child and adult, and between researcher and participant; and in turn we are also led to consider any reading that comes from within 'one' academic discipline as perhaps troublesome.

There are 'many constructionisms' (Alanen, 2000), which can, even within disciplines, leave researchers 'speaking past each other' (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p.8), but here focus is

turned explicitly to that constructionist thought which represents 'the substantive, cumulative and publicly accessible products of innumerable human selections' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.46), whilst also placing particular emphasis on the 'society in the individual' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) in a way that sees self as shaped relationally – intersubjectively. These positions of co-being may be liberating, but they are also ontologically troubling, in that socially 'constructed things have an uncertain existence', and rely on social processes for their 'beingness' (Anderson, 2009, p.42). It could be argued here that:

Since the social world, including ourselves as people, is the product of social processes, it follows that there cannot be any given, determined nature of the world or people. There are no 'essences' inside things or people that make them what they are (Burr, 2003, p.5).

Those driven to essentialise to the individual would hit an ontological wall at this point, but relief maybe comes in reminding ourselves that (in a Bakhtinian sense) being is 'co-being', and that social processes are in turn shaped intersubjectively by many 'beings'; the social is the self. It is not that 'I-being' ceases to exist, but that both dialogic and constructionist readings would replace 'the self-contained, pre-social and unitary individual with a fragmented and changing, socially produced phenomenon who comes into existence and is maintained not inside the skull but in social life' (Burr, 2003, p.104). Here children and adults alike are socially situated - and co-being leaves any analysis that forces a fixed separation between the two as problematic.

There is room for the near celebratory within this reading perhaps. If we can 'actively construct the world of everyday life' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p.3), and reality is 'negotiated' through everyday interactions (James & James, 2008), then we are responsible for 'the making of meaning and significance - deciding what is important, which things should be attended to, how they should be viewed' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.41). These claims of agency may however awkwardly imply awareness and intentionality within lived experience and meaning-making (something that, bar the fleeting 'individually' significant moment, would be difficult to posit) and might overstate our want, or ability, to step outside of the ideologies and discourses that we inhabit. As Berger and Luckmann warn us, the 'active construction' of reality in one generation can become a reified 'given reality' (1966, p.55) in the next; even when we understand and shape our own world, its transparency and malleability 'thickens' and 'hardens' over time (Ibid). Maybe at this point we should turn away from a problematic structure/agency binary in the making, and acknowledge, for all

the relative power-relations between self and society, that the construction of knowledge and understanding is 'inherently ambiguous, continually evolving, and free to vary with the predilections of those that use it' (Gergen, 1985, p.268). In accepting that the self can offer 'preferences' (even if they may be seen as a 'revoicing') within this social complexity, knowledge and being become participatory; or returning to Bakhtin, co-knowledge and co-being are co-participatory.

A dialogic co-participatory constructionism could however be accused of leaving research unable to locate a material world (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999)), and expose us to a 'relativist ontology' (Apelgren, 2003, p.133) whereby the instability, inseparability and unfinalisability of experience and meaning-making becomes more troublesome than liberating. Here though we turn to a phenomenological reduction to help find conceptual purchase; that in placing presupposition out of play we might be freed to address the part, within the whole (without denying intersubjective complexities, or recourse to a reifying objective scientism). In this way we may be able to quietly accept that experience in itself, whether one feels inclined to locate it within being or co-being, provides firm enough footings from which to address a research project – or even life.

From Phenomenology to Hermeneutics

'Phenomenon', according to Kant (2005), is something as perceived by the senses - as opposed to 'noumenon', something posited without them; it is that which is 'experienced directly, rather than being conceived in the mind as some abstract concept or theory' (Denscombe, 2007, p.77) or through 'second-hand experience' (Patton, 2002, p.105) (and intriguingly this leaves this conceptualisation, and in much phenomenologically work, as exposed to claims of hypocrisy). As a discursive and at times conflicted 'intellectual discipline', phenomenology can broadly be said to focus on people's perceptions, attitudes and meaning-making (Denscombe, 2007). It is interested in what 'being human is like, in all of its various aspects, especially in terms of the things that matter to us, and which constitute our lived experience' (Smith et al., 2009, p.11). A broader phenomenology however may conceal 'an individualistic bias that privileges first person subjectivity over communal rationality and leads to the neglect of I-you connectedness' (as is within transcendental phenomenology (Stawarska, 2009, p.ix)), as well as a tendency to place emphasis on

'important' matters, rather than on every day lived experience (as is apparent within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis for example). Indeed those approaches to phenomenology that hierarchically concentrate on 'how people make sense of the major life experiences' (Smith et al., 2009, p.1), trigger us to ask that in placing significance on the significant, who gets to decide where significance lies; the power to decide what 'matters' does not readily appear to sit with the research participant.

Description (and Bracketing)

An answer may lie in acknowledging phenomenology 'at large' (in that it can dialogically (Glendinning, 2007) rope-in much 'being' facing thought), but paying particular attention to a Husserlian phenomenology whereby focus turns to the moment experience is constituted, and that moment's description. There is room to acknowledge the sociology led 'social phenomenology' (e.g. Schütz, 1970, 1972) and its 'concern with the ways people interpret social phenomena' (Denscombe, 2007, p.84), but following Husserl's call for description over interpretation (e.g. 1991 & 2001), this study is weighted more towards experience as lived, shared and described ('as it is in itself' (2014, p.116)), and cautious of experience as interpreted - a position that runs counter to later, more interpretive, phenomenology.

Husserl questions the ways in which we experience, understand and describe phenomenon. Under a Husserlian reading:

understanding comes from sensory experience of phenomena [and] there is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and becomes a person's reality, thus the focus on meaning making as the essence of human experience (Patton, 2002, p.106).

'Reality' only comes in to 'being' (ontologically and epistemologically speaking) as we subjectively experience it, and make meaning from that experience. Experience is subjective, and the meaning-making inseparable from it, is also therefore subjective; and it is here that we are then alerted to the dangers of isolating to the 'individual' (Stawarska, 2009) when striving for understanding, or valorising an objective single-voiced interpretation over intersubjective description. Usefully however Husserl validates a 'we-subjective' everyday 'life-world' whereby we all belong 'with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this 'living together'" (1970, p.108).

Husserl locates being and understanding as relational within lived experience in a manner that would appear fitting to much of the thought shared to this point – even if there is more emphasis placed on individual consciousness than on co-experience and co-being. Husserl’s ‘we-subjectivity’ resonates with the intersubjective ontology of Bakhtin’s other-in-I, and I-in-other (as well as Heidegger’s later anti-binary, anti-essentialist, anti-subject/object ‘being in the world’ (1996)). In a manner akin to a Bakhtinian contestable polyphonic truth, Husserl (1970) saw intersubjectivity as leading to an approximation of ‘objective truth’. Husserl does not however resort to suggesting that there is, or can be, ‘one truth’ out there to be addressed and described – ‘realities’ will differ situationally – but that there are shared bodies of subjectivity that could combinationally *become seen* to be truth.

Husserl (and then Wittgenstein (2009)) argued for description over any form of (‘vain’ (Husserl, 1999)) interpretation and Merleau-Ponty in a similar manner advocates for that phenomenology which:

tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide (1962, p.vii).

This face-valueism, in which Husserl argues one should ‘describe the “given” exactly as it is given’ (2006, p.117), might feel out of step with much contemporary context-rich qualitative research, but in accepting a participant’s subjectivities, as they are constituted within experience, and not as they are interpreted by the researcher, we perhaps avoid supplanting the meaning-making of the research participants with our own. Co-opting Husserl, Schütz (1972) insisted that, beyond valorising description over interpretation, the researcher should endeavour to suspend their conceptual positions. Rather than apply theory (Husserl, 2006) to everyday life the researcher should concentrate on description of lived experience:

Indeed, in genuine phenomenological viewing, we are not permitted any scientific or philosophical hypotheses. We should attend only to the phenomena in the manner of their being given to us, in their modes of givenness (Moran, 2002, p.11).

If we follow this argument to its conclusion however we are faced with a conundrum; in disposing of a conceptual framework, we would be left without a framework from which to argue that a framework is problematic (and we are in turn triggered to be cautious of any claim for conceptualisation-free research). A declarative act on what should be placed out of play, and what should not, might provide some measure of recourse.

It could be argued that the decision to describe experience, rather than concentrate on interpretation, mitigates the risk of interpretation distancing us from that experience, and this thesis is 'witness' to a tension between a phenomenologically grounded desire to describe alone and a (maybe kneejerk) impulse to interpret. A tension that could be said to play out more towards the interpretive in much qualitative research and as is perhaps expressed within Geertz's validation of interpretive 'thick' description over 'thin' phenomenological description (1973, p.6). Heidegger (1996) insists that description will always be part of an interpretive act, and in this way 'descriptions of experience and interpretations are so intertwined that they often become one' (Patton, 2002, p.106). Accepting that every research act offers at least a measure of interpretation could be said to be an inevitable and pragmatic step, but (with the researcher being both channel and 'sluice gate' to participant meaning-making) an acceptance of interpretation brings us to ask, who gets to frame description and interpretation, and significantly, how does the researcher position themselves in relation to the research and research participants? If phenomenological research is co-constructed and 'unfinished' (Glendinning, 2007), as suggested here, the researcher has little choice but to be unsure of where the research act begins and ends; all boundaries between research, researcher and researched come in to question, and thus perhaps we reach a phenomenological and ontological impasse.

This is where we turn to a Husserlian conceptual 'bracketing' for a measure of guidance in how to face intersubjective complexity and an impulse to subjectively interpret experience. Husserl was a mathematician before a philosopher and he hoped that by bracketing out assumptions, as one can with a mathematical equation, he could build the foundations from which to operate:

Husserl proceeds to what is in effect a phenomenological reduction: he puts out of play all constituted knowledge, he insists on the necessary absence of presuppositions (Derrida, 1973, p.4).

In light of much of the discussion above this act of 'de-suppositioning' would appear futile perhaps (and according to Derrida, impossible), but as a method of inquiry, adopted in good-will, it allows the researcher to bracket out preconceived (mis-)understanding of the phenomenon being addressed (Wilcke, 2002), in a manner that frees them to focus in on a particular part, or area of interest, without getting bogged down by trying to understand an un-addressable whole. Bracketing in this sense should not be seen as ignoring that outside

the brackets, or essentialising and reifying that within the brackets, instead it can be said to provide a temporary moment in which to address 'smaller' experiences. Bracketing can be appreciated as a tool for getting on with the matter-in-hand, whilst accepting that that matter-in-hand may sit within a body of otherwise overwhelming intersubjectivity and contextuality.

The researcher might at this point attempt some measure of self-bracketing, in that they set out to remove their researcher-self and intentions from the broader methodologically complexities, but, as much of the preceding discussion would suggest, any such attempt would appear likely to fail. Here we are again triggered to question how the researcher can reconcile their place within research; a dialogic constructionism positions the research act as co-participatory, and thus the researcher becomes inherently implicated within meaning-making, whilst a Husserlian phenomenology argues that the researcher should distance themselves as far from the research as to provide only description (in a manner that might even return us to the shadow of scientism). It is to the interpretive 'hermeneutic phenomenology' of Heidegger and Gadamer that we now turn in the hope of finding some measure of accommodation between the valorising of a co-constructed epistemology and a want to 'partition' off the researcher from the research act.

Hermeneutics, Interpretation & Dialogue

Hermeneutic phenomenology argues that we must make a detour through the contextual on any journey towards understanding; at the heart of the hermeneutic tradition sits a belief that one cannot understand any text without acknowledging its context and its author. By means of providing a conceptual tool toward this understanding Heidegger and Gadamer offer an iterative 'hermeneutic circle' whereby 'the part is understood in the context of the whole and the whole is comprehended in relation to the part' (Schostak, 2006, p.78). The hermeneutic circle can appear troublingly recursive, but it does remind us that for all our thoughts of 'bracketing out' we must be careful not to ignore how the 'parts' make the 'whole', and the 'whole' makes the 'parts'. To Heidegger:

The hermeneutic circle is an inherent element of any attempt to interpretively understand human phenomena. For the interpretive explanation of such phenomena is possible only in so far as of one who understands brings with him from his own point of view a certain

preunderstanding of this phenomenon and the context in which it manifests itself. By interpreting the new phenomena from this perspective an understanding of this phenomenon can be achieved which in turn will change and deepen the original perspective from which the interpretation was made (Kockelmans, 1989, p.221).

Understanding in this way comes from iteratively journeying between presupposition and phenomenon. These presuppositions constitute the 'hermeneutic situation' from which it would seem impossible to escape – how can we undo our understanding to this point (culturally, historically and so forth)? Even though he is far from blinkered to 'being', Heidegger's presuppositions tend toward the epistemic. It is Gadamer (2003) who more usefully reminds us that our being is (contextually) significant and therefore we become part of any 'method'. According to Gadamer it is not possible to step out of ourselves. We are part of the hermeneutic situation, and therefore interpret within a contextually located (and loaded) body of subjective prejudices and biases.

Methodology has been said to keep researcher and subject apart (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002), yet with research more of a co-construction, methodology can instead be seen to police a shared space. Gadamer's suggestion that we can only really interpret the world from within our own sphere (or hermeneutic situation) means that, by extension, we can only conduct research in light of our own self; we are subjective beings, so our research can only be but subjective. Gadamer however goes on to argue that there can be a 'correct interpretation' (2003, p.269) to the understanding of phenomenon, and at this point he may have awkwardly rejected one (scientific) dogma only to propagate a new one. This is where a 'hermeneutic trap' comes to light – any close reading and exegesis (by the reader) has the potential to out-rank the 'original' expression of meaning, indeed, through valorising interpretation over description, the hermeneutic method could be said to almost force the reader to overwrite the experience of others.

Beyond problematics inherent within the formalising of (one) method, the tensions between interpretation and description, and his (perhaps oxymoronic) 'correct interpretation', Gadamer's thought reminds us that any study, like this one, which valorises the subjective positions of its participants, child and adult alike, should also accept the significance of the researcher's subjectivities – and that hermeneutically speaking those subjectivities cannot but exist as part of the research whole. It is here that we note that the originally text-facing

hermeneutic circle, whereby we carefully read, interpret, re-read, and re-interpret can be recognised as a dialogue, or ‘fusion of horizons’ between text and reader (Gadamer, 2003, p.337). Indeed it has been argued that Gadamer’s major conceptual breakthrough was his shift from addressing the ‘I and other’, toward recognising being as more dialogic (Kogler, 2010), in a manner that allowed him to see experience as ‘itself within the whole of life[, as] the whole of life is present in it too’ (Gadamer, 2003, p.60).

Gadamer came to consider language as ‘where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together’ (2003, p.469), and thus being is mediated by language, and in turn understanding is negotiated through dialogue. The hermeneutic circle of Gadamer is formed not as a dialectical ‘operation of assimilation and unification’ (Malpas & Zabala, 2010, p.7), but as a dialogue that proposes no on-going truth quest. Gadamer rejects objectivity and argues that meaning is created intersubjectively (2002). His ‘truth’ is found through understanding experiences, yet significantly experience is not a snapshot of a moment, but part of a process, so to Gadamer experience is subject to change – therefore so is truth – and we are back to our ‘many truths’.

With Gadamer’s work opening up to dialogism, it is intriguing that Bakhtin latterly ‘recruits himself’ to the hermeneutic tradition and its ‘methodological virtue of an endlessly reversible and bilateral movement of going out to a culturally or temporally ‘other’ work and then returning’ (Pechey, 2007, p.10). Here we are led to acknowledge that dialogism spans conceptual frameworks as much as it does other aspect of experience, and in turn we should accept that any conceptualisation will leave much unanswered and maybe unanswerable. There are many tensions, and even contradictions, within the positions mapped out to ‘uphold’ this research project – but again we can return to Bakhtin to usefully remind ourselves that research, like life itself, is dialogic and unfinalisable.

Much of the discussion to this point has attempted to reconcile the place of the researcher within the research, and ultimately challenge any impulse toward carving-out an ill-founded ‘objective’ distance between self and research. No claims for scientific objectivity have been made within the study however. Instead there is a quiet acceptance that there will be areas in which the research ‘space’ will familiarly abide by those methodological ‘rules’ that have

traditionally kept researcher and research apart, and that there will also be moments where these rules break down; research and self, following a dialogic imperative, may on occasion become research with self. Now however we are confronted with another impasse - in accepting the place of the researcher within the research, we become aware of the many researcher selves ('researcher', 'practitioner', 'academic', 'other'), and the difficulties inherent in any attempt to hold these selves apart. Any fixed demarcation would be problematic, and even undesirable. If we are happy to position research participants as co-constructors of meaning, and recognise understanding as contextually contingent on each individual research interaction (or utterance), then it becomes unlikely that we would find the footings from which to separate out, and fix, each researcher self. Indeed, any division could only be fleeting; we are no more fixed than our field of research can be (Engeström, 2008).

Considering the researcher's background as a practitioner in the children's media industry (and one-time colleague of some of the participants) it does become necessary to address the methodological complications of being both part of one of the participant communities, and acting as a researcher of that community. There have been attempts made to split researchers in to those that are either insiders or outsiders (Alderson & Morrow, 2011), or emic or etic (Headland et al., 1990), with these binaries perhaps useful for those that research their own practice, or field of practice (as within this study) - but less useful in overly dwelling of subjectivity/objectivity distinctions (Harris, 1999). A Gadamerian reading would suggest that we can be nothing but inside our research however. We might be able to research the 'other' – but not in isolation from our own lived experience and understanding. We always come loaded with presupposition (and agenda). 'Outsider research' might be useful shorthand, and addressing an 'unfamiliar' field might allow for some measure of 'perspective', but to propose a complete outsidersness is to deny the intersubjective world as experienced. Tellingly one of the practitioner participants with an interactive background, Ellie Haworth, noted in jest her hopes for the research: "I think the biggest problem that I had was that I really want the things that are about interactivity to be on the agree side". It would be a foolish researcher that did not admit that they equally have 'preferences' (or 'intentionalities' (Danaher & Briod, 2005)) within research, and in turn did little to mitigate them. Answers could lie in acknowledging that the researcher is 'part of' the research design and methodology, and in foregrounding, and offering ongoing disclosure, on how the

conceptualisation and practice of the research was shaped within an iterative and sometime conflicted and messy process.

A Dialogic Phenomenology

The conceptualisation here has oscillated, or even ricocheted, between a phenomenology that valorises the 'description' of (the utterances of) experience and a hermeneutic acceptance that interpretation is inevitable - with a sense of dialogism, quite fittingly, bridging the two. The study was initially weighted more towards Husserl's constitutive phenomenology whereby research stands as an act of inquiry and description, and sets out to avoid the 'truth' hunting and overly-interpreted. As the study has been 'experienced' however, the orientation, drawing Bakhtinian dialogism in to play, and in accepting the hermeneutic situation, turned toward addressing the place of the researcher within the research process and acknowledged an impulse toward interpretation.

A shorthand distinction between the two wings of the thought shared across this discussion would focus on the respective valorisation of description or interpretation, and this site of 'conflict' is where many of this research project's conceptual struggles were played out. As with most binaries however this demarcation may serve little more than a heuristic role; neither position should be held up as methodologically certain (but each could be said to offer useful conceptual tools). Rather than suggesting that we adopt some half-way synthesis, this study ultimately argues for a 'dialogic phenomenology' - one in which a Husserlian reduction is said to provide 'descriptive analysis of human life that is [...] able to speak to the lived human experience itself, rather than the abstract conditions of possibility of that experience located in isolated intellect' (Stawarska, 2009, p.176), but is also aware of the 'positing' (Danaher & Briod, 2005, p.223) and editorial power of the researcher (that emerges out of the hermeneutic situation). The study is intersubjectively descriptive, in that it looks to the voice of the participant, whilst interpretive, in that it acknowledges that the researcher ultimately decides whether to listen to, attenuate or mute that voice – and comes with their own presuppositions.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Part 2. Design

Discussion to this point has dwelt on a tension between trying to co-construct descriptive research with participants, and an 'impulse' toward researcher interpretation. This section moves on to address how these tensions played out within the research design, and to how the design was applied. With the research question addressing children's preferences within children's cross-platform media and to the ways in which producers of media for children understand these preferences, what follows will reflect on the rationale behind, and the choice of tools, within the two staged design; with the first stage, conducted with children, adopting a drawing-led Creative-Reflective approach, and the second, conducted with children and adult media practitioners, turning to the card sorting technique familiar to Q Methodology.

Within these initial first stage interactions ten and eleven year old children were invited to share their views on what they would prefer in their 'ideal' children's media production. Through drawing and describing their media concept children shared their perspectives on what they considered to be of most significance within media 'for them'. From within these perspectives a number of subjective statements on children's media were constructed, and printed out on to small numbered cards, with these statements then forming the 'basis of engagement' for the second stage card sort based interview interactions. Within these (and in response to the first stage 'ideal media' perspectives) a second group of children offered their own views on media made for them whilst producers of children's media offered their understanding in parallel. This multi-method design can therefore be seen to link the voices of children with those of practice, whilst fostering dialogue in which foci were shaped from within the experience and viewpoints of child participants.

Methodological Openness

This study has argued against operating from within just one traditional 'specialist domain' (Klein, 1996), and as such a parallel position is made here for a methodologically 'openness'; we should be just as cautious of adopting 'off-the-shelf' methodology and method, as we should of operating within the confines and expectations of any one discipline. The preceding conceptual orientation positioned methodology as a means of reflexively policing a space that researcher and participant share, not an overarching body of rules to follow. Lather, in countering what she sees as a resurgently positivist 'methodological fundamentalism', argues against 'the kind of *methodolatry* where the tail of methodology wags the dog of enquiry' (2006, p.47, author's italics), and indeed it would feel awkward to claim for an inductive openness within research, and not be in a state of 'resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrella-like paradigm over the entire project' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.xiii). Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1993) have argued for 'agenda free' research, whilst Gauntlett and Hill (1999) suggest liberating research from the confines of the (disciplinary shaped) 'theoretical'. It may not be fully possible to do either of course (and this thesis still recognises and operates within structures inherited from 'senior' disciplines and paradigms), but to sit uncritically within the ideologies and agendas of any one, established, research tradition could be said to leave research blinkered.

Are we in thrall to those researchers that precede us? Each discipline comes loaded with its orientations and ideologies, yet it is worth asking whether off-the-shelf methodology can serve as well as those that are designed, tailored and fitted to address the imperative of the individual research project. Ultimately no two studies are identical – therefore no two studies should operate under identical methodology or method. Should we reject 'the domination of enquiry by externally imposed methods' (Moran, 2002, p.5), and only draw on that which is of most utility? Remain open then to research tools wherever they come from, and in turn free ourselves from a (scientific) believe that there is 'one best way' to doing research (Lather, 2010, p.67)?

The perfect, floorless fieldwork design does not exist. The researcher is inevitably faced with multitudinous methodological choices, the overall design to the minutest detail, and with every choice something is gained and something is lost (Schrøder et al., 2003, p.24).

In accepting, or even celebrating, methodological diversity, dialogue and complexity, the researcher is able to co-opt and reshape research tools as seems most fitting to the matter in hand. No tool is beyond bounds, whatever discipline it comes from. Researchers in this way should remain 'free to shape their work in terms of its necessities rather than according to received ideas as to what they ought or ought not to be doing' (Geertz, 1980, p.166), and equally then there is room to 'to invent, or piece together, new tools or techniques' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.4). Indeed it can be argued that lived experience is too diverse to be addressed from within one approach; that the 'multiple strands of meaning within complex qualitative accounts cannot all be unravelled by a single analytical method' (Reynolds, 2003, p.556).

Methodological openness does not necessarily need to be recognised as a methodological 'free for all'. Methods should be aligned to their purpose (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Beazley et al., 2009), and hence the 'methods and strategies the researcher chooses to use in a study must be decided in relationship to the nature of the research problem' (Eriksson, 2006, p.42). Being open methodologically does not however imply that established methodologies and methods are outmoded or lacking in validity, just that they can be said to have been constructed for another purpose – perhaps far from the imperative of the research at hand. Indeed, with one of the foci of this study, cross-platform media, being an agglomeration of what once would have been considered distinct forms, and as such addressed from within often quite different methodological frameworks, it would feel bizarre to unquestioningly 'step backwards' and construct research within the 'strait-jacket of encrusted traditions' (Moran, 2002, p.5).

Just as in research generally, there is arguably 'no one 'best' method' (Hill, 2006, p.76) or 'template' for child-facing research (Thomson, 2007), and as Christensen and James (2000) argue research with children requires no particular methods that cannot be used in research with adults. Research should not rely on techniques that are 'special' to children alone; the only restriction should then be that the method should relate to the research imperative and that participants comprehend it. Here it is possible to see that adopting 'child only' or 'child centred' methods (as encouraged by the likes of Corsaro (2011) and Westcott and Littleton

(2005)), rather than 'child friendly' method, can position child participants as uncomfortably 'other'.

Rather than locating itself within any one research tradition, this study can be said to share an affinity, or be in dialogue with, certain methodological approaches. It draws on two signature tools within its multi-method design, firstly the Creative-Reflective, where children were invited to draw a picture, and then discuss what was significant to them within it, and secondly a 'card sort' led interview, in which children and adult media practitioners were asked to arrange a sequence of statements in light of whether they agreed or disagreed with them. The first tool has recently found some favour within qualitative audience-facing research, whilst the second was co-opted from within a research tradition, Q Methodology, that claims to sit astride the quantitative and qualitative distinction (even if this study only acknowledges its qualitative face). Both tools, outside of any discipline led territoriality, align with the imperative of the research, in that they are able to offer the means to help construct, and then reflect upon participant perceptions, with the choice of tools being an agnostic one in relation to the 'perceived' capabilities of all those that took part in the research. The following offers a rationale behind adopting a Creative-Reflective approach, whilst questioning that research which appears to offer its participants creative and reflective agency, but then locks its participants out of eventual meaning-making.

Creative-Reflective Methods

Sometime around 13,000 years ago children, possibly as young as three years of age, are said to have created 'finger flutings' within Rouffignac Cave, France (Sharpe & Van Gelder, 2004) (Figure 4.1). Even though Archaeologists may share a tendency to try and interpret the meaning behind 'prehistoric art' (Alexandri, 2013), it would be difficult for us to offer, from this temporal and cultural distance, any real insight into the child artists' meaning-making, without those artists being here to translate for us. This cave art then perhaps leads us to realise that if within research we are lucky enough to be able to listen to the perspectives of any 'meaning-maker', be they child or adult, we should ask them what they intended, rather than try and construct our own 'distanced' interpretation.

Images can of course be interpreted in isolation, and in some cases (if there's disconnect between their creation and the research act itself) they may have to be, but it would seem strange, if one has access to an image's creator, to not directly ask them something about its meaning. The research challenge then, if the meaning-maker is within reach, is to look for ways in which to trigger and actualise these subjectivities/voices, whilst remaining alert to the potential barriers to that actualisation; 'to get children to freely and openly express themselves in such a way that the goal of understanding is served' (Spyrou, 2011, p.153), but significantly, without overly confusing researcher meaning-making with that of the participant.



Figure 4.1. Palaeolithic Finger Flutings (Cave Drawing). Rouffignac Cave, France

Photograph: Sharpe & Van Gelder. 2007.

This thesis opened with *The Little Prince's* request that his narrator draw him a picture of a sheep (Saint-Exupéry, 1995). Later within the same text the narrator recalls how his six-year-old self had previously drawn a snake that had just eaten an elephant (Figure 4.2):

I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups and asked them if my drawings frightened them

They answered: 'Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?'

To help 'the grown-ups to understand' the narrator's six-year-old self then drew an 'explanatory' exposed cross-section of the snake, in which the soon to be digested elephant could now be seen. The narrator amusingly closed his thoughts on this process by telling us that:

Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves and it is rather tedious for children to have to explain things to them time and again

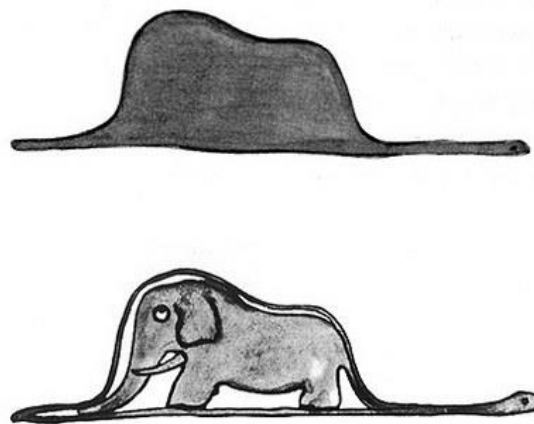


Figure 4.2. Drawing Number 1 and Drawing Number 2 from *The Little Prince*

The 'grown-ups' within *The Little Prince* can be said then to have offered early interpretation on a child's creative expression, without recognising that the child may have intent outside immediate adult meaning-making. This scenario, whereby adults are not able to comprehend a child's world without having a child there to help translate it, is of course fictional, but it may usefully demonstrate inherent problems with trying to understand, and share on, something of the lived experience of children – particularly if we are too swift to assume and interpret from within an adult construction of childhood.

Text and the Verbal

Historically it has been commonplace in studies linked to media, to explore participant's responses 'through language alone' (Gauntlet, 2005, p.154), whilst criticism of normative qualitative research with children suggests that it has tended to over valorise written proficiency (and therefore lost track of children's symbolic and emotional lives) (Pink, 2007). Yet the 'legacy of 500 years of print culture has been to give excessive weight to the written

word' (Krznicaric, 2014, p.31), and indeed academic expression (including every text cited within this written thesis) can be said to predominantly take place through language, mostly within the written form.

Thought (Chomsky, 1971) and being are seen as shaped by language. To Gadamer language is 'the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world' (1976, p.3), and similarly to Heidegger 'language is the house of being, which is appropriated by being and pervaded by being' (1998, p.254). We live within language and it lives within us. Even if our understanding and being is formed and located by language, we should remain cautious however of the hypnotism of language (Wittgenstein, 2009); we are quite capable for example of interpreting language in quite distinctly different ways from each other. 'Language is not innocent' (Schostak, 2006, p.69), and by extension therefore, neither is research conducted through language.

It might, at this point, be necessary to undo the conventional positioning of language as limited to the word. The visual can be said to have its own grammar and its own manner of shaping thought, and here it could be worth considering early pictographic writing systems as a bridge between word and image, or to turn to Pinker's (1994) suggestion that we think, and therefore experience being, in 'mentalese', rather than any formally structured language. Our being and understanding may sit within language, but language then can encompass all communicable meaning-making as experienced, whether that be through text, voice, image or other means; and in turn there is then little reason 'to relegate visual research to lesser status than any other' (Thomson, 2008, p.11).

Creative-Visual Turn

Over half the neocortex is involved in the processing of visual information (Van Essen et al., 1992), and intriguingly then we can be considered to be, first and foremost, ocularcentric beings (Levin, 1993; Rose, 2007). We may be said to understand our world through language, but we 'frame' it through the visual. Much media can be 'seen' as distinctly optical, and it would appear appropriate therefore to suggest that any method that engages the visual should be as equally valued within research into media as any written or spoken word led

approach. This does not appear to be the case however, with Bruner noting that attention, more often than not, is given to 'verbalizations at the expense of visualizations, to language at the expense of images' (1986, p.5); he suggests however, that with lived experience shaped around word and image, we should remain open to both.

Gauntlett has advocated a turn toward 'the visual and the imagination' within research (Gauntlett & Hill, 1999, p.1). In particular he proposes the use of 'creative-visual methods' (with the 'visual' and 'creative' seemingly conflated or interchangeable within much of his argument), in which he claims that through creating an artefact participants are able to share something of their own life-world and connect with researchers in a meaningful fashion (Gauntlett, 2007); with approaches of this kind, in activating 'inventive and imaginative processes', serving as 'tools to assist research participants to describe and analyse their experiences and give meaning to them' (Veale, 2005, p.254). To Gauntlett (2005, 2007, Awan & Gauntlett, 2011) creative-visual methods provide metaphorical insights that might be missed, or even inaccessible, in word based studies. Thomson similarly notes that images trigger the emotional; they 'communicate in different ways than words [and] may well illicit different responses than research methods which are primarily speech and written word based' (Thomson, 2008, p.11).

Even though Gauntlett argues that creative-visual methods are not 'better' (they are just 'a powerful alternative' (Gauntlett, 2007, p.182), or 'different way' in to research (2005)), Buckingham usefully warns against recognising visual approaches as being any more able to access the 'authentic' as any other (2009). The approaches that Gauntlett advocate no more offer an invitation for 'children to express themselves or open a window onto their inner lives' (Buckingham, 2009, p.644), than they do some 'transparent evidence of inner mental processes' (p.652). If we return to the argument that written language can be deceptive, and by extension then 'all language systems are equally tricksters', then creative-visual facing research can be just as deceptive. Indeed a 'child may draw a person crying for many reasons' (Dockrell et al., 2000, p.57).

To Gauntlett however there is an emancipatory release from researcher-participant hierarchies at play, in that 'participants in visual/creative studies can offer a wide range of responses, and ideally should be able to significantly change the researcher's agenda or frames of reference' (2005, p.155), and in turn then, approaches of this kind might provide a measure of rebalancing adult-child research relationships. Creative-visual methods could be said to mirror how we construct meaning through media (Gauntlett, 2005), and, in creating something themselves, which they can hold and manipulate, participants arguably claim some measure of 'ownership'. Veale similarly notes that the aim of creative methods is to 'facilitate reflection, debate, argument, dissent and consensus, to stimulate the articulation of multiple voices and positions, and, through the process to lay the foundations for empowerment' (2005, p.254). It is here that the approach may promise much, in making room for participants to not only reflect, but to possibly 'argue against' the research(er).

Creative-Reflective

Gauntlett has led a variety of studies that draw on creative-visual methods (e.g. 1996; 2005; 2007), and across these he has developed an argument for how the creation of an artefact can liberate participants from the constraints of instant prescriptive responses. Awan & Gauntlett argue that much audience facing media research is 'conducted through language-based events, in particular in focus groups and interviews where participants are expected to be able to generate more or less immediate verbal accounts of their feelings and experiences' (2011, p.360). They suggest that, rather than rely on the 'immediacy' of the oral, creative-visual approaches can help access responses that might have been otherwise concealed:

by asking research participants to go through a reflective process, taking time to consider an issue and to create a visual response, we receive more carefully thought-through responses which can offer rich insights into what a particular issue or representation really means to an individual (Ibid).

With much research requiring participants to produce instant word based responses then, creative-visual methods open an alternate 'route' in to research meaning-making, and leave room for meaning-making to be shaped in different ways and notably in slower, and therefore possibly more reflective ways.

This 'change in pace of statement-generation' can be said to avoid linearity (Gauntlett, 2005, p.154) and leave room for participants to take an embodied tactile ownership of the research process. Approaches of this kind are seen to offer children, in particular, time to respond 'at their own pace' (Tatlow-Golden & Guerin, 2010, p.549):

The use of drawing gives children time to think about what they wish to portray. The image can be changed and added to, which gives children more control over their form of expression (Punch, 2002, p.331).

In this way children who might, through more word based method, have felt 'under pressure to respond relatively quickly in the 'correct' manner' (Ibid, p.336), are freed to construct meaning-making tactually, and on their own terms. As Gauntlett suggests, people 'do not usually contain ready-made lists of 'what I think'' on a particular issue (2007, p.135), and in this sense creative-visual methods, like drawing, may allow participants the time (space and matter) to construct, and reflect on, that meaning. This then is where significance appears to sit in relation to this study – the reflective affordances of the approach; from this point the term 'Creative-Reflective' methods will be used to corral in that body of approaches in which research design encourages a participant to reflect on a self-created artefact, and here the artefact itself can act as a tangible site of dialogue (on that which might have previously been abstract), or as an 'object to think with' (Turkle, 2007).

Still images and video have found a home in the social sciences generally (see van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Pink, 2007; Rose, 2007) and in research with children in particular (see Thomson, 2008). Both the analysis of previously created photographs and the active creation (photo-elicitation) of still images are widely acknowledged within research (Prosser, 1998; Banks, 2001; Rose, 2007; Pink 2007). In particular photo-elicitation has been used within research as a means of looking through 'the frame' of those that are not conventionally empowered to express themselves societally. Radley et al. (2005) asked homeless people to create photographic images that showed something of their experience. Participant and researcher then discussed the image, with it usefully acting as a trigger to dialogue rather than standing as data in itself. In a similar manner Schratz and Steiner-Löffler (1998) asked children to take photographs of the parts of their school they liked and disliked, and then discussed them with the participants, with both of these studies leaving room for participants to voice themselves. Cook and Hess noted that as well as providing 'tangible representation' (2007, p.32) of their experiences, asking children to take photographs helps

maintains interest, and is 'fun'. Here significantly could sit another measure of the worth of Creative-Reflective approaches, in that they may offer an enjoyable and non-threatening way in to research that is tangibly in the hands of the participant.

Video production, even though it adds another layer of technical complexity, has been used as a tool in research with children and young people. Within MacGregor and Morrison's reception study, participants (some 'adolescent') were seen to be able to unlock insight through 're-editing transmitted [Gulf War news] reports into a preferred reading' (1995, p.141). Turning to the self-creation, rather than re-use, of video footage Grace and Tobin (1998) asked children to produce films within their study in to transgressive behaviour in schools, whilst a range of researchers have similarly drawn on video production as a tool to give children and young people a 'voice' in intercultural and migrant youth facing research (Niesyto et al., 2003; de Block & Rydin, 2006; de Block & Buckingham, 2010). Video production was at the heart of Gauntlett's (1996) exploration in to children and the environment, when he asked those aged 7 to 11 to make films, whilst he observed the surrounding discussion. Gauntlett's participatory and potentially reflective design appears to make room for participants to make, and voice themselves, yet curiously the study did little by means of actually asking its participants to engage in describing the resulting artefacts.

However much the creation of still or moving images may promise, in being able to access that which might not have been constructed, aired or reflected upon through other means, photographic and videographic images are more often recognised as something to analyse at a distance from their creators; as if the image is somehow *cleaner* if it can be separated and packaged up as a 'source of highly reliable data' (Ruby, 2006, p.387). The artefact in this way is an 'historical' object, ripe for interpretation, rather than as an act of meaning-making in itself, and tellingly out of the multiple method papers within the four volume *Sage Visual Research Methods* (2006), not one mentions visual artefacts as 'created' for the respective research project.

Moving beyond video and stills alone, Buckingham and Sefton-Green utilised a mix of linked tools, including asking Media Studies students to create a parody on the conventions of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, a video that would 'challenge dominant representation' on race

(1994, p.187) and a 'media identity' poster whereby the participants could express a sense of their self. Similarly Awan, in a study on youth identity, asked young people to create collages that would represent how they perceived themselves. Within the follow up interviews, which allowed participants to interpret and reflect on their own work, Awan suggests that the collages helped provide metaphorical insight into participant identity (Awan & Gauntlett, 2011).

Returning to word based expression, Ang's (1985) audience study, in which participants were encouraged to write a letter on why they liked (or disliked) the soap opera *Dallas* (1978-), can be recognised as an early attempt to make room for participants to reflect on their responses. However Ang is careful to note that the researcher would be wrong to accept the letters 'as direct and unproblematic reflection', and that they 'cannot be taken entirely at face value' (p.11). Here then, in that the participant's meaning is 'deduced' by the researcher from their letters, we are alerted to how research that on the surface might, through the creation of an artefact, appear to offer its participants voice, might ultimately leave interpretation in the hands to the researcher.

Drawing

This first stage of the fieldwork for this study turned to the drawn artefact as a means of encouraging children to express something of their ideal media production. Children were also free to write explanation, and follow up discussion allowed room for the participants to explain what they considered of most significance within their idea orally. Drawing was seen to serve as a useful trigger to the construction and sharing on of participant meaning-making, in a way that could be said to provide 'more indirect indicators of experience' (Misailidi et al., 2012, p.525) than word based expression alone. Maybe because it is considered common to childhood (or even 'childish') drawing has been used across much research with children.

As a tool drawing has been said to act as icebreaker and flexible fill-in activity (Punch, 2002). It can engage all regardless of confidence levels, and as 'an activity which usually falls beyond the confines of written and assessed school-based work, its inclusion may add to the novelty and enjoyment of a research task' (Tatlow-Golden & Guerin, 2010, p.557). The perception

then is that drawing is a pleasurable act for children (Hill, 2009); 'it can be creative, fun and can encourage children to be more actively involved in the research' (Punch, 2002, p.331). In this sense drawing might lend a sense of common focus, and help children (as well as researcher and school staff, in the case of this research) buy into the design; as all parties experience something actually being done, something created - an output of sorts. Drawing could also invite in 'the 'messiness' of children's voices' (particularly when set within multi-method design) (Eldén, 2012, p.78), and allow a means of expression temporarily away from 'the surveilling gaze of adults' (Tatlow-Golden & Guerin, 2010, p.549).

Drawing is often considered as a 'method for which children have a natural propensity or talent' (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p.112), yet this universalising position awkwardly positions children as 'drawers', and adults as 'talkers' and 'writers'. Any assumptions that we should turn to Creative-Reflective methods, like drawing, just because we are researching with children (and in turn, exclude creative methods in research with adults) would be deeply problematic. We should here remain alert to how children may be just as capable 'of engaging with the methods used in research with adults' (Punch, 2002, p.330), and even though drawing can be said to be part of a child's day-to-day repertoire, some children could feel as encumbered by the technical and aesthetic restrictions of the drawing process, as others might be by the written or spoken word. It is at this point we thus feel persuaded to return to the earlier argument for opening method choices up to whichever means of constructing, and sharing on, of experience, that appears most fitting to the research imperative.

Interpretation

The conceptual orientation of this study highlights a tension between description and interpretation, and much research with children, which calls on drawing as a research tool, can be said to be skewed more towards interpretation – and problematically perhaps towards that interpretation sitting under the researcher's authority alone. Drawing has long been used as a means of 'diagnosing' and 'assessing' children, and here interpretation has sat firmly within the hands of the therapist/researcher. Psychoanalytical approaches have recognised art as an means of accessing unconscious desires and conflicts; 'pictures, drawings and metaphors show a person's emotional state of mind much better than verbal

definitions or descriptions' (Diem-Wille, 2001, p.119). Klein for example argued that children 'will draw a house to represent their mother, and then put a tree in front of it for their father's penis and some flowers beside it for children' and that 'small girls drawing little stars or crosses [signifies] faeces and children' (2011, p.208). Without stepping in to a critique of psychoanalysis, it would have been intriguing to hear what the children who created these drawing considered them to 'mean'.

Even though there are those within the psychoanalytic tradition that complicate any 'authentic' understanding of children's 'core being' through their drawing (e.g. Winnicott (1971)), psychoanalysis regularly offers direct interpretation of children's drawings without asking the child to, at least, corroborate that interpretation (DiLeo, 1970, 1973 & 1983; Klepsch & Logie, 1982; Malchiodi, 1998). Ultimately 'the therapeutic paradigm assumes a privileged position for the adult researcher as 'interpreter' of the child's unconscious as it appears in the drawings' (Eldén, 2012 , p.68). Diem-Wille (2001) demonstrates this impulse to interpret when she states that the Whale drawings of one of her child clients represent family members; yet this explanation for what the Whales might mean was constructed by the therapist, not the child. In relation to another therapy based drawings, in which a child drew thick lined blue circles, Diem-Wille, with little apparent justification, and without any prompting from the child, interpreted the circles as 'intense and dangerous feelings' that the child was trying 'to hide under a calm surface' (Ibid, p.126).

Psychology has similarly considered drawing to be a means of 'assessing' a child, with the 'draw-a-person' test in particular being seen as a means of measuring and evaluating individuals (Harris, 1963: DiLeo, 1973; Cox, 1993; Malchiodi, 1998). In one such study children were asked to undertake the test as a means of assessing if they were 'stressed' (Rudenberg et al., 2001). The researchers engaged two 'independent' coders to look for 'ground line emphasis, unusual placements, phallic extensions, clawed nails, very light pencil pressure, very strong pencil pressure and immaturity' (p.35). Similarly developmental psychologist Bombi & Pinto (1994) asked children to draw a picture of themselves with a friend. The researchers then 'scored' the drawings and provided a statistical analysis on cohesion and distancing. Both of these studies again demonstrated a tendency for

researchers to interpret drawing as they saw fit (regardless of how deceptive they may be), and did nothing to ask children to share their understanding of their drawings.

Bombi et al. saw drawing as 'the most obvious candidate to capture children's ideas' (2007, p.3) when attempting to construct a formalised 'research instrument' for studies with children. Within their approach they call upon an 'expert judge' to code drawings, yet the researchers share no explanation of what might constitute an expert on the matter in hand, and there is no sense whereby they might consider that expert as being the child whose drawings are being 'assessed'. Here we might see psychology led traditions as tending to objectify the child, and their creative expression, as something that can be measured, analysed, interpreted, and presented 'scientifically'.

Media facing research may similarly be blinkered to the place the participant can play in offering understanding. For example researchers made claim that 'in-depth psychological interpretation was deliberately avoided' (Götz et al., 2005, p.37) during a study where children were asked to draw pictures of make-believe worlds, yet the interpretation of the children's drawings was still left exclusively in the hands of the research team.

Even studies influenced by the 'social turn' within research with children tend to demonstrate a tension between 'trusting' participants to express something of their own lived experience for themselves, and seeing participant's meaning-making as somehow in 'need' of researcher interpretation. On one hand research might make room for participants to create meaning through the creation of an artefact and then some measure of agency within how that meaning is understood (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000; Coates, 2004; Veale, 2005; Kostenius, 2011), whilst of the other it could underplay, or ignore, the place of the participant in helping to understand their own experience and meaning-making (e.g. Béneker et al., 2010; Lehman-Frisch et al., 2013). Perhaps we should accept, as suggested within the conceptual orientation, that however much the researcher tries to 'describe' participant voice, there will inevitably be some measure of interpretation at play. In turn we might recognise the drawn artefact itself as being able to help 'reveal the contours' of understanding (Eldén, 2012, p.71) in a way that cannot be 'corroborated' directly by the participant. Yet even if we can accept these drawn contours as 'readable', by the researcher

alone, it would be problematic to appreciate them as of any more valuable than a child's self-voiced explanation of their meaning, and thus we are returned to consider the drawings more as a trigger to dialogue, that standalone artefact.

Eldén (2012), in a corrective to valuing researcher interpretation over participant voice, asked children to create drawings as a springboard to in-depth interviews; she turned to the participants to offer some understanding on the nature of their drawing, and in particular asked them 'why is this particular object important?' This is a point of emphasis that resonates with how children in the first stage of this research project were asked 'what was most important to them' within their drawn 'ideal' children's media concept. It would have been easy for the researcher here to have leapt to his own conclusions about the meaning(s) within each participants ideal media drawing, but the eventual coding of that meaning relied as much on the voice of the child, as it did any researcher ordained 'areas of interest'. Hoping to avoid the 'glib readings and easy assumptions' (Thomson & Hall, 2008, p.160) that may cloud understanding of children's creative meaning-making, this study then stands reluctant to provide adult-bound analysis of its participant's drawings.

Ultimately this study recognises children's drawings as a concrete experiential space in which a child is free to project and reflect on the abstract. As a trigger to meaning-making, drawings become metaphor generators which 'uncover [...] the unrecognised' (Leitch, 2008, p.37), yet the drawings are far from being standalone reified 'data' unto themselves that can be interpreted from 'afar'. They operate as expressions of subjective experience, which sit within a (participant-researcher spanning) word and image shaped dialogue, and appreciated as such these dialogues 'fed forward' in to the research's second stage interactions.

Q Sort Interviews

The second stage of the fieldwork involved Q Sort led 'semi-structured' interview interactions with both children and adults that create media for children. During these individual interactions participants sorted, and then reflected upon, a number of Q Sort

'statement cards' that had been shaped from the outcomes of the preceding first stage 'ideal media' drawing-led fieldwork.



Figure 4.3. Practitioner's Q Technique Card Sort Interview in Progress

Using statement cards as a catalyst for dialogue in this way was shaped in light of the Q Technique card sorts used within Q Methodology. To create these statement cards, known as the Q Set, the interactions from the first stage were coded (see Procedure section) to create a broad expression, or Concourse in the language of Q Methodology, of the child participant's media preferences. Participants were then asked to arrange the Q Set statement cards in light of whether they agreed or disagreed with them, with this process known as the Q Sort (Figure 4.3). In this way the Q Set statements operated as tangible triggers to meaning-making and reflection; with the layout of the cards (the Q Sort) representing the participant's 'subjective universes of meaning in a particular field of experience' (Schrøder et al., 2003, p.360), or in other words, their views on the matter addressed.

Q Methodologists draw a distinction between Q Technique (the data gathering tool used here), Q Method (the statistical procedures for analysing the Q Sort card layout) and Q

Methodology (the conceptual framework that supports the former), but Q Methodologists firmly argue that these three aspects should remain inseparable (Wolf et al., 2011). Q Method, the statistical face of Q Methodology, is however embedded within a whole body of scientific habits and assumptions that seem counter to much of the spirit under which this research project was constructed.

The statistical 'engine' behind Q Method is a rotated Factor Analysis, through which a number of Q Sorts are analysed 'by-person' to reveal any coherent and shared pockets of subjectivity on the field being researched. Q Method claims to correlate people, not variables, or put another way, the individuals becomes the variable (not age/height/income, etc.), with the aim being ultimately to highlight commonality (rather than frequency). However intriguing this approach may appear, Q Method, as a statistical manoeuvre, can be argued to both distance researcher from participant and look to overlay a veneer of scientific 'respectability' (that positions 'science as a supra-historical, neutral enterprise and as the sole mode of acquiring true knowledge' (Bleicher, 1982, p.3)). This study considers participant's voices as 'valid' unto themselves however, and not being in need of any statistical 'gamesmanship' to bring those voices 'in to line'. It acknowledges the worth of the Q Technique (the Concourse gathering, Q Set creation and the Q Sort led interview interactions) as a research tool, but not the statistical Q Method side of a full Q Methodology study. In other words, design was open to the qualitative within Q, but rejects the quantitative.

Relational Subjectivities

The Q Technique 'front end' was adopted within this study as a tool to enable participant's to construct meaning-making relationally and dialogically, whilst the statistical 'back end' of Q Method was considered to offer little by means of adding to the description of participant experience. Here Q Technique was seen in particular to hold promise as a means of shifting the implicit toward the explicit, or voicing the perhaps, as yet, unvoiced. Some Q Methodologists consider the approach to be a form of 'discourse analysis' (Stainton Rogers, 1991; Webler et al., 2009), even if it could be considered more as a means of constructing discourses, rather than 'identifying' or 'revealing' (bodies of) pre-constituted subjective viewpoints. Subjectivity as expressed through a Q Sort is not necessarily then something that

is 'inside us', but more so in expression of experience as lived. Watts and Stenner argue that 'the production of the Q Sort is not to be understood as a phenomenological matter involving introspection (or looking within)' (2012, p.26), but that participants express their viewpoints - socially and contextually. The Q Sort is then recognised as a way of acknowledging subjectivity 'in the act', and reflects 'a person's current *point of view*' (Ibid, original italics).

Participants are able to express their 'feelings' concerning the subject at hand (Ellingsen, 2011), in light of what holds significance to them; and in doing so mould their own positions from within the relationally constructed malleability of the Q Sort. This is where the Q Sort offers much, in that:

The effect of placing [the statement cards] on the grid is that each response becomes related to [all] other responses, so that a *relational map* of the participant's meaning universe is produced (Schrøder et al., 2003, p.362).

Through the relational ranking of the Q Set statements participants provide a subjective representation of their position towards a given subject, and within the Q Sort the researcher is explicitly interested 'in the person's own point of view' (Brown, 1993, p.101). Q Methodology from its inception can be said to have placed value on the voice of the individual (Stephenson, 1936); indeed if there is an 'expert' on the matter in hand, it is the participant (Brown, 1980). Within this study then the expert is the participant (child and adult), and the matter in hand, children's media preferences.

Within the Q Sort interactions researcher and participant paid particular attention to the statements that seemed to hold most significance to the participants. The Q Sort, as structure for interview, is shaped then in light of participant views, not in light of 'questions' shaped a priori. Q Sort interactions bypass the pre-prepared nature of a typical interview, and therefore challenge researcher authority. Meaning-making is not fixed or imposed by the Q Set. The foci of attention for each interview question is built by the participant on the inter-subjectivities of others (in this case the positions of the child participants from the 'ideal media' first stage of the research), and as such the Q Sort acts as a participant spanning dialogue, rather than a (top down) question led imposition by the researcher. Through placing significance, or not, on statements participants are free to claim a measure of ownership; the Q Sort asks 'participants to impose their own meaning onto the items through the sorting process' and to infuse them with personal significance (Watts & Stenner, 2012,

p.64). Q Set items therefore stand as 'suggestions' (Ibid) upon which participants impose their perspectives. Much research tends to use categories of meaning that the researcher has imposed on the participant; here however, the focus of the research is ultimately determined by the participant's engagement with the Q Sort (Smith, 2001).

In a manner that has a sense of the hermeneutic about it, the Q Sort can be understood as a way of building one's own 'self-referent' (McKeown & Thomas, 1988) matrix of subjectivity, yet the research interaction also clearly operates as a dialogic intersubjective lived moment, one that is 'experienced relationally, involving shared meanings, and the ways in which subjects relate to others' (Wolf, 2013, p.221). Q Methodology acknowledges how an individual's position is a culturally, temporally and spatially located and makes few claims to offer a fixed psychological representation of any unitary participant (Stenner et al., 2008). Indeed the intersubjective (co-) construction of positions, with others, as expressed through the research interaction, returns us by extension, to seeing the lived experience itself as being intersubjective. As the research moment is dialogic, so our 'co-experience', as lived, is dialogic.

Here then the Q Sort stands as both a representation of the individual's subjective meaning-making, and a reminder that meaning-making is shaped with a broader body of intersubjectivity. The Q Sort is 'self-referential' in that it talks for 'the I, the subjective self' (Brown, 1986, p. 58), but also 'self-referential within a field of discourse produced by other selves' (Davis & Michelle, 2011, p.566). There is however a stream within Q Methodology that recognises subjectivity as 'waiting and ready for explanation' (Allgood, 1999, p.210), in a way that dangerously assumes that subjectivity is something out there for researchers to gather and interpret. This position shows a certain disregard for the dialogism of the Q Sort interaction, and misreads how meaning and experience are constructed socially and contextually.

Reflection and the Tactile

To revisit earlier discussion, Creative-Reflective approaches were seen to help articulate voices, to offer participants agency within research, and most significantly aid dialogue and

reflection. It is interesting then that even though the Q Methodology community acknowledges how the approach appears to allow room for argument and empowerment, there is little discussion aired on how it allows time for reflection. As the creation of an artefact might leave room for participants to construct meaning, and in turn reflect on their meaning-making, so a Q Sort similarly provides room for participants to pause and reflect – particularly in light of the model building that occurs when each card is located in relation to those already ‘in play’. Here the tactile nature of the interaction could be said to add a sense of the ludic; the manipulation and ‘playing’ of the cards reminiscent of many a card game. In this way the Q Sort becomes an artefact of sorts; participants have something tangible to reflect upon, and can leave having felt they have usefully ‘done something’. Westcott and Littleton argue that the ‘introduction of an object or artefact into an interview context can dramatically impact the process of joint meaning-making’ (2005, p.148), and more specifically to this study, Lewis and Lindsay (2000) suggest that when children are interviewed they might require props or ‘alternative signing systems through which to communicate their views’ (p.195). Even though this might be the case with younger children, adults are awkwardly positioned as capable of ‘non-concrete’ thinkers, and children not. Here then the argument can be made that having something to tactualy engage with within an interview encourages reflection regardless of age.

Returning to photo-elicitation, the creation and reflection on photographs has been used as springboard to dialogue with children (Svensson et al., 2009) and as a means of leaving room for children to claim agency within the research (Kullman, 2012). We could see the creation of a Q Sort as providing similar room for agency and reflection, and it is thus particularly interestingly that the tactile nature of the Q Sort interaction is also under-considered within Q Methodology. As with Creative-Reflective approaches, the card sort can be said to allow room for tangible engagement with the matter ‘in hand’. The participant, in holding, placing and replacing the Q Set cards, takes a measure of ownership over the research act, and opens up a different way in to the research - in that the tactual nature of the Q Sort might trigger different responses to those that would have been experienced through other means. This lack of awareness within the Q community on what might be significant tactual and reflective advantages to employing Q Techniques could be due to a quantitative led urge to swiftly and efficiently ‘get to the data’. Within this study however the hands-on reflective possibilities of

the card sort discernibly spread out and slow down interactions, and usefully 'delay' the closing down of meaning-making.

With the foundational thought behind Q coming from the Physicist turned Communications theorist Stephenson, Q Methodology has long been used to address culture and media. Examples of where the approach has been employed span Robinson's (1975) study in to middle-class attitude toward film and TV, through to Davis & Michelle (2011) cross-cultural responses to *Avatar* (2009), and Schrøder and Kobbernagel's (2010) study in to cross-media news. Q Methodology has variously been used to interpret media texts, like the *New Yorker* magazine's provocative Obama 'fist bump' cover (Zenor, 2013), and the attraction of horror movies (Robinson et al., 2014). Whilst it also appears to appeal to those with an advertising and marketing research focus - for example, Williams & Koepke's (2006) Medicare research, and Sawang's (2010) study on sex appeal within advertising.

Q Methodology has also been utilised in research with children and young people, for example within Webster & Trepal's (2004) study on bullying, Swetnam's (2010) work on academic achievement, and Storksen & Thorsen's (2011) on young children's emotional adjustment. Yet within these studies there is no discussion on the possible benefits for meaning-making and reflection that may be offered by the tactual nature of the Q Sort. Argument is invariably shaped around statistical analysis, with, surprisingly perhaps, no sense that the research, as published, cares for the actual experience of engaging with the research act.

The Shape of Q

Q Methodology can be separated into five distinct stages: the definition of the Concourse; development of the Q Set; selection of the P Set (or Person/Participant Set); Q Sorting, all of which sit within Q Technique; and finally, the Q Method statistical analysis and interpretation (van Exel, 2005). The following will briefly address each of these stages, but with this study not employing the statistical Q Method 'back end' of the approach, discussion will be truncated at that point.

Q Technique

Q Methodology begins with a gathering of a broad body of meaning-making on a particular subject, with this body, in the language of Q, called the Concourse – a place where ideas run together (Stephenson, 1986; Brown, 1991 & 1993). Significantly the Concourse it is not where meaning is ‘distilled’ down however, but instead the researcher holds on to a sense of the range of possible views on the topic being addressed. Within this study the Concourse is the meaning-making as expressed within the first stage drawing-led interactions. The Q Set is constructed from within the Concourse through ‘capturing, in a finite number of statements or claims’ each ‘major discernible position in the discursive terrain’ in question (Schrøder et al., 2003, p.360), with the Q Set holding on to as broad a range of positions as possible. The journey from Concourse to Q Set is not then a typical act of data reduction in that we aim to isolate the seemingly most prominent, but more an act of removing repetition. Rather than focus in on dominant positions, at the expense of those quieter voices, the Q Set aims to offer a sense of what is being expressed regardless of how marginal some of that expression may be.

There are broadly speaking two approaches to developing the Q Set. The first of which is the ‘naturalistic’ (McKeown & Thomas, 1988) or ‘unstructured’ one (Watts & Stenner, 2012), shaped from within the viewpoints of participants, but ‘crafted’ by the researcher to reflect the ‘overall character’ (Ibid, p.60) of the research. The second approach, finds favour with those that are shaping their research more in light of a priori conceptualisation, and in which the Q Set is developed through a ‘structured sample’ (McKeown & Thomas, 1988; Watts & Stenner, 2012) composed systematically, and statistically ‘representative’ of the data or theoretical position (Webler et al., 2009). Even though there is ‘no single correct way to generate a Q Set’ (Watts & Steiner, 2012, p.57), it would have felt problematic within this study to have shaped the Q Set in light of some pre-imposed conceptualisation, and hence the Q Set was developed from within the perspectives of the participants, not from theory, or statistical construct.

Within this study the Q Set was systematically coded from within the (first stage structured) Concourse, other Q Methodology studies have occasionally taken a more ‘free-wheeling’ approach to deciding what is included in the Q Set – with the process considered to be ‘more

an art than a science' (Brown, 1980). Different researchers, attending to the same Concourse, would therefore appear likely to construct quite different Q Sets (van Exel, 2005). This however is not recognised as being problematic, in that firstly; the Q Set 'is representative of the wide range of existing opinions about the topic' (Ibid, p.5), and hence any researcher meaning 'imposition' is likely to be diluted amongst the wide range of perspectives shared on (even though they could conceivably exclude particular participant perspective); and secondly, 'irrespective of the structure and of what the researcher considers a balanced set of statements, eventually it is the subject that gives meaning to the statements by sorting them' (Ibid). Regardless of the researcher's positions, the Q Set is constructed as a broad sweep of the subjective landscape as expressed within the Concourse, and it is for those that take part in the Q Sort interactions themselves to make meaning from these statements, as they see fit. The Q Set provides a focus for engagement within the Q Sort interaction, but it is also worth noting that it does not preclude detours into other areas. No meaning is enforced, and even if a 'rouge' researcher imposed statement did make its way in to the Q Set, it can be readily ignored by the participant. Restating this quite significant point, it matters little if the researcher includes statements related to a 'pet' position or peeve - participants are fully capable of overriding any researcher imposed position.

Within Q Methodology the appropriate number of Q Set card statements is considered to be that which is high enough to offer adequate coverage, and low enough so as not to become too unwieldy or demanding for participants; with 'fewer statements respondents may not be able to fully express their viewpoint. More statements will tax people's patience for accomplishing the Q Sort' (Webler et al., 2009, p.10). The 'house standard' for the number in the Q Set is generally somewhere between 40 and 80 cards (Watts & Stenner, 2012; within this study the number of statements was kept to the lower end of the scale, 44, with the aim being to not overly try the patience of the participants and to leave room for dialogue.

It is suggested that the language used within a Q Set statements should be as straight forward as possible, and that the 'phrasing of the question must avoid ambiguity and the inclusion of multiple propositions' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.53). Much like in interview questions language should then be 'neither too colloquial nor technical' (McWilliam et al., 2009, p.69):

A good Q statement is salient, in other words it is meaningful to the people doing the Q Sorts. It must be understandable, but it need not be narrow. It is acceptable and even desirable for Q statements to have “excess meaning,” which means that they can be interpreted in slightly different ways by different people. Above all, Q statements must be something that people are likely to have an opinion about (Webler et al., 2009, p.10)

In particular, considering the Agree-Disagree continuum along which participants are asked to place their cards, Q Methodologists warn against any ‘double negatives’. A Q Sort would be confused by ‘I do’ and ‘I don’t’ statements within the same Q Set (Ibid). To avoid these complexities within this study all statements were shaped as first person positive ‘I like...’ or ‘I want...’ ones.

The next stage within Q Methodology is to select what is called, with a rather scientific turn of phrase, the P Set (or person/participant set). Q approaches can be applied to single participants, but typically studies are conducted with a number of ‘very’ strategically selected individuals (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Even though Q, with its quantitative overtones, may feel like it veers toward working with ‘samples’ that are argued to be representative of a wider population, ‘Q participants are actually selected to represent the breadth of opinion in a target population, not the distribution of beliefs across the population’ (Webler et al., 2009, p.10). Participants are generally chosen in a purposive fashion, for being likely to provide a voice on the matter in hand. Just as survey questions would not be selected at random, but are chosen for their ability to offer insightful responses, so ‘Q researchers select Q participants because they think those individuals have something interesting to say’ (Webler et al., 2009, p.10). The process by which the Q Set was constructed and the participants selected within this study is discussed within the following ‘Procedure’ section.

Q Sort

Once the Q Set is in place, and the ‘P Set’ have agreed to take part, the study moves on to the Q Sort itself. Within a Q Sort ‘a collection of stimulus items [on a given subject] are presented to respondents for rank ordering’ (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p.25), according to a consistent rule, or ‘Condition of Instruction’ (Brown, 1997). Participants are asked to position the Q Set (typically printed on to small numbered cards) relationally to each other, across a pre-defined ‘Agree’ to ‘Disagree’ grid (Brown, 1996).

The Q Sort begins with the participant being asked to 'read through all the statements first so as to get an impression of the range of opinions' and to 'permit the mind to settle into the situation' (Brown, 1993, p.102). During this process they engage in a 'pre-sort in which they divide the randomly selected statement cards into three piles: those that they broadly agree with, disagree with, and are unsure about (Brown, 1993). After this the participant begins to position statements across the 'Agree' to 'Disagree' grid. In doing so the Q Sort in-the-making acts as an 'interview guide' (Schrøder et al., 2003, p.361), and as the participant positions, and repositions cards, the sort comes to express their 'meaning universe on the issue' (Ibid, p.362).

Even though many Q Methodologist appear more interested in the positioning of the cards than the dialogue that surround the process, many within the tradition have noted that participants 'can be encouraged to talk aloud whilst sorting the cards along the distribution, as part of a strategy to help him or her organise the material' (Brewerton & Millwar, 2001, p.79). In this study however the impetus was reversed, with the dialogue as imperative, not by-product. With the card sort recognised as an interview structuring trigger to dialogue, the participant was invited in to an explanatory dialogue on where, and why, they placed certain cards on the Q Sort grid:

The Q Sorter is invited to elaborate on her/his point of view, especially by elaborating on the most salient statements - those placed at both extreme ends of the continuum on the score sheet (van Exel, 2005, p.7).

We are reminded here that the participant, in placing statements as they see fit, controls what is and is not 'elaborated upon', or, as touched on earlier, interview questions are 'written' by the participant, from within the broad discursive terrain of the Q Set. Of course this recognition of the power of the participant to claim 'a sense of control' (Ibid, p.17) within the interview does not mean that the researcher is no longer implicated as having a significant and structuring part in the research act, just that the Q Sort interaction is viewed as a researcher-participant spanning dialogue, where the process of laying out the cards, and elaboration on the most personally significant positions, allows ownership of the study to shift toward the participant.

Q Method

The 'full' Q Methodology approach ends with a Q Method analysis and interpretation. Even though this study places great value on the worth of the Q Technique 'front end' of Q Methodology, it however rejects this statistical Q Method 'back end'. The statistical approach used within Q Method involves a Factor Analysis of the combined Q Sort grid data, as laid out by the participants. This is then followed by a rotation of the data, with the ambition being that instead of looking for 'patterns across the population of people' (Rogers, 2003, p.92) Q Method looks to highlight how well items are related to one another, in that they 'cluster' together. Q Method sets out to correlate 'similarities and differences among the diverse meaning universes' (Schröder et al. 2003, p.364), with the purpose of the analysis being to draw together, through correlating their Q Sort layouts, those participants who share 'similar' viewpoints. To group participant's perspectives together in this way may seem fitting to the ambitions of this study, yet Q Method, rather than listening to the actual voices of the participants, as qualitatively expressed within research interactions, relies wholly on the computer manipulation of statistical data (in this case the numbered cards as laid out across the Q Sort grid) to 'isolate', and then claim some measure of understanding, of these groups. This study however holds that staying in direct qualitative contact with the participant-researcher interactions allows for clearer and more nuanced readings, than would the distanced 'decimalising' meaning-making of Q Method analysis.

The unique feature of the Factor Analysis employed by Q Methodologists is the factor rotation, yet there is no one 'approved' approach to this rotation (Brown, 1980), with the process (from within an infinite number of possibilities) being strictly a 'value judgment' on the part of the researcher (Webler et al., 2009). Intriguingly this highly qualitative act, during what is a quantitative procedure, could be said to undermine any scientificly argued validity for Q Method. Here then the statistical face of Q can be recognised not only as an unnecessary distancing from participant voice, but also lacking in validity for those that might be pre-disposed to more quantitative approaches. Q Methodologists argue that their approach is 'scientific' (Watts & Steener, 2012), yet are careful to position it as neither strictly qualitative nor quantitative. Here they tend not to make grand claims for generalisability (Webler et al., 2009), or to be able to test a hypothesis (Davis & Michelle, 2011) or difference (Watts & Steener, 2012). Similarly Q Methodologists make no claim for 'truth' or accuracy (even if they oddly argue for replicability) (Davis & Michelle, 2011). Yet as a tradition, Q

Methodology still holds by what is arguably statistical gamesmanship, seemingly employed to add a veneer of scientific respectability, and appears curiously averse to others using the Q Sort as a research tool separately from the statistical analysis of Q Method (Wolf et al., 2011).

The qualitative Q Technique may usefully help us reach a point where we can 'describe' viewpoints, but Q Method's claim to be able to 'define' viewpoints (Hutton & Montgomery, 2011) leaves us forewarned that its adoption would conflict with the dialogic phenomenology under which this study was constructed. Indeed the researcher that operates through the statistical face of Q could perhaps be accused of talking about dialogue (at a structured and reified distance) rather than engaging in dialogue. Significantly, Q Method statistically analyses the combined Q Sort grid layouts, but ignores the rich surrounding dialogue. As this study is specifically interested in these qualitative interactions, any engagement with the quantitating face of Q comes further in to question. Ultimately this study acts to separate Q Technique from the statistical obfuscation of Q Method. The former is adopted in light of its strengths as a means of decentring the researcher, and dialogically enabling participant researcher meaning-making, whilst the latter is rejected for its scientific overtones and distancing researcher from participant voice.

Q Sort as Interview

Beyond rejecting the scientific 'back end' of Q Methodology, much argument has tended toward trying to 'normalise' the Q Sort in to being seen as a neatly structuring way of conducting an interview (Watts & Stenner, 2012), as if any methodological worries that might surround its adoption can be allayed by association with the well-established and 'beyond reproach' interview.

Maybe due to its near default 'go to' status within so much research, or because it so closely resembles the day-to-day act of 'conversation', qualitative researchers tend to consider the interview as 'the most powerful means for attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences' (Thompson et al., 1989, p.138), and as somehow able to 'unlock' another person's viewpoint (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Yet the interview itself is often under-

considered conceptually by researchers, and as Westcott & Littleton argue in relation to research with children in particular, adopting the interview within one's method is far from an easy option. They question a mind-set in which the researcher just talks 'to children and they will talk to us' (2005, p.141).

Although problematic, it is within the interview's 'everydayness' that sits its value as a research tool. We arguably live in 'an interview society' (Denzin, 2001a; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), and formally or informally, interviews structure much of our social interaction. We tend therefore to be well-rehearsed in being asked and answering questions, and in relation to this study in particular, children are generally used to being asked questions, for a wide range of reasons (Hill, 2006). Returning to the earlier discussion on how researchers might offer only 'distanced' interpretation on a participant's position, it can be argued that the interview goes 'straight to the horse's mouth', and therefore the 'best way to find out what the people think about something is to ask them' (Bower, 1973, p.vi).

To Schostak however, 'the interview is not a simple tool with which to mine information. It is a place where views may clash, deceive, seduce, enchant' (2006, p.1), and thus we are reminded of the 'hypnotism of language', and returned to challenge any quest for the 'authentic'. Interviews are a 'process of joint meaning-making' (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p.148), and as relational dialogic constructs, it would be difficult to see either the researcher's or participant's positions as fully representing any unitary authentic voice or truth – they are more so part of a body of socially situated utterances. The authentic, stable and single voiced interview is thus 'fantasy' (McWilliam et al., 2009), and the meeting of voices that is the interview interaction becomes a 'co-constructed narrative of meaning and experience' (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p.90), that is shaped by the experience of both researcher and participant.

Interviewers should therefore acknowledge their part within the research interaction as being far from neutral or 'objective', indeed they are responsible for bringing the interview in to being. This is something that appears forgotten within much research and bears repeating: 'interview data' (that some hold up to prove their findings) only comes in to existence in light of the researcher's triggering act. This returns us to question the relative

meaning-making power of researcher and participant; 'when an interviewee speaks - who owns what is said? Who owns the 'Truth'? Who holds the power to ascribe meaning?' (Schostak, 2006, p.76). Court & Abbas remind us that the ownership of the interview is shared; it is 'our interview in every case, the interviewer's and the interviewee's. But sometimes (often?) the process of analysis makes it more the interviewer's than the interviewee's' (2013, p.486). Here then we are implicated as players within a co-experienced phenomenological act, yet tend toward, perhaps often uncritically, taking ownership of that act's outcomes. Indeed the traditional interview (particularly in its more structured shape, with its pre-prepared and linearly organised questions) grants pre-ordaining authority to the researcher - to not only set the field of study, but to also 'corral' and 'fence off' experience and meaning-making.

A corrective of sorts could lie in overtly yielding 'control', and making room for an 'interview' that could not have been produced alone (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). With emphasis on the 'inter' within the interview (Schostak, 2006) neatly reminding us of the lived connection between all parties, and that the interview 'unfolds as a social process' (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.171). Maybe the Q Sort led interview comes in to its own as a tool for just this 'letting go'. The researcher that draws on the Q Sort within their design has put in place a means of structuring an interview in which they have no choice but to yield control to the participant. The participant will place cards where they will, the researcher follows. We are thus turned from 'conducting 'researcher-centred' interviews that disempower children by focusing on eliciting responses from them' (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p.153), toward working with participants (child and adult) as we negotiate and re-negotiate meaning together.

This realisation might seem to resonate with much of the sentiment under which this study was constructed, but the realities of fieldwork throw up questions, not just in relation to how the researcher views the research interaction, but also in how the participant perceives the interaction and the researcher. Mandell, acknowledging the performative within adult and child 'roles', suggested the researcher should set out to inhabit 'the least-adult role' (1984, p. 41), and Freeman and Mathison similarly argue that, even though 'adult researchers cannot be children [they] should suspend as much as possible the adult role' (2009, p. 60). Even though it appears fitting to accept that adult and child roles are constructs, as embodied

performatively, it may be naïve, and even patronising, to try to engage in research interactions with children, as anything other than an adult.

Children 'are generally taught early on to take directions from adults, to see adults as figures of authority and knowledge and not, for example as playmates or equals' (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p.56). However much the researcher attempts to 'downplay' distinctions, the child and the adult will sit relationally as 'other' within a school. Of course this 'adult authority' is what allowed the researcher within this study to access the research setting in the first place, and pragmatically speaking, it offered advantages in terms of managing each interaction. The ambition here was thus to mitigate, to a point, being viewed as 'teacher like', but not to try to construct a separate 'least-adult' performative research self. The approach adopted was to position oneself in an 'informal' fashion (and the 'playfulness' of the study's tools assisted in this), and try to play down the more obvious school-bound distinctions between adult and child, and as such the researcher was clear to introduce himself as both a researcher and someone who makes media for children.

The act of 'doing something', like drawing, or a card sort in this case, can be recognised as helping cut through layers of performance and pretence (Schratz & Walker, 1995), and here the adopted research tools appeared to at least partly bypass adult/child roles and allowed for a certain informality. Within the Q Sorts in particular this informality, and a sense of shared purpose, was furthered by the adoption of a side-by-side (rather than face-to-face) seating arrangement (with the actual way in which researchers physically locate in relation to participants again under-considered by Q Methodologists). With one-to-one interviews being potentially intimidating, threatening or invasive (Barbour, 2008), the side-by-side nature of the Q Sort, whereby the statement cards act as conduit for dialogue, could be seen to offer much by means of reducing the confrontational. Sitting at opposite sides of a table might be 'uncomfortable' for children (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000) (and researcher alike), and to some children an interview could appear more like an 'interrogation' (McWilliam et al., 2009). Any positioning away from the face-to-face norm might help free up communication however (Thomson & Hall, 2008), and hence a side-by-side Q Sort could be said to allow both parties to relax in to the interaction – and possibly in a way that can overcome the 'stranger effect' that silences some participants when interacting with

unfamiliar people (McWilliam et al., 2009). Both the Creative-Reflective and Q Technique approaches adopted here appeared to usefully provide a (physical/tactual) conduit through which perspectives could be aired; in ways that help overcome the barriers inherent within much normative face-to-face research.

Ellingsen notes that as Q Sort participants are reflecting on meaning-making as expressed by others, research potentially becomes 'less intense and intrusive' (2011, p.139), and to some degree the opportunity to 'lay meaning out', and then discuss it, might take the pressure off of participants to provide immediate responses. The Q Sort interactions, with their focus on that which the participant considers significant to them, could be said to help move the research along in this way; in having something tangibly to do and concentrate on, participant and researcher are freed from the fear of the interaction running out of steam, or even grinding to an awkward silent halt. In a conventional interview, or within a focus group setting, moments of silence could be recognised as a measure of failure, whereby one is left searching for an answer that should be known (particularly perhaps in school based interactions). Within the Q Sort however, pausing to look at a card and consider one's thoughts is a fully enfranchised part of the interaction. Westcott & Littleton suggest that, even when utilising method designed around talk, researchers should 'not to be frightened of silences' (2005, p152), and here the Q Sort can be seen to permit 'quiet moments' to be 'filled' by tactual engagement. Within the Q Sort (and similarly a drawing-led interactions) both participant and researcher are released from any rush to make meaning – for the participant to think 'through' the sort, and also if they want, to make choices without having to explain them verbally. Intriguingly a Q Sort might appear to be verbally staccato from the outside, but the, reflection spanning, tangible movement of cards could be said to allow for a more holistically free-flowing interaction than other interview approaches.

Drawing it Together

The research tools within this study were adopted in order to offer child and adult participants space to reflect on the creation of media for children. They were recognised as opening up many 'ways in' to engaging with participants and their meaning-making. The first stage 'ideal media' interactions, which spanned individual and group-work based dialogues, were drawing-led, but also allowed room for verbal and written interaction, whilst the

second stage Q Sort interactions, which operated more on a one to one basis, enabled both tactual and verbal engagement. The researcher's task was maybe then to open up a space for the co-creation of research meaning-making, and through providing multiple means of engagement, and levelling the playing field between visual, tactual and word led approaches, the hope being to 'clear the air' for those that might have been more hesitant to add their voice through other means. Working in harness here the Q Sort and Creative-Reflective drawing-led interactions can be said to offer intriguingly open routes into participant engagement, and allowed many different voices in to the overall meaning-making. Most significantly however, the research tools were seen to be able to support, and be aligned to, answering the research question: 'What preferences do children have within cross-platform media, and to what extent do producers of media for children understand them?'.

Both tools could be said to usefully provide participants objects-to-think-with; objects that operate as catalyst to, and repository of, experience and reflection. Turkle suggests that the embodied 'doing' experience of creating and manipulating an artefact can bring 'together thought and feelings' (2007, p.9) in a manner that enables meaning-making, and reflection (Jensen, 2010) – and again in ways that are not typical to a word alone led study. We should however remind ourselves that a 'doing' research interaction does not necessarily lead to a more authentic response, or allow us to access some pure and 'unbounded' creative space (as Kafai discovered on asking children to design their own video game concept, when participants tended to 'refer to existing commercial games' (1999. p.310)). Again we are looking for another way of engaging with our participants, not a 'right' way.

Ultimately perhaps, when considering how research tools may, or may not, work together, we should remain aware that participants probably care not for our long considered methodological conceptualisation, or which tool we use, as long as it is not onerous. It might also be so that children, less versed in what research might 'look like', are not as likely as adults to demarcate means of expression in to those that feel more appropriate to a research setting. As Smidt usefully suggests:

In coming to understand children's representations it is important to remember that to the child there will be no distinction between the different ways of representation: drawing, writing, playing, constructing, making models and so on. For the child something - an idea - is a starting point for

an exploration or an investigation and one thing leads to another (2006, p.110).

Here we are reminded of the argument made across this thesis, that a child may care more for the actual media they engage with, and not so the platform they access that media through. More significantly however, in relation to this discussion, and returning to the thought on methodological 'openness' that headed this chapter, we should strive to reject, or at least unpick, any apparently fixed adult/researcher bound method and methodological demarcation.

(The experience known as) Data

Both the drawing-led and Q Sort interactions were selected to help trigger the (co)construction of what would commonly be called research 'data', but as scientific research behaviours have been called in to question within the preceding discussion, it would feel appropriate to briefly challenge the way in which data, as a concept, is seen within research:

Too often there is a naïve acceptance of the 'data' as something like a found object on the beach, a piece of driftwood, or an apple that falls, or points of light viewed through a telescope (Schostak, 2006, p.68).

Data is a distancing word left over from 'evidence' led positivistic enquiry, and in this sense it comes loaded with agenda, and presupposition; if it tells one truth, it also tells others. At best data vivifies discussion, at its worst it fixes and finalises. Within this study however, and in light of its Latin roots, data implies not facts or proof, but 'a thing given'; with this givenness (of utterances) sited within a co-constructed research act. Data become part of the 'generation of knowledge' (Veale, 2005, p.253), not its 'gathering'. We may undertake 'fieldwork', but data are not discovered 'in the wild', by some particularly observant researcher; reshaping the metaphor, data are more so 'grown'.

The research tools adopted, in that they highlight the co-constructedness of meaning-making, remind us that data are not 'innocent'. Even though the realities of a research project will ultimately fix meaning, the 'findings' (or within the nomenclature of this study, 'categories of description') shared within this thesis, do not lay claim to being 'evidence based'. This study aims for the systematic, transparent and an internal validity, yet it is careful to make no truth claims for the data, and the description built upon that data, other

than it is seen to be a 'fair representation' of a series of research interactions as co-experienced. Data and description (as co-constructed dialogic expression of meaning-making, which spans child and adult participant groups, researcher, and the surrounding 'intellectual heritage' (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.242)), is then said to be 'valid', or 'plausible', unto itself. The data prove nothing, beyond being constructed of actual lived experience. Here data are recognised as expressions, or utterances, of experiential meaning-making, rather than as extractible, fixed and measurable evidence – and it is under this reading that data, as a term, is used across this study.

Description & (un)Interpretation

This thesis operates within a dialogic phenomenology, whereby the 'description' of the utterances of experience is valorised, yet an 'interpretative' hermeneutic detour becomes ontologically unavoidable. The study therefore becomes a site of struggle between a co-constructed expression of meaning-making, and an urge on the part of the researcher to claim and interpret 'data' and 'findings'. The experience of the participant might be recognised as holding primacy over the researcher's, but as an impulse to interpret came to the fore, the researcher becomes ascendant, and interpretation maybe wins out over a pure phenomenological description.

Many of the tensions between a want to describe, and an inevitable interpretation, come to light in the Procedure section that follows, with any 'quantifying' of Q Sort meaning-making considered problematic. Schostak useful cautions us here that even the transcription of an interview is an act of interpretation; a 'transformation, some would say, a reduction' (2006, p.68); whilst the process of coding can similarly be recognised as a quantifying step that reifies 'themes' in to being (Hesse-Biber, 2004). This study might explicitly attempt to 'de-quantify' Q Methodology, but Biesta (2010) reminds us that whilst data itself can be qualitative or quantitative, no research is purely one or the other - it is in some measure a mixture of both. Coding quantifies, just as framing a hypothesis qualifies. Arguably then the main difference between qualitative or quantitative research is the stage at which quantitative measures are enacted. Perhaps at this point we are triggered to accept that we will inevitably be drawn to quantify, yet are still free to step back out of our coding; that codes, and their thematic offspring, are foci for attention, not 'rules to obey unquestioningly'

(Reynolds, 2003, p.554). They are there to guide researcher, rather than thematically reify and close off understanding. Research meaning-making and description must end at some point, but a 'delayed interpretation' may allow room for the intersubjectivities of researcher and participant to 'dialogically meet', and in this light coding should remain open for as long as is practicable within the realities of conducting a research project.

Any act of interpretation could be said to lead to a measure of mistranslation and misunderstanding. Within the complexity of lived experience 'we cannot take complete mutual understanding for granted, even when the researcher and informant belong to the same language community and 'speak the same language' (Schrøder et al., 2003, p.17), and the 'moment we start talking to people about their media experiences we complicate things even more' (Ibid). Each body of 'data' can be shared on and interpreted in many different ways; 'a particular analytical strategy affects, to some extent, the research findings because it brings some aspects of the data into focus and relegates other aspects to the background' (Reynolds, 2003, p.551). The 'original' research interaction is of course no more authentic and true than any interpretation or description, yet we should remain cautioned to how multiple other coding choices, thematic linkages and interpretations can have been made within any study. Another researcher, on another day (or this researcher, on other days), is capable of constructing quite different research, and of coming to quite different conclusions:

In making interpretation some sort of whole is prefigured, and in doing so, this excludes alternative views and thus alternative understandings and interpretations. In this sense, an innocent reading is not possible (Schostak, 2006, p.84).

So here interpretation is inevitable and the researcher is back to being implicated as wielding 'authority'. The researcher then, being 'in charge' of making-meaning, is both idiosyncratic (Anzul et al., 1991) and, problematically, 'expert'. The Q Sort interactions may intriguingly however offer a solution in part, in that they complicate any fixed position on who holds expert status. Whilst the researcher holds the power to shape the study, only participants are expert on their 'views' – with these views at the heart of the Q Sort and drawing-led interactions described across the following section.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Part 3. Procedure

The preceding discussion dwelt of this study's methodological and design choices; in particular it argued for methodological openness, and that research tools should be selected, and shaped, not in light of disciplinary leanings, or the positioning of children as being in 'quarantine' or 'incomplete', but in relation to the research tool's usefulness to the actual task in hand. This study draws on two such tools, a drawing-led Creative-Reflective interaction, as employed with child participants, followed by a Q Technique card sort, as employed with children and adults. The following will map out how these tools were utilised, as well as discuss surrounding issues and analysis.

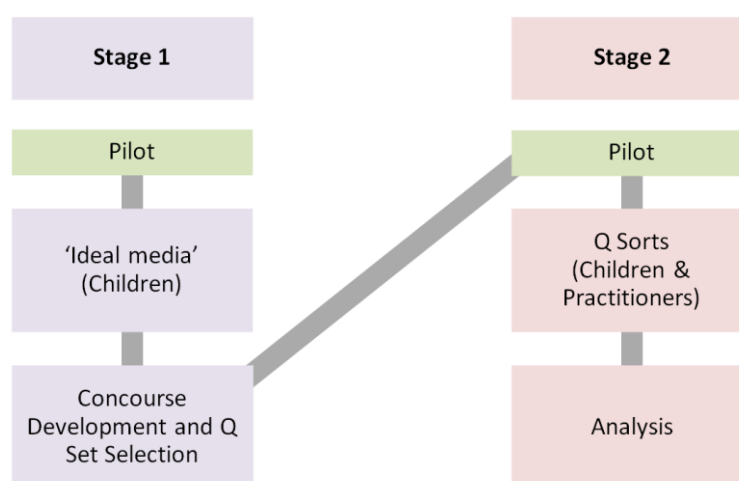


Figure 4.4. Fieldwork Stages

Outline of the Fieldwork

The fieldwork was broken down into two distinct stages (Figure 4.4). The first featured Creative-Reflective interactions with 62 (ten and eleven year old) children in which they expressed a sense of their preferences within children's media, through drawing a representation of, and then describing, their 'ideal media'. The second stage of fieldwork then featured individual Q Sort based interactions with 17 children (within the same age

group) and 12 practitioners from within the children’s media production community, and here these participants interacted with, and created their own meaning in light of, the outcomes of the first ideal media stage. Pilots were conducted for both the ideal media and Q Sort based interactions, with feedback being sought on the research tools from child participants and teaching staff within the schools where the pilots were conducted.

The first stage of the study spanned visits to three schools (in South East London, Bournemouth and Salisbury), with the participants in these sessions envisaging their own ideal children’s media production either from the starting point of a television show, a website, or a video game that would be intended for them (see Figure 4.5 for example). Children were tasked to create a drawing (with written explanation, if they felt they wanted to offer it) to help illustrate their initial concept, before being asked to extend it (again in drawn form) across media platforms. The aim being that in doing so children could start with what might be familiar, a website for example, but then spread their concept in to other areas. The participants, with reference to their drawings, then discussed their cross-platform ideal media concept with the researcher, and shared on what they considered to be “the most important thing”, to them, within it.



Figure 4.5. Example ‘Ideal Media’ Drawing. A Live Game Show Idea Called *Buzz the Question*

The fieldwork then moved on to its Q Technique led second stage. Here the outcomes from the first stage Creative-Reflective interactions (i.e. the children’s drawings, field notes and transcriptions of the surrounding verbal interactions) were used to shape a broad Concourse of the participant’s ideal media meaning-making. This Concourse was then filtered in to 44 distinct Q Set card statements that each expressed a subjective viewpoint on media made for children. Using this Q Set, Q Sorts were then conducted with children and those that make media for children. These second stage interactions with children took place across four schools (one in Dinton (a village school in Wiltshire), two in Salisbury and one in Cardiff) (See Figures 1.2 and 4.6)), whilst the Q Sort interactions with children’s media practitioners took place at a variety of locations as chosen by the participants.

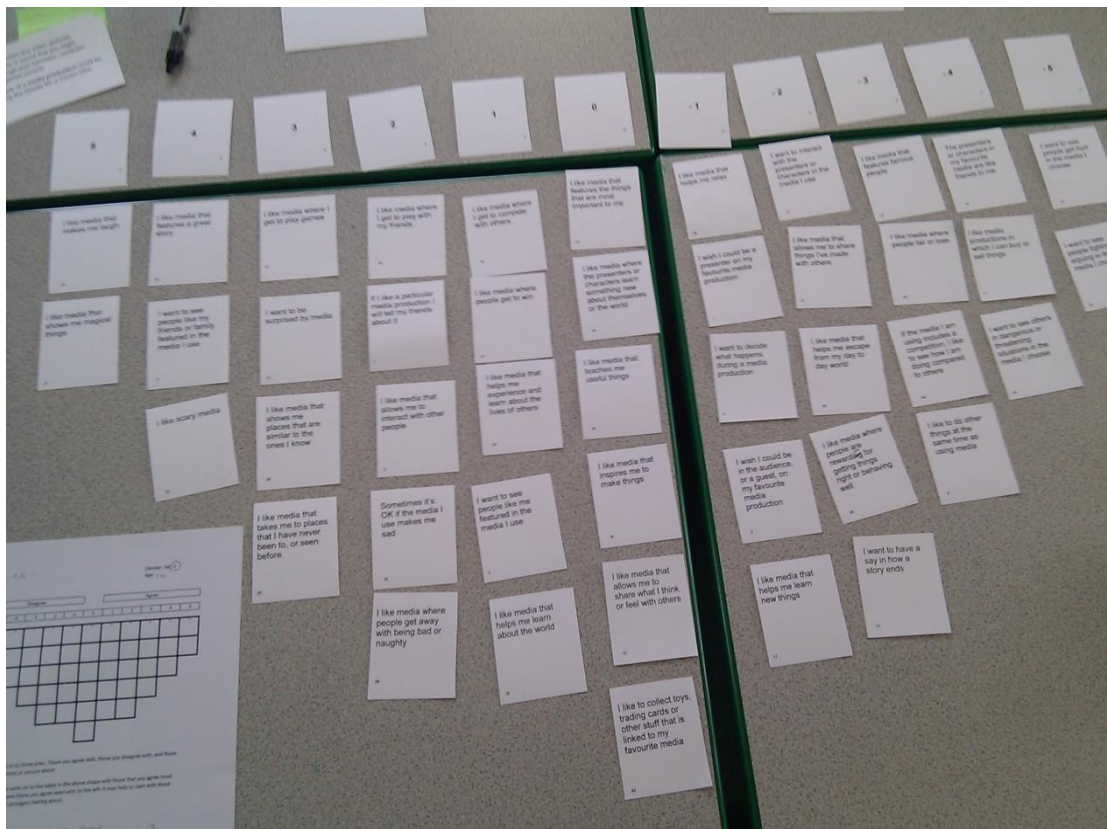


Figure 4.6. Participant’s Completed Q Sort

Participants

The number of participants (or what once may have been known as the 'sample size') was not known in advance of the study. Following, in part, the Grounded Theorists, when the fieldwork was in progress the researcher iteratively assessed participant interactions to see when that particular fieldwork stage could be considered 'saturated' with meaning, and that 'no additional data are being found' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.61). The number of those that took part in the study was thus shaped out of the on-going co-constructedness of the study (and not in light of a pre-ordained need for generalisability). Both stages of research followed this imperative, and were drawn to a conclusion when it was felt that data saturation had been reached. The approach taken here was to bring the fieldwork to a close on finding repetition of expression to substantially outweigh any new subjectivities introduced. In the case of the practitioner Q Sorts, in that they took a long time to negotiate, and would therefore be awkward to cancel, (at least) one interaction happened after saturation point was arguably reached.

The study as a whole (excluding those met during the first pilot) spanned interactions with 74 children. With 62 children contributing to the first stage Creative-Reflective interactions and 17 to the second stage Q Sort interactions - whilst 5 children took part, at different times, in both stages (Figure 4.8). The initial 'ideal media' pilot study was conducted at a school local to the researcher in Bournemouth, whilst subsequent interactions were conducted at this school, as well as ones in South East London, Salisbury, Dinton and Cardiff, with school access 'snowballing' from historical contacts. Q Sort piloting was conducted during the first stage 'ideal media' school visits. There was no sense under which the research was looking to speak for any particular (perhaps 'unvoiced') group, or that it was intended to be generalisable. The schools were thus purposively selected to reach a range of positions on children's media (rather than be representative), and as such covered a mixed of urban, sub-urban and rural settings, and spanned state and fee paying.

Even though there may have been some benefits in meeting with children across age ranges, the focus within this study was on the views of children aged ten and eleven. This was partly a decision based on a pragmatic realisation that to talk with a wider age range would turn the study on to something quite unwieldy, but also partly because the researcher has a

background of working within children of this age and therefore there were seen to be advantages in terms of experience and access. Account was also taken of how practice understands its 'audience' (with for example CBBC's PSB remit addressing six to twelve year olds (BBC Media Centre, 2012)) and, again pragmatically speaking, schools are generally quite welcoming to visitors, post the Year 6 Key Stage 2 assessments completed in mid-May.

		Stage 1	Stage 2	
Schools:		'Ideal Media' Participant Numbers	Q Sort Participant Numbers	Participant Initials
St. Katharine's - Bournemouth	19th May 2011	28		
Rosendale - London	10th May 2011	25		
St. Mark's - Salisbury	28th June 2011	9		
Howells - Cardiff	12th July 2011		3	CC CIJ GMD
St. Mark's - Salisbury	19th July 2011		5	EC FC JT ML RAS*
Woodlands -Salisbury	21st July 2011		3	LC RC SC
Dinton - Wiltshire	9th Nov 2011		6	AB BK JT KS MB TK
		Total: 62	Total: 17	
				Total Participants: 74 *

Figure 4.8. School Visits and Child Participant Numbers

(*5 students from St Mark's took part in both 'Ideal Media' and Q Sort interactions)

All the children within each class took part in the Creative-Reflective first stage drawing-led interactions, whilst during the second stage Q Sort interactions it was not possible, due to time restrictions, to speak to every child in the class. Here participants were either chosen by chance (something that primary school teachers will tend to have a useful mechanism for - in the case of one school for example, lollipop sticks with students names written on a downward facing end were pulled out of a tin), or selected by the teaching staff in light of their availability, and desire to take part. This second means of selection could be considered slightly problematic in that there is a possibility that the teacher may (intentionally or otherwise) have excluded those less likely to 'behave'. This is an intriguing point perhaps when one considers that research projects like this are likely to gain access to schools that

are more open to research, potentially less 'troubled', and that the researcher in turn is quite likely to get to speak with children that are seen to act in a particular 'teacher approved' manner. Broadly speaking it would be naïve to argue that the 'selection' of schools, classes, and children was free of bias.

The researcher was careful to opt out of decisions on which children to interact with, and was quite sure to state that they wanted to meet as near random a selection as possible, not just the most amenable. This plays against a tendency within some research with children to look to work with those participants that might be easier to interact with, or appeared most intriguing to the researcher. Thomson and Hall (2008) for example within one study deliberately selected children they found to be 'talkative and lively' (p.153), as well as those who drew pictures that included the 'interesting, puzzling and diverse'; they also, quite awkwardly perhaps, chose to speak specifically with the 'few Afro-Caribbean children in the school'. In focusing in on those 'louder' participants, and those that seemed of most 'interest' to the researcher, without offering a justifying framework, they weighted their study away from 'quieter' voices, and demonstrated a 'tokenistic' (Hart, 1997; James, 2007) tendency.

It is rare for qualitative studies to stake any claim for statistical representativeness, yet there still appears to be a positivist hangover present in much research, in that 'samples' are expected to be reported, and balanced - for example in relation to class, gender or race. Within this study however it was felt that to break down the sample in this way, could, on one hand, pander to a sense of positivist generalisability, and on the other to get sucked in to conducting research that overly focusses on locating its recipients in relation to whether they are considered 'disadvantaged' or in 'need' of being voiced. The study set out to treat each individual at 'face value' and as meaning-makers in their own right, regardless of any other factor. This is not to say that gender, for example, is not significant, but that this study looks to air a range of views, whoever they may come from.

As well as the 17 interactions with children, 12 children's media practitioners took part in Q Sort interactions. These adult participants (see Figure 4.9 and Appendix 2) hold significant positions within children's media practice. All can be said to create media that spans platform - even if a few were uncomfortable at being defined as creators of cross-platform media. It

is worth reiterating, that with the children’s media production community in the UK being relatively small, in reaching the numbers, and status, of those that are involved here, this study has been given privileged access to some quite notable voices. With the researcher’s background within children’s media practice, participants were either those that the researcher knew directly through practice, or that had been ‘sighted’ as being likely to have something to say on to the study. This mixture of purposive and convenience ‘sampling’ played out well in reaching a useful mix of practitioners - that can be said to span a broad range of children’s media.

Practitioners:	
Anne Brogan	BAFTA and International Emmy winning Executive Producer. Granada and Kindle Entertainment.
Anonymous	Associate Producer. Children’s BBC.
Daniel Leonard	BAFTA winning Vice President, Original Series and Development. Cartoon Network.
Darren Garrett	BAFTA winning Chief Creative. Littleloud Digital Entertainment.
Ellie Haworth	Multi-Platform Development Producer. Children’s BBC.
Estelle Hughes	Channel Controller/Commissioner/Developer. Children’s ITV, Children’s BBC, Disney and 3Line Media.
Frazer Price	BAFTA, Broadcast Awards & Promax winning Promo Producer/Creative Manager. Nickelodeon and Disney.
Jennifer Johnson	Interactive/Games Producer. BBC Children’s and Disney.
Marc Goodchild	BAFTA winning multi-platform Executive/Editorial Lead (BBC North).
Pete Davies	BAFTA winning Series Producer/Interactive Executive. Children’s BBC and Dreammachine Media.
Rebecca Denton	Promax winning and BAFTA nominated Cross-platform Development Producer. Cartoon Network.
Steve Ryde	BAFTA winning children’s entertainment Series Producer. BBC Children’s.

Figure 4.9. List of Practitioner Participants

Ultimately the ‘right participants will always be a function of the research question you’re trying to answer’ (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.71). This study addresses the media preferences of children, and the ways in which producers of media for children understand them. Here then, just as each child within the study can be said to be an ‘expert’ on media for them, each

practitioner can be said to come with expertise on the production of children's media. This purposive approach is seen to be fitting to the conceptualisation behind the Q Sort, in that:

The P set is not random. It is a structured sample of respondents who are theoretically relevant to the problem under consideration; for instance, persons who are expected to have a clear and distinct viewpoint regarding the problem (van Exel, 2005, p.6).

The significant step however is not to just select those that might have 'well-formed opinions' on the matter, but that they should come with 'differing perspectives' (Webler et al., 2009, p.23); 'breadth and diversity are more important than proportionality' (Brown, 1980, p.260). Participants were thus approached in light of their relevance to the matter in hand (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and for their collective ability to offer a variety of positions.

Ethical Considerations

Practitioners were happy, bar one, to be identified by name within the research, and they were free to go 'off the record' at any point (as one participant briefly did). As is common within research with children (Hill, 2005) however, child participants here were anonymised, with no records kept of their full name, and their responses logged against initials only. No contact details were sought and no photographs or video recording of the children were taken/made. The researcher was introduced by first name only and no personal information was provided or elicited. All interactions with children were supervised by a member of staff from each school involved, and the researcher was never alone with a child. The researcher was careful to keep each interaction 'on track', and a policy was put in place to deal with any child protection issues that might emerge during research. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) certification was maintained for the duration of the research, with copies being shared with each school visited (Appendix 3), and the study has abided by the Data Protection Act (1998).

Research Information Sheets were given to, and discussed, with each participant, with one sheet designed for child participants and another for adults (see Appendices 4 and 5). Following the British Psychological Society's (BPS) guidelines on research with children, particular care was taken to 'explain the nature of the research to which participants are being asked to contribute' (2010, p.8), whilst participants were 'given ample opportunity to understand the nature, purpose and anticipated outcomes' of the research (Ibid, p.31). As

the 'ability to give informed consent depends on the quality of the explanation' (Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010, p.177), the language used within the children's Information Sheet was chosen in consultation with a year 6 teacher – and again, under the BPS's guidelines, it was piloted with a child at the lower end to the expected literary scale within the study. The Information Sheet for practitioners adopted a more 'adult' tone, but still remained as straightforward as possible.

A school specific risk assessment was drawn up prior to the study's commencement (see Appendix 6). It was referred to before each individual school visit, and as any changes were perceived to have occurred in the nature of the fieldwork, and its risks, it was amended in an on-going reflexive manner (Gallagher, 2009). There were few perceived significant ethical issues regarding the interviews with adult practitioners, however a separate adult specific risk assessment was maintained throughout the study (see Appendix 7).

Consent and Assent

It has been argued that beyond noting ethical issues within research with children, we should explicitly consider relative 'harm versus benefit' (Alderson & Morrow, 2011), and question whether it is in a child's best interest to participate. In rejecting a strictly deontological argument for addressing the wellbeing of participants, and cautious of those positions that recognise children as necessarily any less capable of expressing their feelings on whether they wish to take part in research, here participants, child and adult alike, were seen to be able to consider the benefits, or otherwise, of taking part in the research for themselves. The weight within research interactions was therefore placed on whether the participant appeared happy to take part. Without school and parental permission being in place of course the research interactions with children would not have happened, ultimately however the decision to take part, or not, was the child's to make, and as such it was felt that they should be given multiple opportunities to not just opt in, but to opt out, of any research interaction. This chimed with those approaches to research with children that look to address their 'assent'.

In line with Bournemouth University's *Research Ethics Code of Practice* (2009) and the BPS's *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (2009 & 2010)), this study explicitly asked for the consent of those that took part in the fieldwork. In particular much care was taken to make sure that child participants were able to offer 'fully informed consent' (Masson, 2000; Leitch, 2008; Gallagher, 2009; Tinson, 2009), and as such the study adopted three separate tiers of consent. The BPS's position (2010) is that researchers should gain consent from school and parent, and assent from children; with assent being recognised as fully informed 'permission' from those that are not legally in the position to provide consent (for example, those under 16 years old). A child's assent then acknowledges their agency within the research, and significantly the choice of whether to take part in research, or not, becomes a positive one, rather than a 'passive' one. Care was taken to thus make sure 'that children (or other potential respondents) [did] not feel obliged to participate' (Masson, 2000, p.40), and that assent was kept 'open' to reassessment and 'continuous negotiation' (Eldén, 2013).

Each participant, child and adult alike, was asked if they 'actively' wished to participate and reminding that they could opt out at any point (as one child Q Sort participant did); whilst the study again followed the BPS guidelines in which to help ensure participants are happy to continue, assent is 'regularly monitored by sensitive attention to any signs, verbal or non-verbal' (2010, p.15). As Lindlof & Taylor suggest, research interactions require the researcher to be a 'sensitive traveller' (2011, p.171), as they remain alert to any discomfort on the part of participants. Here however, there was a clear sense that those that took part in the study seemed to enjoy the process, and no apparent distress was caused to any participant.

Pilots

Pilot of Creative-Reflective 'Ideal Media' Interactions

A two class spanning pilot of the children's first stage 'ideal media' drawing-led interactions was conducted in a school in Bournemouth. These started with a brief presentation by the researcher, and group discussion on what 'media' might mean. In that it can be engaged with in many ways, across multiple platforms, BBC Children's *Deadly 60* was drawn upon as an example. After the introduction children (in table sized groups) were 'briefed' to come up with an idea for a 'live TV show', to then give their show idea a name, and decide which two presenters they might want to present it. They were also asked to draw a picture to help

explain their TV show idea, and then to turn their idea in to “something else”, like a game, or a website, before they then described their concept to the researcher. After reflecting on the outcomes of these interactions it was concluded that they were too leading, in that they started with a media example; and indeed some of the participant’s concepts shared notable similarities with *Deadly 60*. It was decided that within later interactions the researcher would not introduce media as a concept, and what media might mean would instead be seen to emerge from within children’s own understanding and experience.

The way in which the interaction was triggered from a TV perspective was also considered problematic, and thus interactions would ask children to develop their media concept from a number of perspectives (to include television, web and video game), and then swiftly move participant’s away from their initial platform. It was also decided to remove the ‘brief’ of having two presenters, or the need for the idea to be ‘live’, in that these restrictions unnecessarily limited the pallet for participant meaning-making. After one child asked if their work was going to be marked, it was decided that it would be made clear to participants that the drawings were not assessed, and that discussion on the children’s media concepts would be with the researcher, not the teacher or whole class. On looking at the data from these sessions, it seemed fitting to ask participants in future sessions to offer a sense of what was “most important to them” within their concepts – with this approach being introduced to answer researcher fears that they might be drawn to impose their own interpretation. Reflection, alongside one of the school’s teachers, also noted a few structural changes that could be made, for example, to allow room for written expression and longer discussion, as well as to consider working with smaller groups, or individuals, depending on the preference of the children involved.

Pilots of Q Sort Interactions

During an ideal media focussed South East London school visit a Q Sort pilot was conducted that consisted of just nine ‘mock’ Q Set statements, with these statements shaped in light of a school visit the previous week. The pilot interactions suggested that children, and researcher, were competent and comfortable with the relational nature of the sort, but that more care would need to be taken in tuning the language used within the statements and ‘Condition of Instruction’. Another Q Sort pilot was conducted during ideal media

interactions in Salisbury, and here one of the teachers (and later an experienced researcher/media practitioner) was asked to assess and feedback on the Q Set wording before it was finalised. In light of these discussions it was decided to shape statements as if from the voice of one of the child participants; for example “I like media that helps me learn about the world” (See Figure 4.14 and Appendix 1 - Q Set Statements). With the aim being to engage the Q Sorter in more personal reflection than if they had been handed a statement like “Media helps people learn about the world”. It was suggested by the teacher that some participants might need to reflect, within the Q Sort, on examples that were familiar to them, and in the following ‘full’ interactions the researcher encouraged contextualisation of this sort. In addressing the realities of trying to find suitable space for a Q Sort, the decision was also taken at this point to make it so that the Q Sort could be easily portable and be laid out on any available flat surface (and hence the final version featured no board, just movable cards (See Figures 1.2 and 4.6 - Participant’s Completed Q Sort)).

Even though it would be conceptual anathema to many Q Methodologists (Wolf et al. 2011), on visiting the Cardiff school to conduct the first full Q Sort interactions, a group Q Sort was also piloted, as was a sort in which the Q Set cards could be laid out in any shape (an ‘unforced sort’). The group Q Sorts became an unwieldy performative expression of the views of the group’s more vocal children, whilst unforced sorts were seen to let participants ‘off the hook’ when it came to differentiating between positions; interactions lacked for granular points of reflection and inter-relational meaning-making. Some participants just creating a couple of ‘piles’ of under-considered statements, and others a card sort so spread out, that cards only became relational to those immediately to their sides. Here then the ‘forced sort’, even though it could be said to lead participants toward meaning-making against that which would have been made in an ‘unforced sort’ sort, encourages participants toward offering meaning-making distinctions that they might not achieved through other means.

The positive ‘I like...’ or ‘I want...’ nature of the card statements led a small number of children to note that they wanted to agree to more of the statements, than disagree with them. The way whereby the Q Sort scale had been ‘unfixed’ for portability usefully allowed for the Agree/Disagree cards to operate as ‘floating’ across the Q Sort continuum. The centre

0 (zero) point was therefore not considered to be a 'neutral' position, and Agree statements were free to spread in to what might be more neutral space on the Q Sort layout (see Figure 4.7). It is worth noting that this floating scale is not particularly problematic, as most dialogue within the Q Sort interactions was triggered in relation to the cards placed at the most Agree/Disagree end of the continuum, or in light of the participant's further reflection. No claim is made that a card near the middle of the sort comes with any particular value attached to it, and the Q Sort's centre line is not considered a binary 'switch point' between agreement and disagreement. Each point on the continuum is meaningless, except in relation to the statements that sit under it. It is the interrelation between each card that matters.

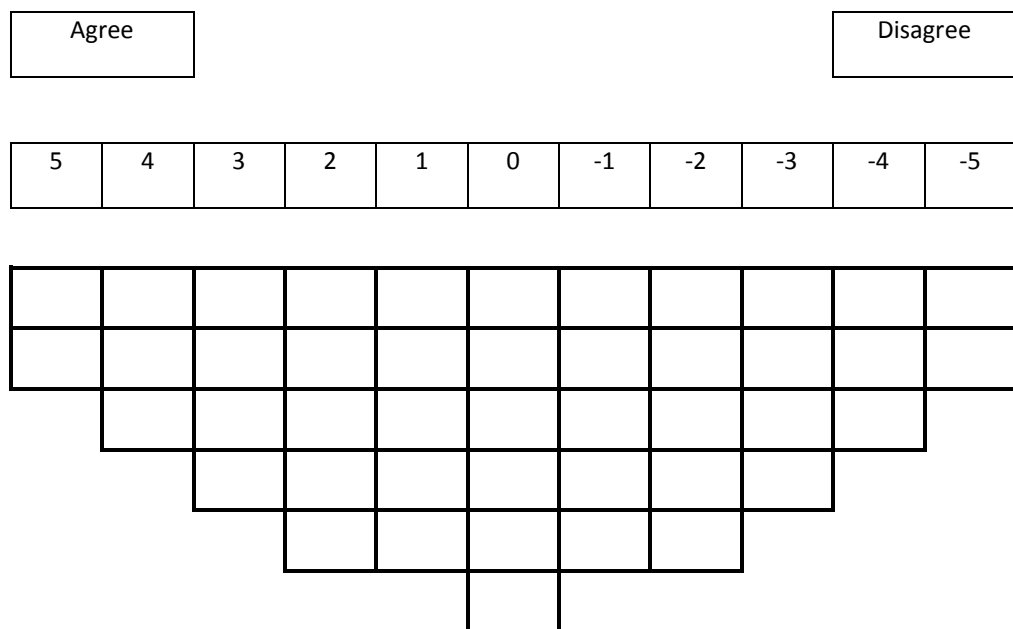


Figure 4.7. Q Sort Distribution Sheet / Layout Template

During the Cardiff group and unforced sort piloting the teacher present stayed particularly focussed on the interactions in a way that appeared to limit the participant's responses to those that seemed teacher 'friendly', and within later Q Sorts the interactions were located so as teachers/school staff (even though they needed to have the participant in sight) would not be in the participant's eye line. The final piloting persuaded the researcher of the appropriateness of the final language selection used in the Q Set and to stick with a consistent 'forced sort' (even when rejecting the statistical need for the sort layout to remain the same across interactions). Most significantly the Q Sort pilots highlighted the value of the 'conversations', not the 'correlations', and that even though the Q Method side of Q

Methodology might be conceptually problematic, Q Technique offered much as a means of bringing participant and researcher together to share views and reflect on media for children.

Settings

All interaction with children happened within schools, with the first stage drawing-led sessions conducted, as class wide exercises, within the participant's day-to-day classroom. The regular teacher staff were present, and children sat according to their normal arrangements. Children worked either in small groups, of between 2 to 4 people, or individually, with discussion with near peers encouraged. This arrangement allowed for the dialogic crystallisation of meaning-making for those that were comfortable to share their ideas in this way, yet also left room for those that preferred to work more privately. In practice participants appeared very keen to work together, or at least discuss together. This individual and group flexibility was viewed as a 'best of both worlds' outcome in that it allowed for more ways in to meaning-making.

Punch noted during school based research that the 'proximity of the desks meant that peer work could easily be seen and copied' (2002, p.332), yet here, as each drawing is not said to represent the 'being' of any unitary child, this was not considered problematic. One class had recently visited a *Doctor Who* exhibition, whilst participants in another appeared quite fascinated by eBay. Close reading of the outcomes from these particular interactions reveals a tendency toward sci-fi and buying and selling, but across the interactions as a whole, these responses can be said to provide a broadening of perspectives – as it fitting to the construction of a Q Concourse. The researcher was again focussed on accepting the research interaction at face value, and avoided trying to create a (what would inevitably be incomplete, and perhaps distracting) background account of children's media engagement. The study looks at children's stated preferences on media, for them. Not their actual media use.

Space for the second stage Q Sort interactions was negotiated ad hoc on arrival at each school, with a balance made between finding a room that offered quiet and a level of privacy, but was also in sight of a member of the school's staff. Freeman and Mathison note that:

One condition of working with children is that researchers generally have little control over the setting in which contact with children will occur. Sometimes these spaces are conducive to individual or group-based activities because they offer privacy and adequate space, tables for drawing, or rugs or couches for gathering. Other times the space is small and uninviting or loud and lacking privacy (2009, p.54).

This resonates with the experience here, whereby interactions happened variously in the corners of classrooms, music rooms, annexes, playgrounds, halls, hallways, and in one school the Q Sorts took place between tea breaks in a very small staffroom (that had little more than a couple of seats and a kettle in it). Sometimes this meant a teacher sat in on an interaction (as they caught up on their marking for example) or a teaching assistant was dedicated to the task. When staff supervision was 'close at hand', or the interaction in the day-to-day class, the participant was positioned so as to not face the member of staff or other pupils, with the aim being to allow room for more uninterrupted and reflective meaning-making, and minimise 'classroom like' responses.

The school setting is of course not a neutral one and children's 'responses in interviews undertaken in educational settings are influenced by contextual systems which extend far beyond the immediate interaction between interviewer and participants' (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p.148). Institutional spaces, like schools, 'embody certain cultural and social norms [and] reinforce certain modes of relating at the exclusion of others' (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p.55); responses with a school setting may well be weighted toward the ways of thinking encouraged within them. Research interactions thus came loaded with assumptions, and habits, firstly on the part of the researcher, who operated within the established norms for adult behaviour within a school setting, and secondly on the part of the participant, who may see an adult researcher as akin to a teacher, and therefore assume they come 'looking' for a certain way of being and responding.

Within research settings children may expect there to be a correct answer (McWilliam, et al., 2009), and children in turn then strive to supply education friendly, or adult sanctionable, responses. As one of the practitioners, Ellie Howarth (who has since retrained as a Primary School teacher), suggested during her Q Sort, children's responses depend "on the context in which you ask them [...] if you ask them in school they are already in a kind of learning mind set". It is possible therefore to argue that any skew towards 'learning' within the study's

outcomes may be due to the research interactions with children being conducted within a school setting, yet intriguingly there is little mention of 'teachers', 'school' or other markers of the educational setting within the data. A school may appear to be a problematic setting for research, yet school is clearly part of a child's everyday life. It is no less 'authentic' than any other place they may operate within, and indeed, for much of the year children's experiences are fundamentally shaped around it. Taking research in to the home, or any of the other spaces children occupy, would reveal other, just as significant, questions.

The Q Sort interactions with practitioners took place in a variety of settings. The choice of location was left to the participant - allowing them to select spaces they would be comfortable within and were readily accessible to them. The majority (7) were conducted in offices, whilst a few (2) took place in coffee shops and (3) in participant's homes. As with the children's Q Sorts it was felt that the interactions would benefit from being conducted in spaces that would allow for uninterrupted and reflective meaning-making. The home settings were by nature private, the office interactions all happened (out of ear shot of colleagues) in private rooms/spaces, and within the coffee shop locations, private and quiet paces were selected in advance.

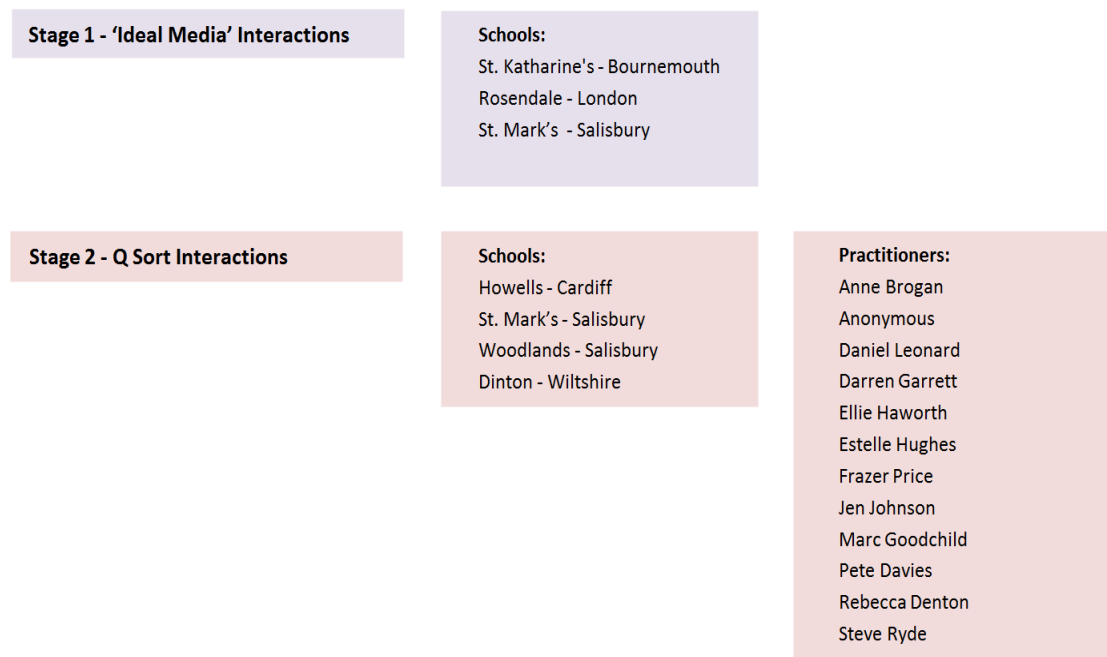


Figure 4.10. Summary of Stages & Participants

Research Interactions

Stage 1. 'Ideal Media' Drawing-led Interactions

The Creative-Reflective first stage interactions with children spanned May to June 2011. Even though the researcher tried to maintain a level of consistency within interactions (Figure 4.11), due to variations in school facilities and approaches, the confidence of the researcher and, of course, the children involved, they differed slightly in shape across each of the three school visits.

Each session started with an introduction to the whole class. Using the research Information Sheet as a guide the nature of the research was discussed and participants were reminded that they were under no obligation to take part, and were free to opt out at any point. They were also asked if they were happy for the researcher to keep an audio recording of researcher-participant dialogue and copies of what was created. With Dictaphones far from unusual in an educational setting (Hatch, 2002) participants seemed comfortable with this. Once the introduction was complete participants were then tasked to "come up with an idea for..." either a television show, a website or a video game, and to draw a picture to help explain it. Plain paper and drawing materials were provided. The participants were told that

their drawings were not being assessed, and that as the researcher was interested in their opinions, not facts, whatever they came up with was 'right'.

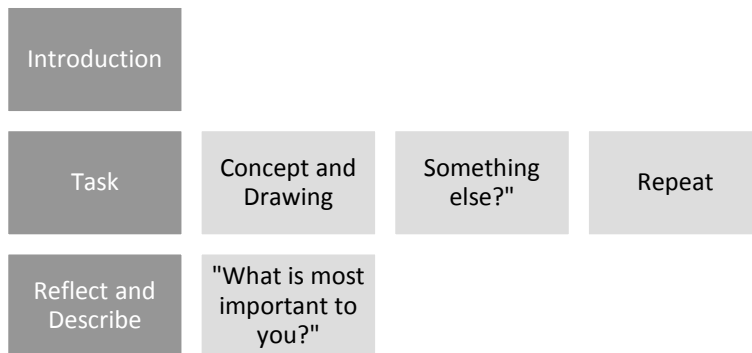


Figure 4.11. 'Ideal Media' Interaction Procedure

Participants were encouraged to come up with any concept that would appeal to them, and that it could be about anything. They were free to give it a name, and to write on their drawing if it helped explain the idea. They were encouraged to discuss their ideas with peers and with the researcher as he moved around the classroom. In doing this it was seen to be effective to crouch down next to the tables in which the children sat, so as to be at, or beneath, their eye-lines, and to start each dialogue 'through' the picture. This allowed the participants to focus on the concept and less so on the researcher, and looked to diminish researcher-participant power differentials.

Once participants had developed a concept to the extent that it could be explained clearly, the researcher then asked them to turn their idea in to "something else". A concept that might, for example, have started as a video game, could become a TV show, or anything else the participant might decide upon. As soon as the participants had offered a clear idea for how this latest iteration of their concept might look, they were again asked to consider what else they could turn it in to. This "what else can you do with your idea?" cycle continued until the concepts appeared exhausted, with the children's ideas travelling out in to some quite intriguing spaces ('bobble hats', martial arts camps, doll's houses, and salt & pepper sets included). In the example shared here (Figure 4.12) one participant initially came up with an idea for a TV comedy game show, *The Rubynator*, in which contestants were placed in 'impossible' situations. The participant then went on to develop the idea for a website where

contestants could compete against a Rubynator Robot, and then a physical board game that mimics the premise of the original TV show (Figure 4.13).

The last stage of the Creative-Reflective sessions involved the participants being asked to describe their idea in its entirety, and in a significant step as far as understanding the participant meaning-making, and so as to avoid any 'mistranslation', children were also asked "what [was] most important" to them within their concept? At the end of the interactions the children's drawings were collected by the researcher and thanks aired to all. There was a clear sense, as expressed by the children, and later passed on by teaching staff, that the participants enjoyed being asked their views in this way, and the process as a whole.

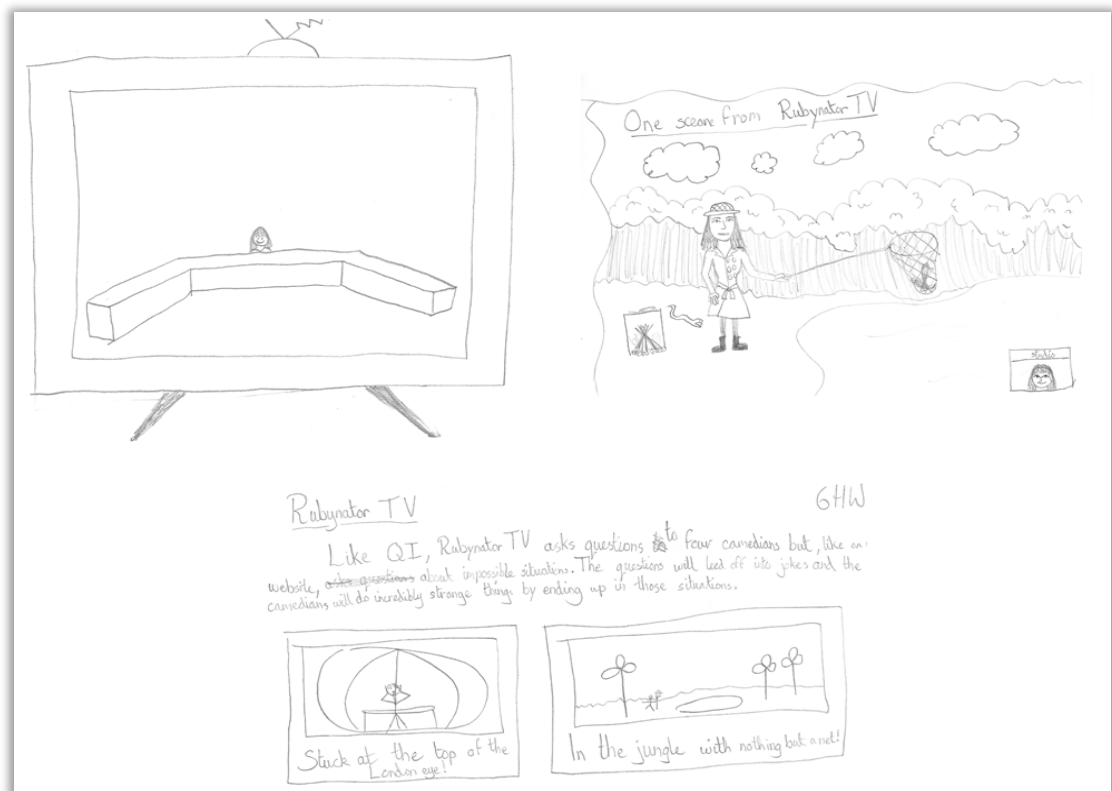


Figure 4.12. Example 'Ideal Media' Drawings. Combined Images of TV Game Show The Rubynator

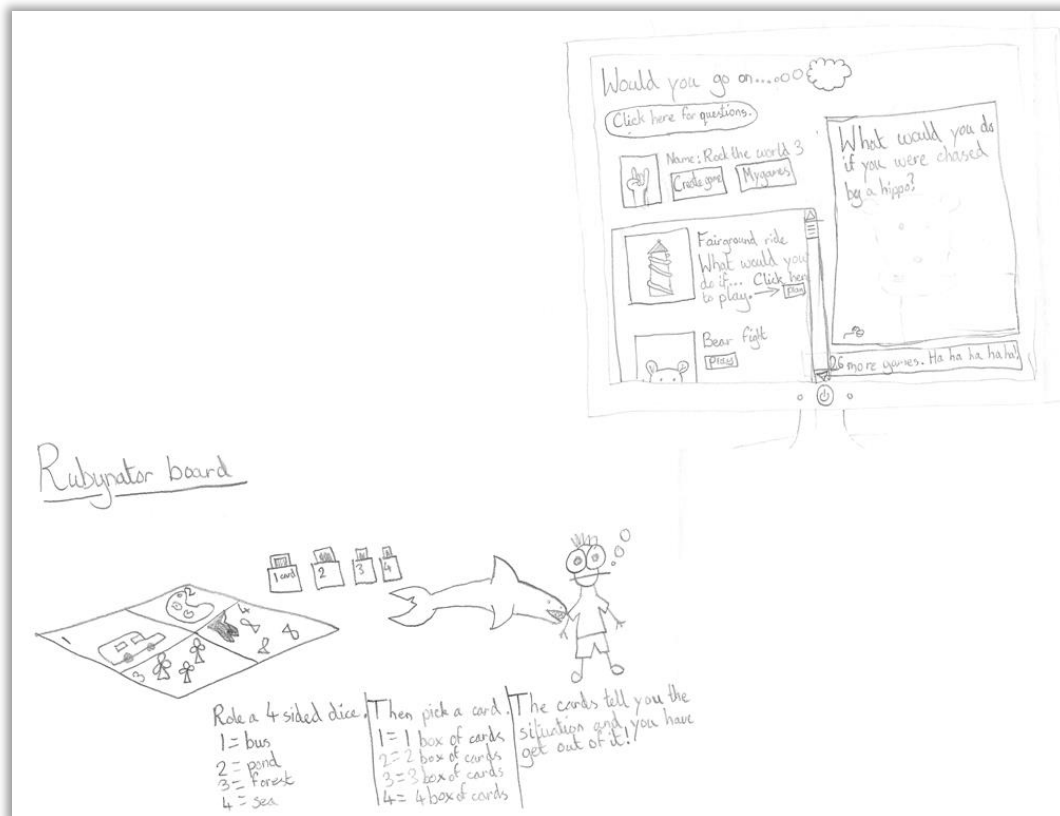


Figure 4.13. Example 'Ideal Media' Drawings. Board Game and Website for *The Rubynator*

Stage 2. Q Sort Interactions

The first stage drawing-led interactions were transcribed by the researcher, and as discussed in the Analysis to follow, the outcomes shaped the Concourse from which the 44 card Q Set was constructed (Figure 4.14). The Q Set cards were numbered and printed on separate 2.5 x 3 inch horizontal aspect ratio cards using a conventional San-serif font (Ariel, 15 point). The 'Agree' and 'Disagree' cards, +5 to -5 cards (see Figure 1.2 and 4.6 - Participant's Completed Q Sort), and the cards that explained the 'Conditions of Instruction' were printed out in the same manner.

	Statements
1	I wish I could be a presenter on my favourite media production
2	I wish I could be in the audience, or a guest, on my favourite media production
3	I want to see people like me featured in the media I use
4	I want to see people like my friends or family featured in the media I use
5	I like media that allows me to interact with other people
6	I want to interact with the presenters or characters in the media I use
7	If I like a particular media production I will tell my friends about it
8	I like to do other things at the same time as using media
9	I want to decide what happens during a media production
10	I want to have a say in how a story ends
11	I like media productions in which I can buy or sell things
12	I like media that allows me to share what I think or feel with others
13	I like media that allows me to share the things I've made with others
14	I like media that inspires me to make things
15	I like media that helps me learn about the world
16	I like media that teaches me useful things
17	I like media that helps me learn new things
18	I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
19	I like media that features the things that are most important to me
20	I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
21	I like media that features famous people
22	The presenters or characters in my favourite media are like friends to me
23	I like media that features a great story
24	I like media that helps me escape from my day to day world
25	I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before
26	I like media that shows me places that are similar to the ones I know
27	I like media that shows me magical things
28	I like media that makes me laugh
29	I like media that helps me relax
30	Sometimes it's OK if the media I use makes me sad
31	I want to be surprised by media
32	I like scary media
33	I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
34	I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
35	I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
36	I like media where people are rewarded for getting things right or behaving well
37	I like media where people get to win
38	I like media where people fail or lose
39	I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty
40	I like media where I get to compete with others
41	I like media where I get to play games
42	I like media where I get to play with my friends
43	I like to collect toys, trading cards or other stuff that is linked to my favourite media
44	If the media I am using includes a competition, I like to see how I am doing compared to others

Figure 4.14. List of Q Set Statements

Q Sort interactions with children spanned July to November 2011 and took approximately 20 minutes each (even though a few ran shorter due to the necessities of the school day). Each Q Sort started with a rapport building discussion, before turning to a brief introduction and explanation of the reasons behind the interaction. As in the first stage participants were reminded that they were under no obligation to take part, were free to opt out at any point and that there were no right or wrong answers - it was their opinion that counted. They were also asked if they were happy for the researcher to keep an audio recording of researcher-participant dialogue and a photographic record of the resultant Q Sort.

The procedure of the Q Sort was discussed, and so the participant had a sense of how the cards would look when the sort was complete, they were shown the Distribution Sheet (that would later be used to record the positions in which the participant placed the Q Set cards) (Figure 4.7). The grid position number cards were laid out from +5 to - 5, and the 'Condition of Instruction', as follows, was read out, and to ensure comprehension, discussed:

“For this study I am very interested in your opinions on the creation and development of media that is made for children”

Watts & Stenner recommend not only running thorough the Condition of Instruction with participants, but also keeping it in sight as 'you need to be certain that they are all answering the same question' (2012, p.56), and here a print out of the Condition of Instruction was kept at hand, and occasionally referred to for clarity. A pre-printed card to help describe what was meant by media within the terms of the study was also kept at hand for the duration of each sort, this read:

“By media, I mean any video, pictures, games, words or sound that you might access through your television, computer, phone or games console

An example of a media production could be something like *Deadly 60* or *Doctor Who*”

This allowed the researcher to not only feel confident that participants were all addressing the same Condition of Instruction, but that there was also a level of confidence that children, the researcher and the practitioner participant's understanding of what is meant by media within this study was broadly consistent – and significantly that what media might 'mean' was shaped through the participant's experience.

This perhaps turns us to note shifts in how children have engaged with media across the time of the study. For example the tablet, now in more than half of children's homes (Ofcom, 2013), was effectively unheard of at the time of the initial research interactions. This shift in media use might have been problematic if the research had been platform specific, yet the interactions here were shaped around a wider conceptualisation of media. Here then it matters not that a child might, or might not, have access to a smart phone for example, the significant point was that they could 'imagine' themselves in to media for them. There was thus no need to 'know' what media technologies those within the study had access to, or what they did with them. Ultimately it was the creation of the 'ideal media' concept, that mattered, not whether that ideal could be realistically enacted within the technology that the child actually had access to at that point.

Once the researcher had laid down the 'Agree' and 'Disagree' cards a 'pre-sort' was conducted to help the participant familiarise themselves with the spread of statements and create some early structure to their meaning-making (Figure 4.15 - Q Sort 'Pre-sort' in Progress). Here the researcher referred to a basic instruction aide memoir (printed out on to the Distribution Sheet) as follows:

1. Sort the cards in to three piles. Those you agree with, those you disagree with, and those that you feel neutral or unsure about

Typically the participant read out the card statements as they ran through this process. On one occasion however, when reading confidence stood in the way, the researcher joined in.

Once the participant had finished laying the cards in to three piles, they were then asked to complete the full rank-ordering Q Sort (Figures 1.2 and 4.6), and here under the language of the aide memoir, and with reference to the Distribution Sheet, they were asked to:

2. Then place the cards on to the table in the above shape with those that you agree most with to the left and those you agree least with to the right. It may help to start with those that you have the strongest feeling about

Here the participant was asked to start with the two most Agree and Disagree cards, and then work inwards from there.

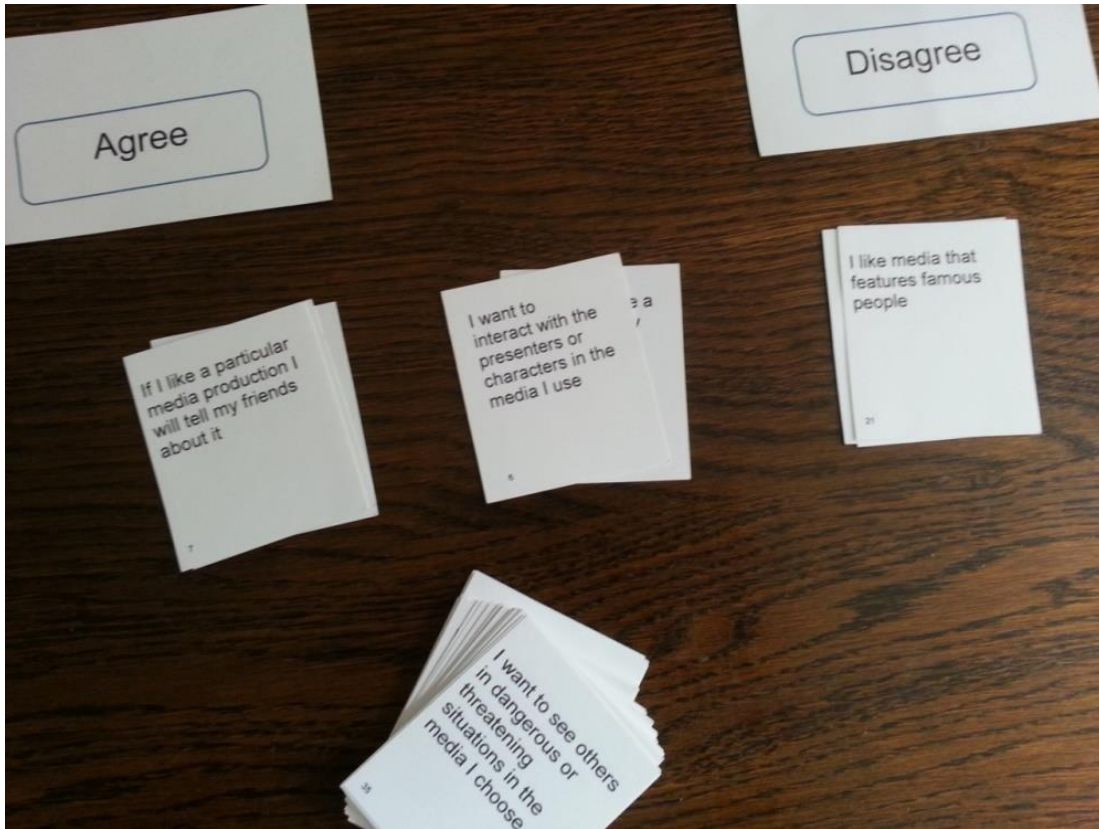


Figure 4.15. Q Sort 'Pre-Sort' in Progress

With 'Agree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral/Unsure' Piles.

As cards were laid out opportunities for discussion and explanation were plentiful, and as such the researcher 'interviewed' each participant as they conducted their sort. The structure of the sort allowed dialogue to remain 'open' as participants were asked to explain what they "were thinking" by their particular choices. When the sort was complete the participants were asked to reflect on their choices, and re-sort if they wished in light of that reflection. Discussion then followed, with particular emphasis on the most 'Agree' and 'Disagree' end of the continuum, and any particular clustering of relational meaning-making that came to light. For example one such dialogue began with the researcher saying the following:

"So let me ask you a few questions then if I can about what you were thinking when you were doing this, because it's very interesting. Let's start over this end on the agree end. I like media that inspires me to make things. What were you thinking about there?"

Here then the emphasis was on asking the participant to explain their choices, rather than assuming that the card position in itself can act alone to represent the participant's position.

As a sort progresses the location of each newly placed card tends to draw on those other cards as already positioned on the Q Sort grid. Participants thus build an iterative awareness of how their views fit together in a relational map (Schrøder et al., 2003), with the researcher in turn following these relational ‘trails’ as trigger to dialogue. Once discussion on the participant’s more ‘significant’ statements had run its course, they were asked if there were any other statements, however positioned, that they wished to discuss. Before interactions were drawn to a final close participants were asked if they were happy that the Q Sort expressed their views on the subject and were given the opportunity, if they wished, to make any final changes. Children were thanked for sharing their time and views, and from their responses they appeared to find the Q Sort process unproblematic and enjoyable. In particular they appeared to appreciate the game/challenge like nature of the card sort and became quite immersed in the process.

Even though the researcher has many years’ experience (in media practice settings) of interacting with children of the age within this study, the rationale behind the interactions here was substantially different, and hence they felt the need to undo an impulse to ‘direct’ and ‘entertain’ participants. This familiarity with working with children did not mean that there was no trepidation in advance of the interactions, or moments of awkwardness along the way, but the research tools did seem to offer a ‘safety net’ of sorts.

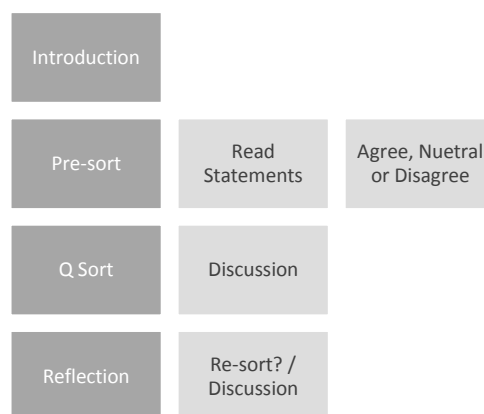


Figure 4.16. Q Sort Interaction Procedure

The Q Sort interactions with the children's media practitioners spanned July 2011 to March 2012, and as such ran mostly in parallel with the children's Q Sort interactions (of July to November 2011). These interactions took approximately an hour each, and as such were much longer than those with children. This was, in part, due to adult practitioners not operating within the segmented time constraints of a school day, but also maybe, due to how practitioners are more versed in discussing and explaining their positions on children's media. The practitioner Q Sorts may have been longer and triggered more reflection, but with this study seeing children and adults as equal actors, the Q Sort interactions were designed to broadly operate in the same way for both groups (regardless of perceived abilities). The actual procedure followed during the Q sort interactions was the same for the adult participants as it was for children, significantly however practitioners were asked to shape their responses 'from the perspective of a 10 or 11 year old child' (and a reminder card was placed on the table to this effect).

The Q Set within this study was constructed from within the viewpoints of the first stage child participants, and these viewpoints formed the 'terms of engagement' for subsequent interactions with both children and adult children's media practitioners, in which child participants used the subjectivities of others to help shape and reflect on their own position, and adult participants used the subjectivities as the basis for reflection on the outlook of their 'audience'. The children's media practitioners were thus asked to arrange the Q Set statements from the perspective of someone else; they went through a 'two step' process in offering their own views, on the views of others, with this approach at significant variance with normative Q Methodology (Wolf at al. 2011). Traditionally Q Methodology invites participants to arrange statements from their own perspective, but here those that create media for children were asked to arrange statements in light of what they thought a ten or eleven-year-old child might say - to construct a sort through the eyes of their imagined 'child audience'. This added 'layer' of thinking triggered occasional discussion on more 'meta' matters, like the language chosen within the Q Set. Children interestingly, in directly being asked on their own views, did not however tend to reflect 'outside the sort'.

The adult participants appeared to have little difficulty seeing the Q Sort from 'their audiences' perspective. One practitioner, Darren Garret, did however describe the process

as “tricky” in that it was necessary to “get your own prejudices out of it” by moving past reflecting on one’s own childhood, whilst another, anonymous, participant struggled to reconcile a perspective beyond her own gender, when she suggested that she couldn’t “think like a boy”. Anne Brogan suggested that some of the Q Set statements might represent too adult a position, for example she questioned whether the statement ‘I want to be surprised by media’ was overly analytical.

“It’s a question people who work in the media ask themselves all the time, what’s surprising about this? What’s different? What’s new? So it’s not so much that I don’t think that kids fundamentally do want to be surprised some of the time, but I’d be surprised if they had analysed that desire, that need, in the way it’s phrased”.

Here Anne touched on one of the research’s main struggles, and in particular in the construction of the Q Set, of trying to work within the language and ‘conceptual space’ of children. Intriguingly though, she might have implicated practitioners as recognising its audience as being unversed, or even incapable, of reflecting on its own media engagement and preferences.

At this point there may appear to be some basis for comparison between the child participant and media practitioner perspectives on the matter in hand, but it is worth reminding ourselves that children and practitioners, although reflecting on the same body of media ‘ideals’, are undertaking a conceptually different act, and this would undermine any attempt to overly validate direct comparison. In some ways the analysis and discussion that follows does, perhaps inevitably, tend towards the comparative at times, but this thought is carefully framed as heuristically constructed description, rather than as ‘findings’.

The Q Sort interactions with children operated as a trigger to brief commentary on their card sort choices, whilst for the adults, it worked more as a spring board to reflection across their wider practice. The practitioner sorts appeared highly effective in triggering dialogue, and having something physical, from the audience, to take into the interaction made for a far more ‘playful’ time than was perhaps expected. The sorts took a measure of pressure off of practitioners to offer instant answers, as well as helping the researcher, who was well versed in ‘media interviews’, but not academic ones, find their feet. As suggested elsewhere in this thesis the interactions with the practitioners could easily have been designed as

conventional interviews, with a pre-written list of questions, as prescribed by the researcher. However through asking practitioners to engage with a body of subjectivities shaped from within interactions with children, it was possible, in part, to bypass the 'authority' of the researcher and locate the practitioners within the same body of meaning-making as the child participants. The Q Sorts here then operated as semi-structured interviews, in which the focus, or 'questions', were negotiated between the children engaged in the ideal media interactions, the participants (both adult and child) within the Q Sort interactions, and the researcher.

Analysis

The following sets out the analytical strategy used across the study, before moving on to map out the coding process. Data analysis spanned two distinct stages, firstly where the outcomes from the drawing-led interactions were coded through to the Q Set, and secondly where the outcomes of the Q sort interactions were coded towards shaping the study's 'categories of description'.

Across both stages of analysis pre-coding data familiarisation looked to get a sense of the respective field of meaning. Following Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological approach (2009), each record of participant interaction, be that drawing or Q Sort layout data, was considered in its entirety, before any attempts were made to break down meaning into codes and then categories. This delayed encoding helped to keep meaning-making as open and inductive as the act of coding will allow. Here the researcher initially looking for 'repetition' in the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) before attempting to draw together structures that might 'interconnect the key parts of the data' (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.266) and reveal the returning 'lived understanding structures' (Giorgi, 2009). No coding templates were applied across the first stage drawing-led interactions – the open codes adopted emerged from within the data (not in light of any particular conceptual position). The second stage Q Sort interactions were coded in light of the Q Sorts and open coded.

'A priori' approaches to coding may appear to offer a useful means of handling large amounts of data, but in the pre-visualisation of codes one is not only awkwardly skewing how they represent data, but also restricting meaning-making to the epistemological and ontological framework under which the pre-ordained codes were created. Even the practice of naming codes and categories can separate data, which was once linked and meaningful, in to separate bodies that no longer communicate with each other (Bazeley, 2009). Rather than adopt an approach that looked for early 'lumps' of meaning (that might solidify early coding), following Tracy (2013), data were 'fractured' in to multiple codes that could be re-combined as the coding process continued. A highly iterative approach was adopted, whereby codes and categories remained open to review and reflection, and were regularly created, split and combined. Coding was shaped around malleable key words, rather than long (and perhaps harder to re-assess) description; with the ongoing refinement of codes being seen to avoid any unwieldy proliferation in their numbers (Fielding & Lee, 1998). The researcher here remained particularly cautious of how coded data can become decontextualized and fragmented (Catterall & Maclaren, 1997; Buston, 1997; Fielding & Lee, 1998; Reynolds, 2003), and as such avoided reassessing coding in isolation of the source data.

Coding Sheets were created and maintained during both stages of coding; these defined each code and, where necessary, listed an example (Appendix 8). Data were 'taken at face value', with description, as provided by the child participants, outranking any researcher interpretation. During the first stage coding the drawn visual artefacts acted as aide memoir, and to help 'sense check' understanding, but the coding itself only drew on that which was directly expressed by the participants. The second stage coding was Q Sort layout led, but an additional open cycle of coding helped to ensure that meaning-making outside of the participant's most strongly felt Q Sort views was not missed.

Cycles of manual and computer assisted coding were used for both the first and second stages of the study. Manual coding allowed a more tactile connection with the data whilst the computer assisted coding helped in the creation of a more structured reading. Each approach allowed different ways in to same data, but there was no sense under which one approach was recognised as being able to validate the outcomes of the other, but more so the aim was to look for what might have been missed.

The computer assisted coding (using the proprietary qualitative data analysis software NVivo in this case) allowed the many hours of unwieldy transcripts and Q Sorts to be handled with relative ease, and the study benefited from the indexing, sorting and retrieval afforded by the software (Bazeley, 2013). Here the cycles of computer assisted coding usefully allowed for codes, and the connections between them, to be built, un-built and re-built, as well as those connections to be 'visualised' in the making, as codes were drawn in to sub-categories and categories (or 'conceptual groups' (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Even though the computer assisted coding may have offered advantages in terms of access and management, no 'auto-coding' or 'word frequency' lists were used, for fear of distancing the researcher from the data, and maybe triggering a more quantitative response.

The search for 'repetition' may be at the heart of the coding process, but there is a fear that this search can become little more than an act of quantifying data, and we should thus remain alert to a potential 'coding trap' (Bazeley, 2013) in which we become fascinated by the coding, to the detriment of conceptualisation and reflection. During the coding, consolidation and categorisation attention was of course paid to the 'quantity' of meaning-making, through reference to the number of Q Sort participants coded against a particular statement for example. This 'quantifying' however was seen to point towards areas of potential interest, rather than being a vector for 'fixed' meaning. The categories of description as shared on within this study have effectively been mapped across from those perspectives the participants considered to be most significance within Q sort interactions, but coding remained alert to the possibility that other meaning-making could 'break in' to the categories.

Coding as a process looks toward creating categories that according to Patton (1990) are judged under the dual criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity; with the first criterion referring to the extent to which a category holds together, and the second to how it sits as distinct from other categories. Seeing differences between categories as clear and finalised may however break connections within the data, and misses the many different ways whereby categories can be constructed. It may be possible to construct a category that holds a sense of homogeneity unto itself, but it would be perhaps strange to then assume the meaning-making as located within that category could sit in no other. This study

therefore rejects any sense that heterogeneous categories can be constructed, or that coding and categorisation can be anything other than 'fuzzy' (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and cross-cutting. There is thus no 'unique solution' (Ibid) or right answer.

The first stage's coding happened across the summer of 2011, whilst the coding of the second stage Q Sort interactions spanned 2012 to 2013, with there being long pauses between periods of engagement with the data. This meant that the researcher was free to travel through cycles of re-acquaintance with the study, whereby they could reorder, re-label, 'code on' and 'play' with the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). This opportunity to live with the data, after the 'excitement' of the fieldwork had dissipated, appeared to offer a means of cutting through some early conceptual and coding assumptions.

However systematic and open to participant voice the analysis ultimately strived to be, the researcher is implicated as the final arbiter on what is coded forward, and it is thus worth repeating that there are many other ways in which the research interactions could have been coded. Accepting the tensions that play out between description and interpretation here, the researcher takes 'responsibility' for each choice made within the analysis. To help minimise any explicit researcher bias however, and to provide a measure of confidence checking (or 'analyst triangulation' (Patton, 2015, p.661)), as well as help highlight any meaning-making that might have been overlooked, an experienced qualitative researcher was invited in to assess the first stage coding that led to the formation of the Concourse and Q Set statements. The coding and categories as constructed from the second stage Q Sort interactions were also assessed by the same confidence checking researcher, and at this point a second experienced researcher (who was unfamiliar with the research to this point) was invited in to assess the analysis.

Coding

The following maps out the cycles of coding as applied across the two stages of the fieldwork (see Figure 4.17 - Summary of Coding Cycles), and what these cycles looked like in practice.

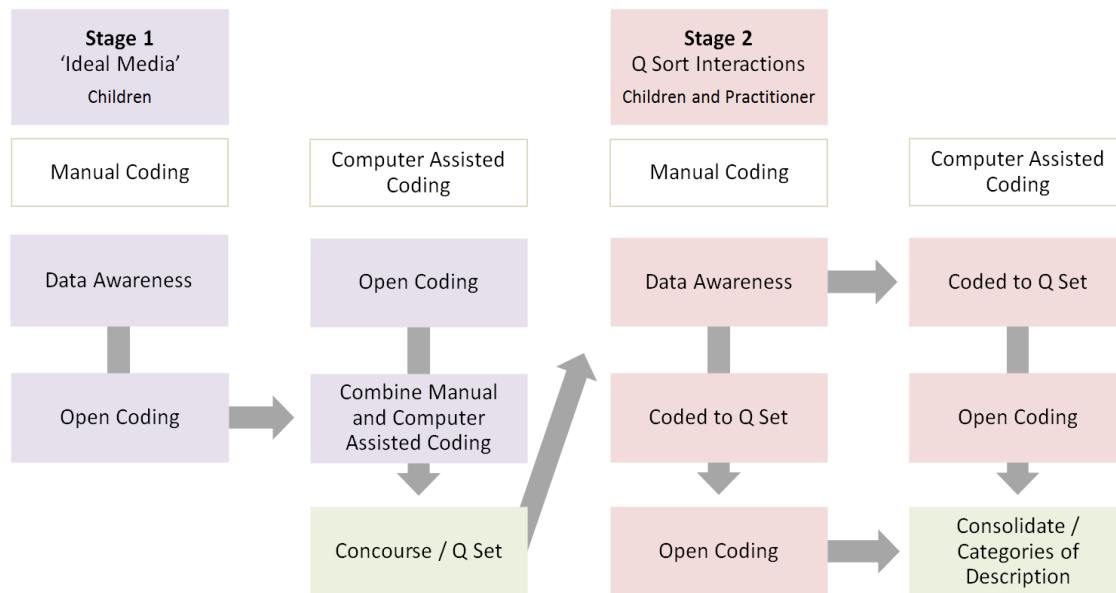


Figure 4.17. Summary of Coding Cycles

Stage 1 - Coding from 'Ideal Media' Drawing-Led Interactions to Q Set

Following the imperative of Q Technique the first stage's cycles of coding looked to hold on to a broad field of meaning-making, rather than 'code down'. After a pass for data 'awareness', the first cycle consisted of manual line-by-line open coding across transcripts, drawings, and research notes, followed by a cycle to help construct a 'working' coding sheet (as well as to build a 'rule for inclusion' for each code). A third manual cycle of open coding was conducted to construct working categories. Computer assisted open coding was then employed and the outcomes combined with that of the manual coding. These then formed the Concourse from which the Q Set was constructed. (See Appendix 9 – Stage 1 Manual Coding; Appendix 10 – Stage 1 NVivo Coding; Appendix 11 – Stage 1 Combined Manual and NVivo Coding).



Figure 4.18. Example 'Ideal Media' Drawing. *Buzz the Question*

To help map out the first stage coding process, from the drawing led interactions through to the construction of the Q Set, we turn here by means of illustration to an ideal media example, *Buzz the Question*, as created by a group of three children (Figure 4.18. Example 'Ideal Media' Drawing). These children developed their idea after being prompted, in this case, to create a TV show, which they were then asked to turn in to 'something else' (whether that be a website, a game, or anything else they could think of). They initially described their idea as:

"a quiz show for children and there's two groups, one of girls and one of boys, and they have... and the two presenters ask them questions and whoever does the buzzer first they get to answer the question. If they get it wrong they have to go to the middle and get goo poured all over them" (Appendix 12).

The participants drew themselves, competing against classmates, in to the image they created for their quiz show. They composed a theme song for *Buzz the Question*, and a constructed a list of 29 other media/physical expressions of their concept (including models of the presenters, a studio doll's house, 'goo' shooter guns and themed first aid kits). They also created a list of ways in which to access their quiz show - that included mobile devices, games consoles, computers and television.

Initial familiarisation with the *Buzz the Question* (drawings, transcript and notes) data might have suggested that codes would emerge around friendship, identity, embarrassment, collecting, fun, winning, or a sense of jeopardy. In light of engaging with the rest of the first stage data however coding thought turned to include sharing, creating and connecting, 'real' and 'fantasy' distinctions, celebrity, and belonging and ownership. Subsequent computer assisted open coding also introduced thought around competition, knowledge and learning, play and gaming, buying and selling, audience participation, and control and agency (Appendix 13 - NVivo Coding Strip - *Buzz the Question*). Significantly however, when those that created *Buzz the Question* were asked what was the most important thing to them within their concept, they suggested that it was the opportunity to be able to "apply to be on the show", and therefore care in particular was taken to code this meaning-making forward. The participant's views here can be recognised in a number of the Q Set statements (examples being 1. "I wish I could be a presenter on my favourite media production" and 2. "I wish I could be in the audience, or a guest, on my favourite media production").

This process, as expressed in relation to *Buzz the Question*, was followed across the rest of the first stage coding, with the manually developed and computer assisted codes being combined. This combined coding, under five 'higher order' codes, was seen as the Concourse from which the 44 Q set statements were constructed (See Appendix 1 - Q Set - Card Statements; Appendix 11 - Stage 1 Combined Manual and NVivo Coding; Appendix 14 - Stage 1 'Ideal Media' to Q Set Statements in relation to Combined Coding).

Counter to the instincts of much qualitative coding, no attempt was made at this point to 'distil' meaning to that which appeared 'dominant', or of most conceptual interest. Instead much care was taken to feed (via the Q Set) as broad a spread of the children's meaning-making as possible in to the next stage of the research. The aim was to remove unnecessary repetition, not edit down, whilst a number of statements that expressed similar positions (or overlaps) were included. This approach is not common within Q Methodology, but with most Q research being conducted with adults, it was felt that some 'near' repetition would offer a useful sense of 'internal validity' to each Q Sort. If for example a participant placed two similarly focussed statements at opposite ends of the layout grid then there is a possibility that they struggled to comprehend either a statement or the nature of the card sort's Agree

to Disagree continuum. In standing against explicit data reduction the coding remained cross-cutting, and with data not essentialised down to just one code, a Q Set statement like “I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world” could be seen to relate to a number of coding possibilities (for example, learning, narrative/character or celebrity).

Within a few of the interactions there was some sense of awareness on media platform and of their various affordances. This thought was not coded forward in to the Concourse explicitly however, as this was considered to be a potential outcome of the participants being asked to come up with a platform specific ‘idea for a TV show’, or ‘an idea for a website’, and so forth. Here the decision was taken to keep any mention of any specific platform to a minimum within the construction of Q Set statements, with ‘media’ referred to generally, rather than in relation to any particular platform. Some statements, like ‘I like media where I get to play games’ could perhaps be said to encourage thought around certain platforms, but, to allow room for meaning-making to drift where it will, the statements were left broadly ‘platform agnostic’.

Stage 2 – Coding from Q Sort Interactions to Categories of Description

Unlike in the first stage, the second stage’s cycles of coding led to a measure of ‘data reduction’, as layers of coding were built towards the creation of ‘thematic’ categories of description. This coding started with a manual data ‘awareness’ pass across the participant’s collective Q Sort grid layouts and transcripts, with the Q Sort based interactions having been transcribed verbatim (half by the researcher and half by a professional transcriber).

During a second manual cycle data were coded against the Q Set statements, before it was then open coded, and, in a third cycle, a working coding sheet constructed. This third cycle was undertaken to try and temporarily disconnect coding from the original Q Set statements and ‘open up’ the coding to that meaning-making that might have emerged outside of the Q Set. During the next cycle computer assisted coding was employed against the Q Set statements, whilst in the fifth cycle open computer assisted coding was again used. A final

cycle of coding was undertaken to look back at the first stage data, with the aim being to pick up any meaning-making that might have been left behind.

The Q Sort led coding paid particular attention to those positions in which participants could be said to hold ‘stronger’ views, with these stronger views being recognised as where statements were placed under either the +5, +4, +3 or -5, -4, -3 positions on the Q Sort continuum. This usefully allowed analysis to focus in on those statements that appeared of most significance to the participants. Looking at the Q Sort for KS for example (Figure 4.19) we see how their most strongly agreed with statements, like 28 and 15 (‘I like media that makes me laugh’ and ‘I like media that helps me learn about the world’), would have been coded forward, as would their most strongly disagreed with statements like 27 and 33 (‘I like media that shows me magical things’ and ‘I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose’). The Q Sort statement led coding could however be said to be ‘top down’ and maybe lead to missed insight, and open coding was thus introduced as a corrective against accepting a participant’s grid layout as the ‘only way’ of addressing their meaning-making.

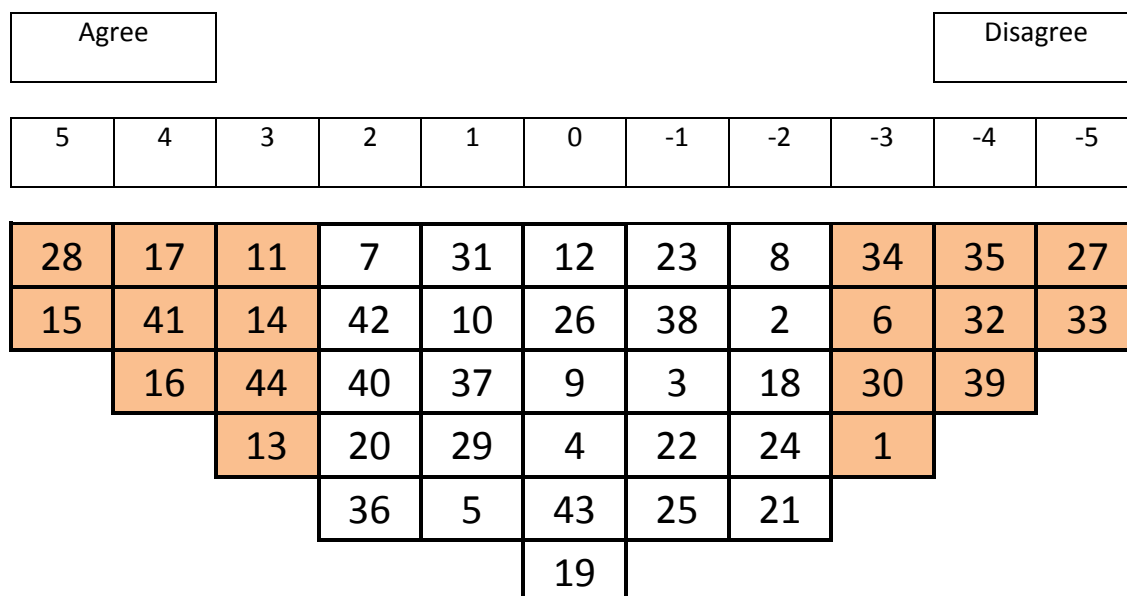


Figure 4.19. KS’s Q Sort

See Appendix 1 or Figure 4.14 for full list of Q Set Statements

The child and practitioner Q Sort interactions were coded in parallel, but data kept separate for clarity. As codes emerged in one data set however they were cross-checked with the other, and incorporated across the board, if they appeared to hold relevance.

The manual and computer assisted coding was consolidated in to categories of description for the children and practitioner participants (Appendix 15 - Stage 2 Q Sort Interviews NVivo Open Coding; Appendix 16 - Stage 2 Coding to Q Sort Statements; Appendix 17 – Categories of Description). Children's categories emerged around 'fun', 'fairness', 'story', 'play' and 'learning', whilst practitioner categories emerged around 'fun', 'fairness', 'story', 'play' and 'interaction'. As the two sets of categories differed slightly a final cross referencing and consolidation was conducted before they were combined (Figure 4.20). Notably at this point, in light of the significance of learning within the children's data, learning coding within the practitioner interactions was reassessed to reveal a previously under-considered 'negative' position on learning.

Analytical summaries were created to help clarify each category of description. These offered a brief written description of the category, relevant Q Set statements and Q Sort interaction transcription text, as well as examples of first stage ideal media interaction data. These summaries formed the basis of the description for the following chapter, and alongside summaries of coding, were kept at hand during the writing up.

Towards Description

From within the six combined categories of description that had emerged to this point, focus turned to trying to share on that which appeared of most 'significance'. Here again sat a tension between a 'pure' description, whereby 'all the stories' should somehow be expressed, and a more troublesome interpretive act in which maybe only the categories that were of particular interest to the researcher (or shaped by the interests of practice) would be seen to be of any worth. To overcome this impasse attention turned to those areas that appeared to be of most significance to the child participants; here then the researcher returned to the data to look at the areas which children most agreed and disagreed with within the Q Sorts. Here it is worth noting that child participants clearly disagreed with a

cluster of positions coded around 'kindness' within media for children (with five of the top six most strongly disagreed with statements in this area) and similarly they tended to agree with a cluster of positions that expressed a preference for 'learning' within their ideal media (notably four of the top six most strongly agreed with statements were learning facing) (see Appendix 18 - Strong Q Sort Agree Positions – Children and Appendix 19 - Strong Q Sort Disagree Positions – Children).

Returning to the data at this point could be said to shape 'findings' in a quantified light, but as coding was built openly, iteratively and reflexively, this approach was considered preferable to other, perhaps overly interpretive, alternatives. Even though this study is far from traditionally quantitative, repetition can be considered to be 'the easiest way to identify themes' (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.89), and it would perhaps feel amiss to not acknowledge the 'quantity' of the qualitative data in guiding discussion.

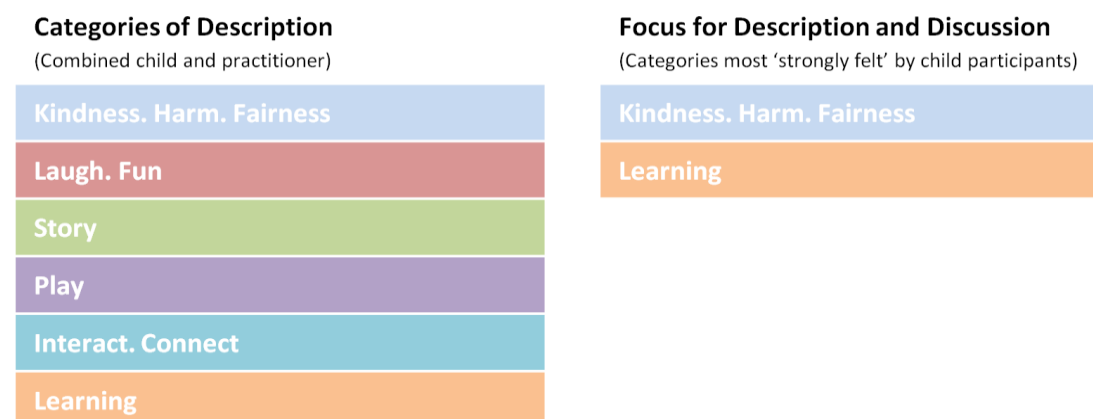


Figure 4.20. Combined Categories of Description and Focus for Description and Discussion

Looking at the categories of description, one could perhaps argue that much of the meaning-making is 'obvious'. Most children, like most adults, could be said to take pleasure from laughing for example. Other description could have readily been shared-on from within the participant's views on play, fun, story and interaction - all areas that coding suggests may be noteworthy, and have long shaped children's media within the UK. Yet as these 'findings' would hold little surprise in some ways, and wanting to follow the 'data', it was felt fitting to validate that which was of most significance to the study's child participants.

The following description and discussion will focus therefore on two overarching bodies of meaning-making, the first as shaped around 'kindness', in which child participants tend to suggest that they are not comfortable with that media where harm is caused to others, and which does not embody a sense of fairness. Secondly description and discussion will turn to thought shaped around 'learning', and a comfort that child participants tended to share in its place within their ideal media. Practitioners appeared to share an understanding with child participants on kindness, even if they maybe tended to underestimate the strength of feeling (see Appendix 20 - Strong Q Sort Disagree Positions – Practitioner). Intriguingly however they tended not to recognise children as having a preference for learning-facing media (see Appendix 21 - Strong Q Sort Agree positions - practitioner). Even though this study tries to avoid simplistic comparison, whereby 'children say this' and 'producers say this', differences between these respective positions on learning do appear to highlight a useful area for discussion.

Chapter 4. Description

In a way that aims to enrich and add ‘substructure’ (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), this chapter will offer description by drawing on examples from within the child and practitioner Q Sort interactions, as well as look back at the data from the initial ideal media interactions with children. Here particular care will be taken that in sharing ‘telling ‘examples’ of some apparent phenomenon’ (Silverman, 1998, p.87) description does not descend in to anecdotalism or ventriloquism, and to address the ongoing tension between description and interpretation, here description will come first, with a more reflective/interpretive discussion offered in the chapter to follow.

From Dangerous Dares to Dance Factory: A Sense of ‘Kindness’

Within the early ‘ideal media’ stages of this study, when children were asked to draw a sketch to illustrate their preferences within children’s media, there was a distinct sense, to the researcher, that much of the thought expressed within their drawings featured the dangerous, rebellious and sometimes violent. *Dangerous Dares* (Figure 5.1), one of the multiple ‘assault course’ bungee rope led ideas shared, operates as a useful example here, with those that created it explaining their concept as one in which:

“Two celebrities come on the show and they go up on land marks and they... bungee jump off them... famous handstands... sometimes they ask questions and if they get it wrong they make them bungee jump”

As the title implies, this idea resonates with the dangerous, and feels comparable to established adult contestant formats such as *Total Wipeout* (2009-), as well as the child contestant featuring *Raven* (2002-10) and *Escape from Scorpion Island* (2007-). The concept also features celebrities in unusual and challenging situations and in this way it could be said to be akin to family factual entertainment formats like *I’m A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here* (2002-).

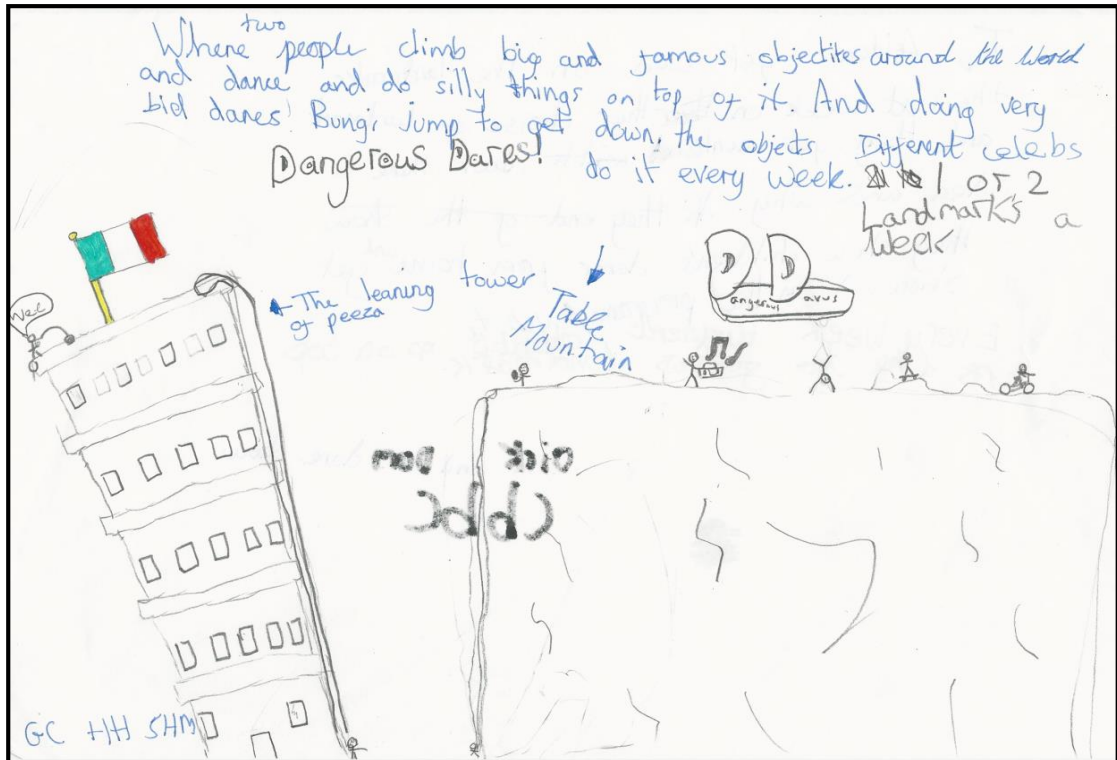


Figure 5.1. Dangerous Dares

Granny Smackdown's (Figure 5.2) central premise, in which “two famous people that pretend to be grannies[...] argue about typical things” and engage in a bowling battle, would be slightly harder to locate in relation to established media, but structurally the children that created it mirrored established ‘interactive’ media practices.

“It’s like... *Granny’s got Talent*... everyone puts in their request about what’s going to happen... and they win... what they are going to argue about.”

Here in may be possible to see argument, competition and, perhaps, subversion at play.

Gummy Bear Sweets vs Toothbrushes (Figure 5.3) features the more directly violent – for example a machine pulls “eyeballs off the Gummy Bears” so they can be used as golf balls. Even though this child’s idea could appear quite brutal, in its comedy (note the ‘Battle of Toothalga’) and educational bent (the idea is shaped around a war between toothbrushes and sweets) it could be described as ‘cartoon violence’ – with a message. In briefly returning to the ways in which the drawing led interactions were ‘coded forward’, it is perhaps significant here that, on being asked what they considered to be of most importance within their concept, the participant stated that it was “the characters”. In light then of a possible

conflict between what the researcher and the participant may believe is of most significance within the interaction, the researcher remained cautious of any impulse to overly interpret, or close down, children’s meaning-making, and thus the coding incorporated in to the Concourse, and hence the Q Sorts, explicitly including the directly expressed ‘character’ thought (not just the coding possibilities that seemed to be ‘most obvious’ to the researcher).



Figure 5.2. Granny Smackdown

When the children that developed *Ninja Primates* (Figure 5.4) discussed their idea there was much talk of “fighting” and “beating up”, and one of the children (described by teaching staff as having behavioural difficulties) asked if they could superimpose their face on to the explicitly violent characters; this child then went on to name their ‘team’ the ‘Evil Hang Man Group’. However ‘rugged’ the media idea may have been though, it is worth noting that, in a similar way to the previous example, there is a sense of ‘morality’ at play here, in that the characters are rescuing someone from a house fire.

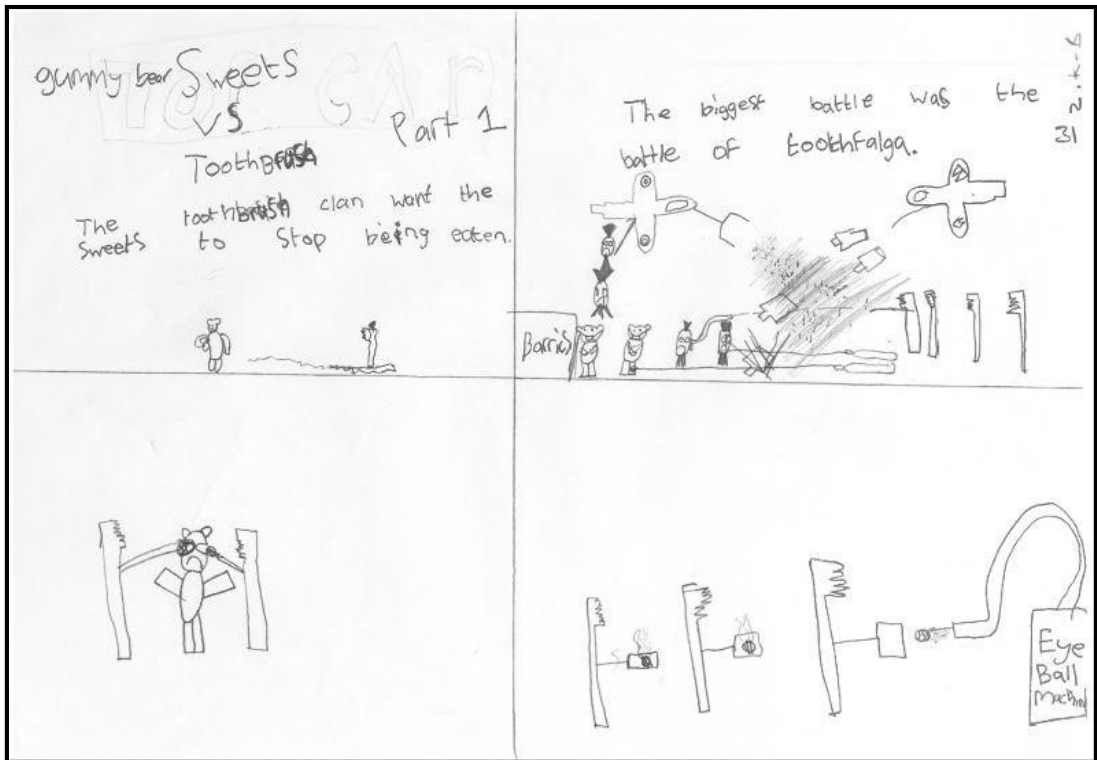


Figure 5.3. Gummy Bear Sweets vs Toothbrushes

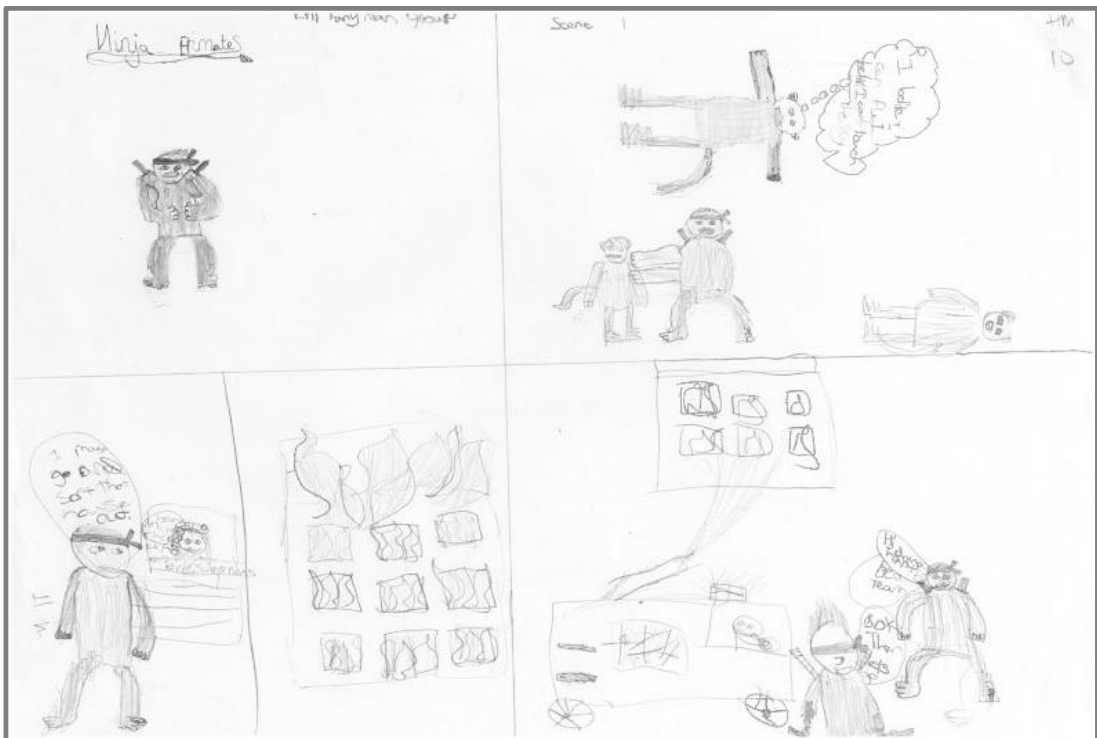


Figure 5.4. Ninja Primates

In *Laura + Her Creations* (Figure 5.5) one of the participants locates themselves within their ideal media production, with the protagonist on a quest to find their lost pets “with help from her loyal friends”. There is mention that they need to be wary of “the killer hammers”, but here we can maybe see the concept as reflecting friendship and kindness, rather than a hammer-hinted darker side.

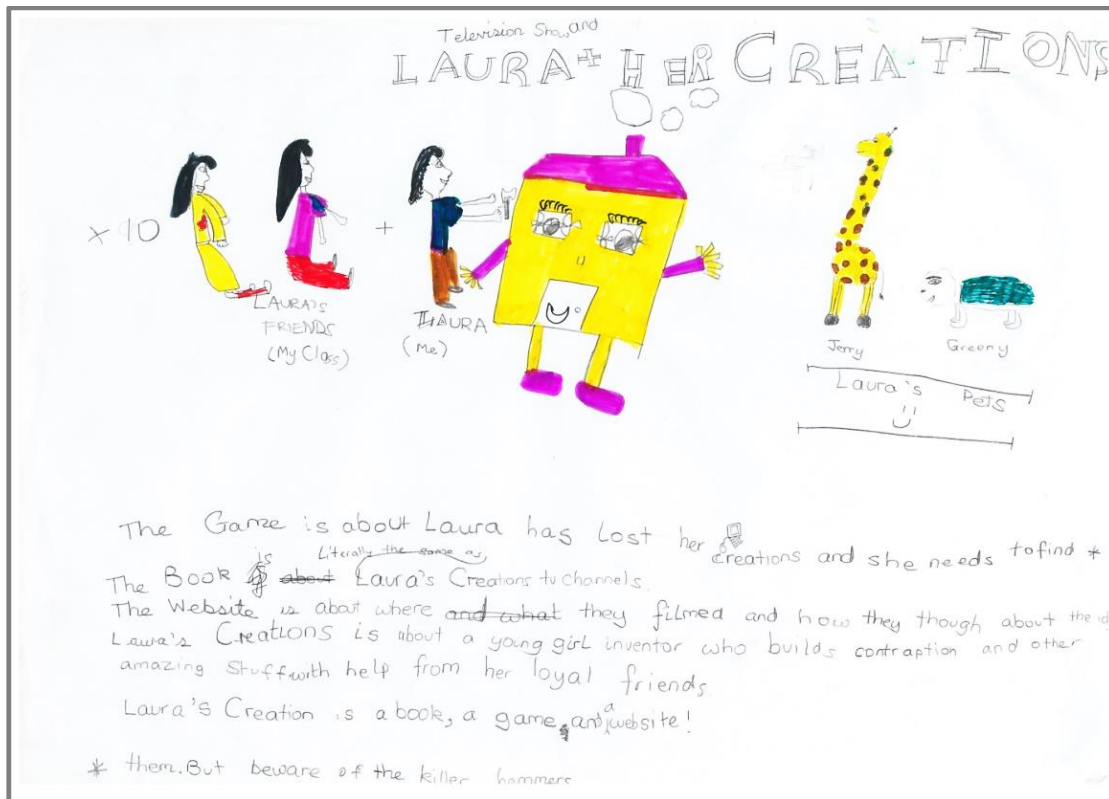


Figure 5.5. *Laura + Her Creations*

Between them these concepts suggested, when asked to develop media ‘for them’, children might make room for danger, argument, violence and the subversive - but significantly, even in the least likely corners, there is perhaps also space for kindness and the ‘moral’.

Intriguingly, within the later stage Q Sort based interactions with children, and seemingly counter to some of the sometime ‘dangerous, rebellious and violent’ thought that appeared to emerge in the first stage of the research, children tended towards expressing distaste for that media in which people fought or argued, and for that where others came to harm, or were in danger of it.

In a corresponding manner children in the Q Sort interactions demonstrated a disinclination towards seeing ‘bad behaviour’ within media made for them, with the following child’s Q Sort (Figure 5.6) being typical of those that shared this sentiment. Here the participant strongly disagreed with a desire for media that featured ‘bad or naughty’ behaviour (statement 39 for example), and we can also clearly see a cluster of statements that express a broad disinclination towards media that features harm or the threat of it - notably Q Set statement 33. ‘fighting or arguing’, 34. ‘people getting hurt’ and 35. ‘seeing others in dangerous or threatening situations’ (See Appendix 1/Figure 4.14. Q Set Statements).

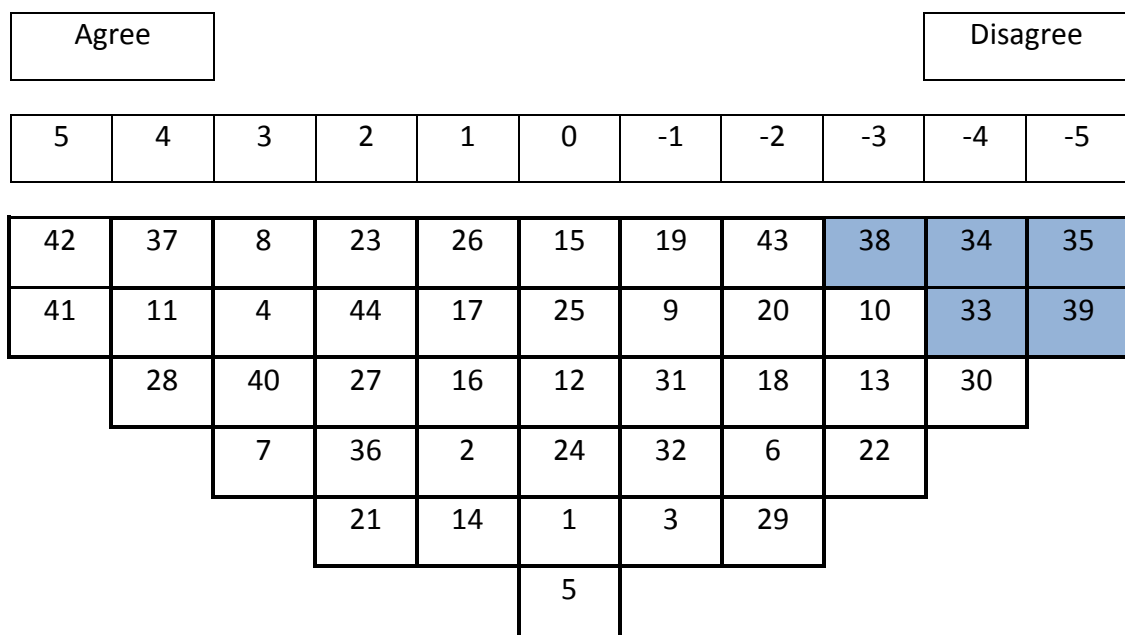


Figure 5.6. JT’s Q Sort

‘Kindness’ facing statements highlighted in light blue.

- 33. I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
- 34. I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
- 35. I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
- 38. I like media where people fail or lose
- 39. I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty

(See Appendix 1 of Figure 4.14 for full list of Q Set Statements)

There is a quite clear sense that that ‘bad behaviour’ (statement 39) frustrated many of the participants; as one suggested “if someone is good they get told off, and the person that’s bad don't get told off, it's not fair”. In localising discussion to their own life, one participant stated that they “never get away with being bad or naughty, so I find it a bit annoying when other people get away with it”. The participant in the following Q Sort (Figure 5.7) shared these sentiments; when discussing their choices they suggested that “it's just a bit silly that people get away with being really naughty”.

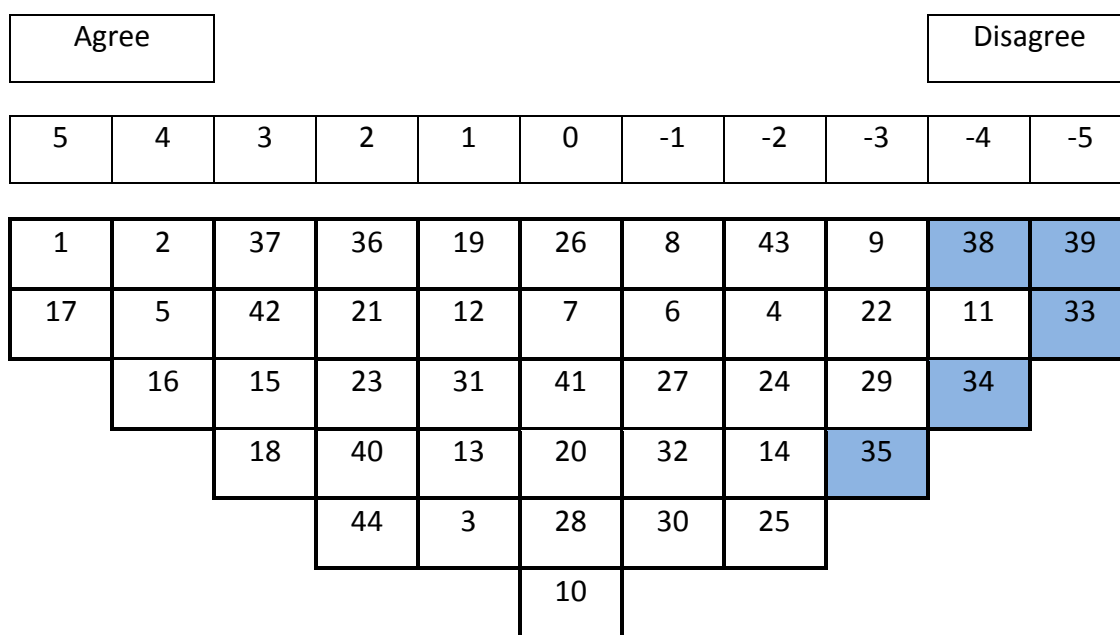


Figure 5.7. BK's Q Sort

'Kindness' facing statements highlighted in light blue.

- 33. I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
- 34. I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
- 35. I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
- 38. I like media where people fail or lose
- 39. I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty

Other children tended to reiterate these 'moral' positions, one quite straightforwardly stating that they are disinclined towards the 'bad and naughty' in media for them "because it's wrong", whilst other children suggested that they do not like seeing others cheating or "going against the law and like annoying people".

The practitioners that took part in the Q Sort interactions appeared more agnostic on children's dispositions around media here, with the two practitioners from Cartoon Network, Daniel Leonard (see Figure 5.17) and Rebecca Denton, both seeing children as pre-disposed toward media in which 'people get away with being bad or naughty' – this may relate in part to the nature of the channel's 'rebellious cartoon' content. Daniel suggested here that "everyone loves a naughty kid really" and that a character who behaves badly is "more fun to watch". In the media he creates he tends to "know who the most popular character is gonna be, and they are usually the naughtiest ones. Not bad as in villain or evil, but just cheeky, irreverent, that kind of thing". Daniel considered there to be a gender distinction in

this area, in that he sees boys as tending to “like someone who's naughty and behaves badly and stuff, I think girls are probably... slightly more interested in seeing people do well and get rewarded”.

To a lesser degree practitioners Frazer Price, Marc Goodchild and Anne Brogan all recognised children as being inclined toward the ‘bad and naughty’ within their ideal media. Anne noted that with boundaries “set so tightly in most homes and most schools” media gives children room to push limits “in a very safe environment”. She suggests that

“it's a very human thing, isn't it, seeing somebody push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Not in a cruel or sadistic way, it's often in a funny or very active or very empowered way”.

Rebecca similarly notes that within gaming in particular children can “get to do things that they would absolutely never be allowed to do in real life”. Pete Davies notes that there is a children’s media ‘tradition’ (from *Dennis the Menace* (1951-) to *Tracy Beaker* (1991-)) “where naughty children are successful”, but unlike many of the other practitioners he does not believe “it's an eternal theme, that children are always attracted to bad people. It has to be within bad, within very kind of confined boundaries”. Jen Johnson shares a conflicted position here in that to her children:

“Don't like a goody two-shoes. You know a lot of these shows that do particularly well [are] often with a boisterous kind of character who breaks the rules a lot. Saying that though, I don't think they would want somebody who was permanently bad [...], ‘cause they have quite a strong sense of justice as well”.

Children tended to offer a sense that they consider media for them as being a space in which justice, or more softly put, fairness should prevail. Practitioners generally offered a common understanding with children here, but they do not appear to fully appreciate the strength of feeling shared by children in these areas, and overall perhaps, underestimate children’s sense of kindness toward others. Notably children did not tend to show a preference for wanting others to ‘fail or lose’ (Q Set statement 38), with one child suggesting that “it's just quite upsetting [that] they've put all that hard work and effort in, not to get anything” and that “it's a bit mean on them, cause they can like really try and practise for something, but if they like lose it can really upset their feelings”. The one child participant that acted as an exception however suggested that they “like people losing, it's funny”, and there appeared

to be a slight tension between funny, and the failure of others, within other children's responses.

To practitioner Pete Davies there is a distinction to be made between how children and adults engage with a production like *X-Factor* (2004-), with children wanting to witness a "new star" born, "whereas adults like to see buffoons perform"; children significantly are not tuning in to 'laugh at', but to 'cheer on'. To Steve Ryde people, adult or child, do not like "to see really desperately unfair things". He argues that there may be room within media for "luck and chance", but not for perceived "injustice" – even if it is played for laughs. Ellie Haworth equally contends that rules and "fairness is really important to children", but questions if this predilection shifts as children reach the age of those that took part in this research. Estelle Hughes similarly argues that children, at seven to nine years old have a "very, very strong [sense of] right and wrong [and] they are pretty strong on things being fair and not fair"; by ten years old however, she appreciates the picture as getting more complicated. Pete Davies sees children as talking "about fairness all the time", and asserts that children of the age of those within the study "have a slightly different sense of what justice is" and that they tend to focus on "what is put before them", rather than "the bigger picture, and the finesse". Estelle, drawing on her practice experience, noted that when creating children's game shows it is "crucial to make the rules simple [and] consistent", and maybe here we can appreciate how a child might want a set of straightforward rules that are easy to understand and predict, and most significantly, in light of this discussion, fair. Darren Garrett, in noting how '80's programming and specifically American programming [had] a very moralistic back bone to have in absolutely everything that occurs', suggested that children see through attempts to overlay 'crude' morality.

Children within the study predominantly shared a marked disinclination towards witnessing others being hurt (Q Set statement 34) or in danger or under the threat of being hurt (35). With the 'want to see people get hurt' statement the one with which children disagreed with most strongly across all Q Sorts (see Appendix 19 - note how the statements that children disagreed with most strongly relate to behaviour, harm, threat, arguing and fighting). Children clearly stated that they "don't really like too much violence" or to see others come to harm, with some again localising thought to their own lives. As one participant suggested

“‘cause think it was one of your parents, you wouldn’t want them to get hurt”, whilst another noted that “if I’m in dangerous situations and things, then I feel really scared and sometimes I feel that way about other people”. Across the interactions there was a distinct sense in which children did not “want to see people threatening other people. It’s not nice”. The word ‘threatening’, as used within the Q Set statement that triggered discussion here, could be said to have accentuated children’s antipathy here, but it is worth noting that the positions held were consistently pronounced in this area, and we could perhaps turn to one of the child participants here by means of summary: “Well, I just don’t particularly like violence. I... it’s just... it’s not kind of my cup of tea at all, no. Not a big fan of it”.

For some children there is an explicit distinction to be made between ‘real world’ and ‘made up’ harm, with one participant stating that “if it was real and then I would be more on the disagree side, but if it was like... just not real and it’s made up, then I’d be fine with it”, and another noting that “there are some computer games that are made that people get hurt in, but they are not real worlds so it doesn’t really matter, ‘cause they are made up”. Practitioner Marc Goodchild similarly notes a distinction between how children recognise ‘real world’ harm to others, and the things children can do in a consequence free world,

“You know you can shoot something, you can smash someone over the head, it’s [...] all fine because it’s not real consequences and that’s about testing [...] your limits. But when it comes to seeing real people, like them, being hurt I think [...] the natural instinct is to go against that”.

Marc recognises that there is room for *You’ve Been Framed* (1990-) “falling off a chair” humour, but he suggests that children will only latch on to it if “it’s not real hurt, it’s not real pain”. To Anne Brogan “kids don’t enjoy seeing other people getting hurt” and demonstrate a “very well developed sense of empathy”; and this perhaps brings us to appreciate that children may well be comfortable with harm coming to others, as long as they are quite sure it is not ‘real’.

It is worth noting that although the practitioners that took part in the Q Sort interactions broadly shared with children a sense that they would be averse to experiencing harm/hurt within their media of choice, they appeared slightly more at ease with seeing children as being comfortable with danger or threat, than children themselves. This acceptance could be shaped around an understanding and appreciation of ‘structural jeopardy’ within

contemporary children's media forms and commissioning practices (with jeopardy in this sense an abstract concept that children did not appear to focus on during discussion). Media jeopardy, particularly within factual media practice, tends to play on the border between the 'real' and the 'made up', and here Jen Johnson reasons that children enjoy "some kind of danger, but not real danger [..., if] somebody gets actually really hurt, I think they can find that quite distressing". Steve Ryde correspondingly feels that children are generally comfortable with jeopardy "as long as it feels ultimately safe, there is no real life-threatening or catastrophic danger or threat". He notes that there is a distinction to be made between the more authentically dangerous and threatening and people just being "in danger of losing a prize". Within drama Darren Garrett argues that a character should be placed in some form of peril if a storyteller is to successfully "create suspense and drive the story forward"; whilst noting that "seeing people in jeopardy and escape from jeopardy" has long been at the heart of children literature, Anne Brogan contends that jeopardy "sometimes gets airbrushed out of children's media because adults don't understand the function of it".

Children here, in quite a pronounced fashion, did not want to witness fighting or arguing within their media (with Q Set statement 33 being the second most disagreed with for children) even if there was some acceptance that arguing at times "can end up being funny"; there was a clear sense that "arguing and fighting and things like that" might "upset" them. Within discussion children focussed on fighting and argument as both a verbal act and physical one ("it's not nice to see people getting beaten up on TV or the internet"). There was clear sense here of children empathising with others, with one participant suggesting that if it feels "real when they do get hurt [...] then I feel like I want to help them" – and at this point we maybe witness a clear sense of kindness shine through.

Practitioners in the main shared an understanding with children on fighting and argument, if not a full appreciation of the strength of feeling. Steve Ryde, reflecting on his own practice, reasons that fighting and argument might make media "more exciting in some way, as long as that conflict feels manageable and [is not] genuinely threatening". Here again a distinction could be made between that media which offers 'formatted' argument (at a mediated distance), and that which might be a little 'nearer to home'. To Jen Johnson "little spats are fine, but any kind of proper full on fight, punch or [...] really aggressive argument" is not

something that children will want to engage with. Jen recognises a line between the lesser degree (play?) violence children might enact with each other, and more disturbingly, when it is an “adult doing it aggressively”. As Pete Davies neatly summarises, children “don't mind a bit of Kung Fu, but anything that is too close to real life in my experience they don't like”. Anne Brogan usefully notes however that there could be something ‘cathartic’ in engaging through media with those things that might trouble you “in your everyday life”; when “parents fight or argue” for example it can be deeply disturbing, but to Anne media afford less upsetting “way[s] of experiencing that situation”. As with the previously discussed positions there were intriguing ‘outliers’ on fighting and argument, with two of the participants clearly inclined toward ‘argumentative’ media; as one of these children suggested, “I like people fighting. I was watching *Jersey Shore* because they fight between the boy and girl between each other, I like watching that, but I'm not supposed to”.

Most children here did not place much emphasis on media for them being ‘scary’, but as may be wrapped up, in part, within the earlier discussion on jeopardy, a couple of children did appear to show a preference for scary media - with there being a necessary distinction to be made between threat and danger, and scary. Some participants offered a measure of reflective granularity in their understanding of just ‘how’ scary media for them should be - “it might be too scary, which I don't really like, but if it's just a little bit scary [...] then I quite like it”. Here, as before, we can perhaps separate out the ‘made up’ scary from that media which features more of a ‘closer to home’ threat. The following child’s Q Sort (Figure 5.8) demonstrates a now familiar disinclination for fighting, argument, physical harm, danger/threat and seeing others fail, but quite unusually for this study, they expressed a very strong desire for the scary (statement 32.) within media made for them.

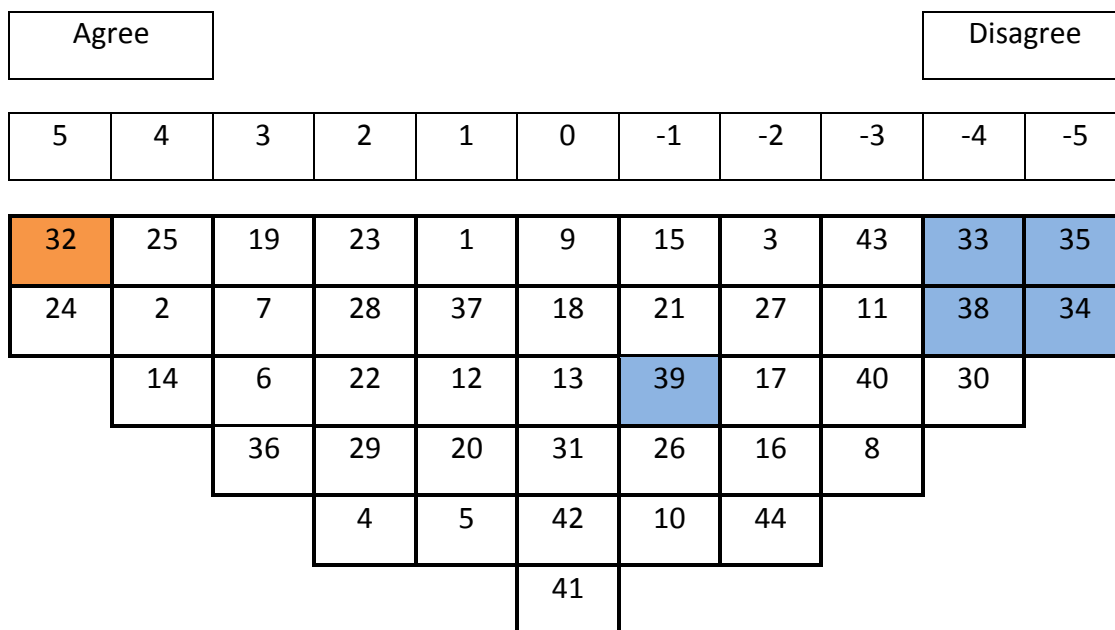


Figure 5.8. GMD's Q Sort

'Kindness' facing statements highlighted in light blue and 'Scary' media in orange.

- 32. I like scary media
- 33. I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
- 34. I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
- 35. I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
- 38. I like media where people fail or lose
- 39. I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty

Pete Davies, although one of the practitioners that argues against children having a 'universal' predilection for media that features bad or naughty characters, does however suggest that there "seems to be a universal trait" for children wanting to be scared; he recognises it as being "part of growing up". Pete goes on to note how "proxy scariness" is expressed through the ways in which children might watch "*Doctor Who* from behind the sofa"; it is a "very ritualistic thing" whereby children "set the limits". As Marc Goodchild neatly summarises this, "I want to be scared, but knowing that I'm safe".

Children did not offer much of a sense that they consider media for them as a place for 'sadness' (statement 30.). Children's media have traditionally been more 'laughter' facing (as chimes with the Q Sorts here (see statement 28)). Even where children's media tend toward the sad, it provides, as one practitioner put it, "some kind of funny resolve", and matters 'come good in the end'. Estelle Hughes (Figure 5.9) appreciates that there might be room for the 'demanding', 'hard hitting' and dealing with 'emotional issues' within children's media, but to her it is "never designed to make them sad" explicitly, with this being something Daniel

Leonard agreed with, and saw as of particular significance for the age group within this study. Frazer Price similarly argues that at the age here “kids definitely want to be entertained and definitely want to have fun”, not deal with ‘angst’ and media “that would make them feel sad on a day to day basis”.

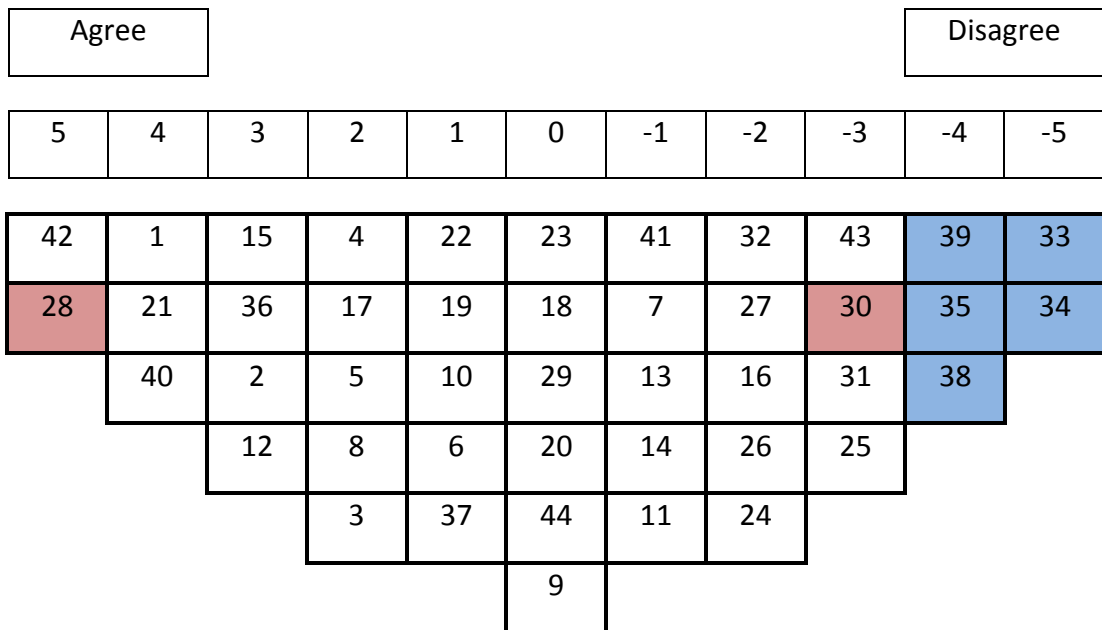


Figure 5.9. Estelle Hughes’ Q Sort

‘Kindness’ facing statements highlighted in light blue. Estelle placed ‘makes me laugh’ [28] at the most agree end of the continuum and ‘makes me sad’ [30] at the disagree end.

- 28. I like media that makes me laugh
- 30. Sometimes it’s OK if the media I use makes me sad
- 33. I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
- 34. I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
- 35. I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
- 38. I like media where people fail or lose
- 39. I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty

When Pete Davies worked on CBBC’s *Dance Factory* (2005), in which children competed to stay on the show, the production team felt they had to alter the format to underplay any sense of competitors ‘losing’, because “children wanted to see other children doing well” and “didn’t want to see other children going home in tears”. Pete’s experiences on *Dance Factory* left him persuaded that “children don’t like to see other children cry” and recognising children as being “overwhelmingly kind to each other”.

Marc Goodchild neatly summarises much of the discussion when he recognises children as being “quite moralistic in terms of doing the right thing, and I think they generally don't like to see other kids being picked on or kids going through pain”. He argues that children’s media engagement is “based on the positive that they get out of it, not on the negative that they inflict on other people”. Across this discussion practitioners and children can be said to have broadly agreed with a body of positions that would correspond with Marc’s thought. Practitioners may have positioned much of their discussion in relation to their practice, but beyond some difference in emphasis, children and practitioners broadly demonstrated a shared understanding on how children, in the media made for them, do not want to see others come to harm – indeed the research interactions with children strongly suggest that children consider media for them as being a place for both ‘fairness’ and ‘kindness’.

From Beat the Beasties to Blue Peter: ‘Learning’ may not be a Dirty Word

Within the preceding discussion child participants and practitioners could be said, in general, to offer positions in sympathy with each other, yet on turning to the accounts that surround learning, and children’s media preferences, practitioners appear to repeatedly under-appreciate, or disagree with, how children appear to recognise and appreciate learning within media for them. From within the interactions with children there emerged a clear sense that they do not see learning and children’s media as incompatible. Correspondingly here there was also some indication that children were outward looking, interested in the lives of others and are seemingly happy to follow these others on a ‘learning journey’. The practitioners within the study however, whether through perhaps revoicing normative children’s media practice, or for some other reason, did not appear to appreciate the child participant’s sentiment on this.

Within the first ideal media drawing-led stage of the research there were signs that some children were making room for the ‘educational’ within their concepts. One participant for example came up with the idea for a learning focussed sports production that “tells a lot about football... it can teach you some skills at home” (and intriguingly, in light of the previous discussion on kindness, the idea also encouraged people to “do fun stuff for charities”). Within another interaction participants created *Beat the Beasties* (Figure 5.10), a

learning-facing concept in which its presenters would try to “find an animal, and have a little fact file about it”.

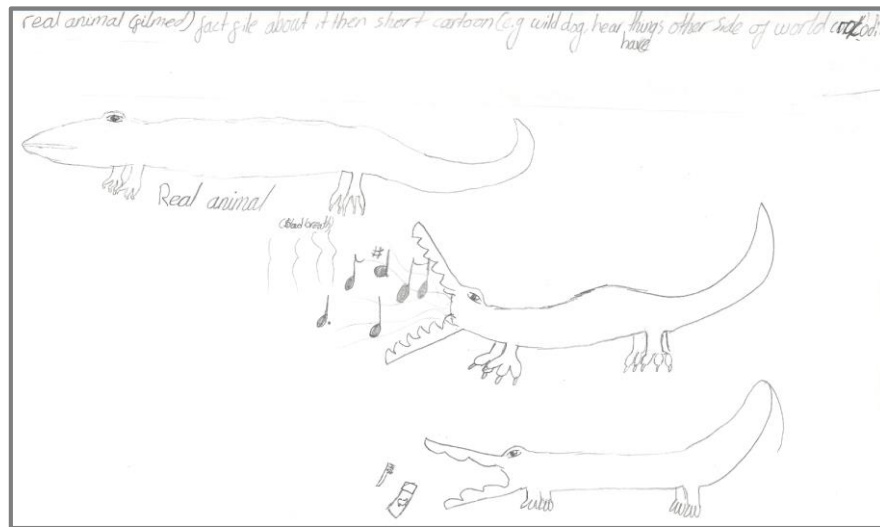


Figure 5.10. Beat the Beasties

In *Kings Theatre* (Figure 5.11) the learning was localised to the personal interests of the participant, in that the musical theatre production was located in a venue that the participant frequented. Even though to the child the ‘most important thing’ to them was the theatre production itself, they developed an idea whereby it was possible for those that might engage with it to “learn all the songs” online.

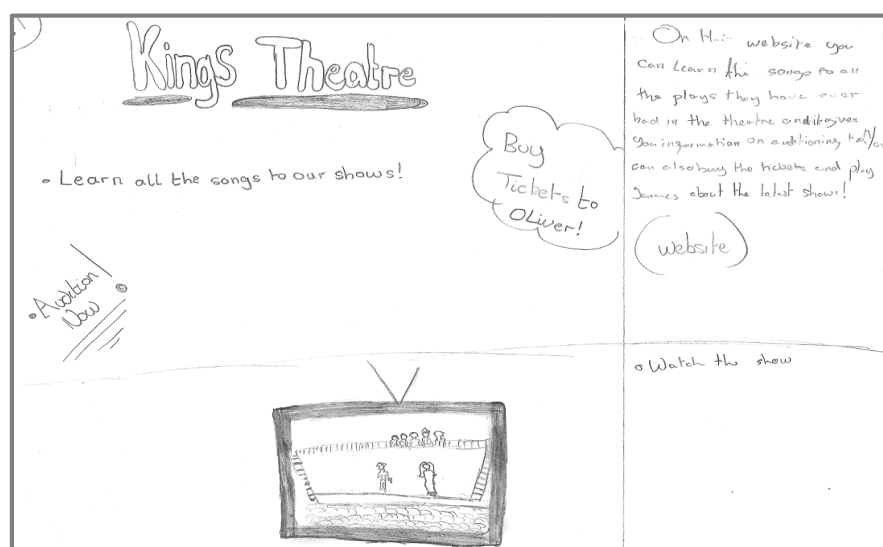


Figure 5.11. Kings Theatre

Within *Google Info* (Figure 5.12) the participant expressed a more explicit inclination toward knowledge and learning within media for them. At the heart of their idea is a child friendly version of the search engine Google, with this sitting alongside an information based television production in which “children could maybe tune in and ask questions, and then they could be answered”. The production would also provide quizzes “for people that watch it they try and remember it all and it's put to the test”.

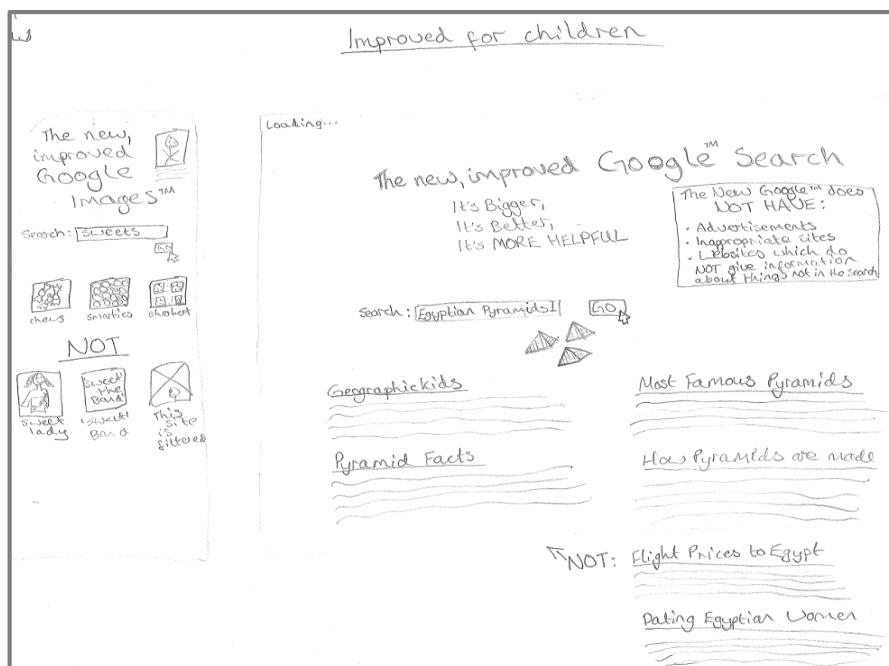


Figure 5.12. *Google Info*

The children’s Q Sort interactions that followed the drawing led interaction tended to offer a sense in which child participants were comfortable with the place of learning within media for them (see Appendix 18 - Strong Q Sort Agree Positions - Children). Out of all of the interactions with children only one strongly disagreed with any statement that could be said to relate to learning, and generally children weighted the learning-facing statements towards the agree end of the Q Sorts.

Within the following example sort (Figure 5.13) we see perhaps the most pronounced expression amongst child participants of a preference for learning within media. Here they saw media as a trigger to creating and sharing (statements 14 & 13). Their media preferences suggested the outward looking, in that they were keen to learn about other people and places (15, 20 & 25), and in particular, they expressed an interest in that media which “helps

me to learn more things, and it will become useful in like my life”. Here we can see the participant relate learning back to a sense of it being of personal use (statement 16), rather than perhaps, just an act unto itself.

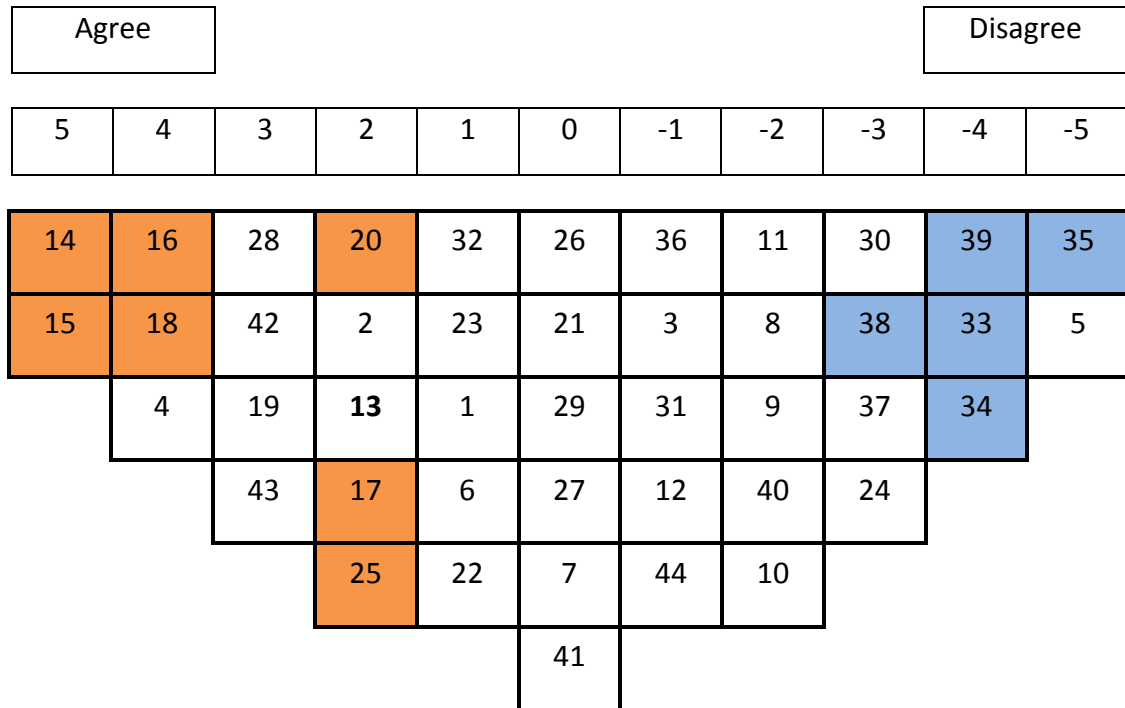


Figure 5.13. AB’s Q Sort

‘Kindness’ facing statements highlighted in light blue and ‘Learning’ in orange.

- 13. I like media that allows me to share the things I’ve made with others
- 14. I like media that inspires me to make things
- 15. I like media that helps me learn about the world
- 16. I like media that teaches me useful things
- 17. I like media that helps me learn new things
- 18. I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
- 20. I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
- 25. I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before
- 33. I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
- 34. I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
- 35. I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
- 38. I like media where people fail or lose
- 39. I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty

Like the majority of practitioners that took part in the Q Sort interactions, Marc Goodchild did not place much weight on children expressing a preference for learning within their media, however when reflecting on the interactive and web content he produced for *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999-), he did note how he saw some children as looking to gather knowledge in such a way as they become “an expert in a world where you’re mum and dad

aren't experts" – with learning not focussed on school curricula, but on personal interest. Within the following Q Sort (Figure 5.14) the child participant expressed a preference for media that helps show them "how to make something or do something" (statement 14) (if less so an interest in sharing what they had created (statement 13)). This desire to 'create' emerged across the children's Q Sorts in a manner which suggests that *Blue Peter* style 'makes' may still hold much currency - whether the trigger comes from traditional broadcast media or elsewhere.

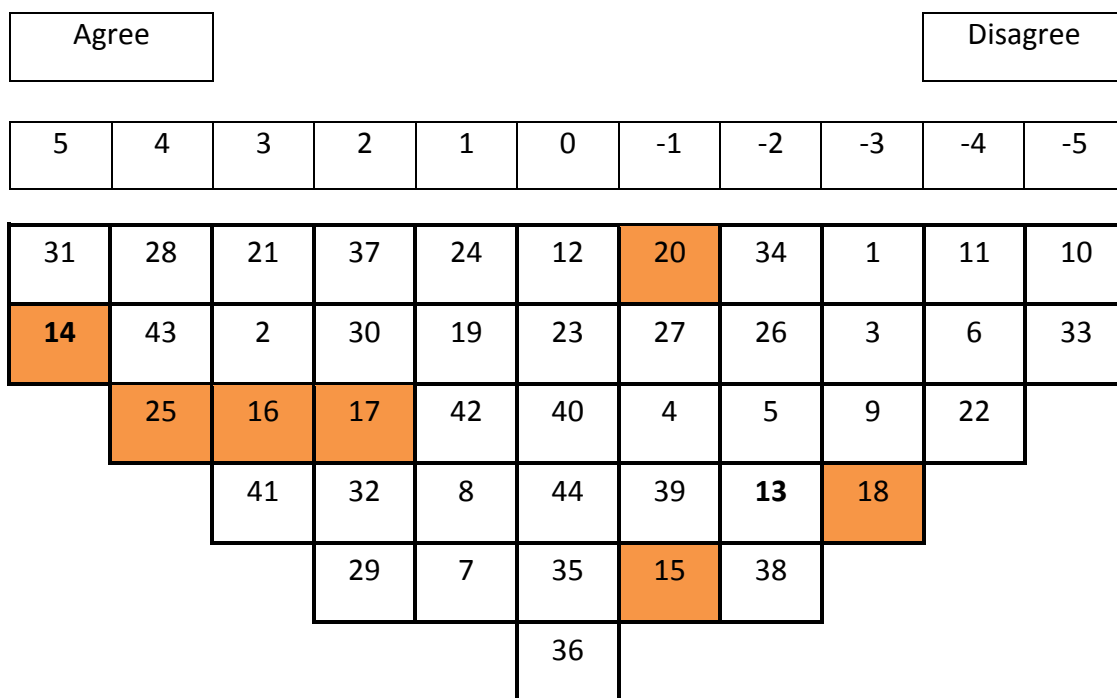


Figure 5.14. EC's Q Sort

'Learning' facing statements in orange.

- 13. I like media that allows me to share the things I've made with others
- 14. I like media that inspires me to make things
- 15. I like media that helps me learn about the world
- 16. I like media that teaches me useful things
- 17. I like media that helps me learn new things
- 18. I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
- 20. I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
- 25. I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before

Practitioners here tended to be agnostic on children's preferences toward making and media for them. Anne Brogan suggested that "the desire to make things is such a strong one in kids", but Daniel Leonard, through reflecting on his own childhood, argued that children, rather than wanting to 'join in' with media, could just as readily want to "lay back" and

“watch, and be entertained, and to laugh, and be scared and be involved in the story”. Ellie Haworth however, in a manner similar to Anne, considers children to have “a very personal desire to want to make and be creative”, but she does question if children would express that desire explicitly. Within the child’s Q Sort that follows (Figure 5.15) the participant placed emphasis on learning-facing positions. As with the previous participant, the child here suggested that they liked “making things and [...] having new ideas and stuff”, but in demonstrating an interest in learning about other places (statement 25), people (20) and the world (15), they also offered a curiosity in “something different from my normal life”.

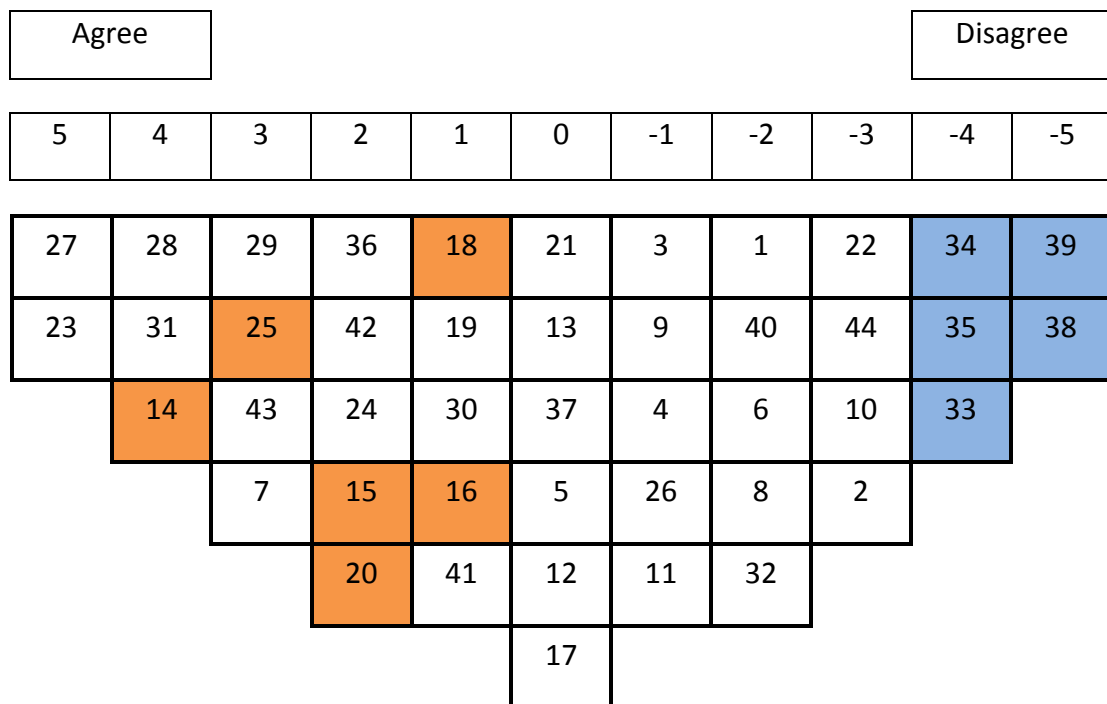


Figure 5.15. FC’s Q Sort

‘Kindness’ facing statements highlighted in light blue and ‘Learning’ in orange.

14. I like media that inspires me to make things
15. I like media that helps me learn about the world
16. I like media that teaches me useful things
18. I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
20. I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
25. I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before
33. I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
34. I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
35. I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
38. I like media where people fail or lose
39. I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty

Even though there were child participants who were clearly more interested in “what I can do, than [...] what other people can do” within their media of choice, there was a sense of the outward looking within the interactions with children. As one of the participants, on

being asked why they like media that takes them ‘to places they have never been to or seen before’, for example replied, “because, I’ve never been to Africa and I like watching documentaries... about it”. This ‘outward looking’ preference for experiencing and learning about other people reached clear expression in the following Q Sort (Figure 5.16.), with the participant (when strongly agreeing with a want to learning about ‘the lives of others’ and ‘the world’ (statements 15 & 20)) suggesting that “it’s nice to know how other people live, and not just how you live”.

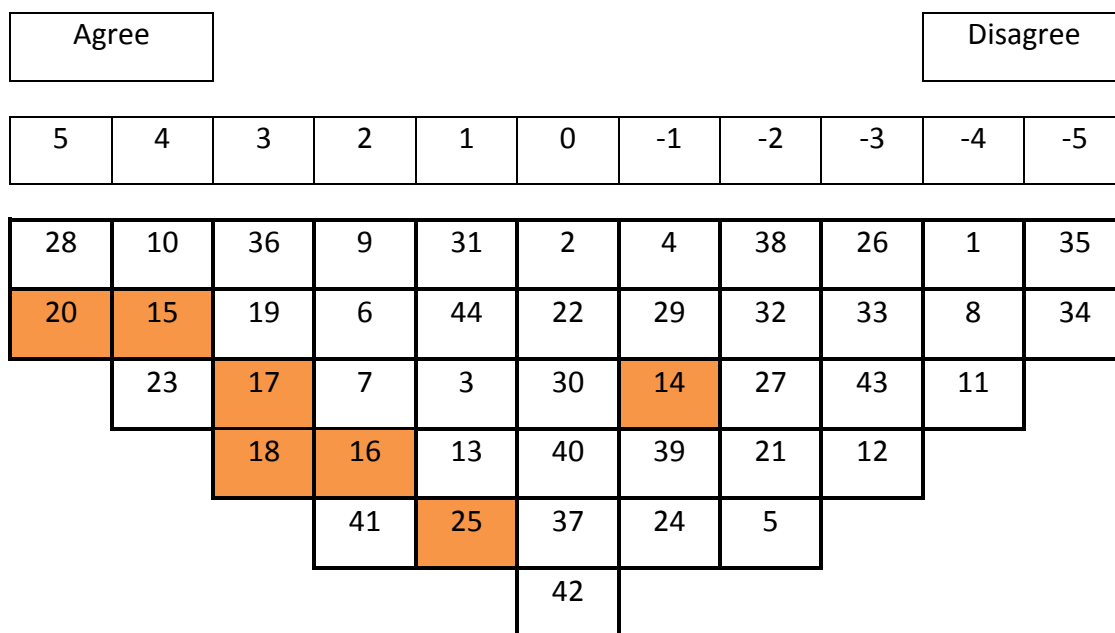


Figure 5.16. CJW’s Q Sort

‘Learning’ facing statements in orange.

- 14. I like media that inspires me to make things
- 15. I like media that helps me learn about the world
- 16. I like media that teaches me useful things
- 17. I like media that helps me learn new things
- 18. I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
- 20. I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
- 25. I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before

The practitioners that took part in the Q Sort interactions did not tend to share an understanding with children on their expressed preference to learn about other people and places through children’s media. Indeed research interactions suggest that practitioners see children as showing a strong disinclination towards children’s media of this sort (see Appendix 20 - Strong Q Sort Disagree Positions – Practitioner). Daniel Leonard’s Q Sort (Figure 5.17) sits at the far end of practitioner thought on ‘learning’ (as well as ‘kindness’),

with his sort suggesting that children have very little interest in learning (statements 14, 15, 16, 18, 20 & 25).

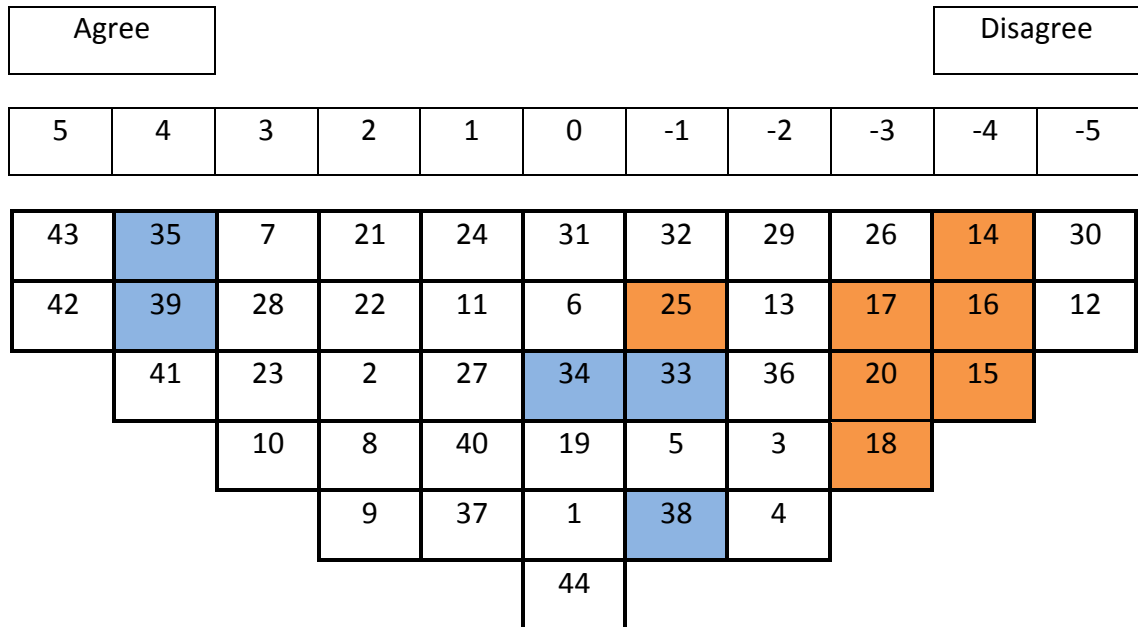


Figure 5.17. Daniel Leonard’s Q Sort

‘Kindness’ facing statements highlighted in light blue and ‘Learning’ in orange.

- 14. I like media that inspires me to make things
- 15. I like media that helps me learn about the world
- 16. I like media that teaches me useful things
- 17. I like media that helps me learn new things
- 18. I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
- 20. I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
- 25. I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before
- 33. I want to see people fighting or arguing in the media I choose
- 34. I want to see people get hurt in the media I choose
- 35. I want to see others in dangerous or threatening situations in the media I choose
- 38. I like media where people fail or lose
- 39. I like media where people get away with being bad or naughty

Pete Davies, as viewed through his Q Sort choices (Figure 5.18), argues that children have little “interest in other children who aren't like themselves[...] I don't think British children are interested in what children are like in Africa, unless there is a [...] huge overlap, of either kinda culture or experience, or something incredibly extreme”. Pete asserts that children of the age within the study “are just far too self-centred” to care about the lives of others beyond their experience. He recognises children as not being inclined towards learning within media made for them, unless perhaps that learning is explicitly ‘useful’ to them (statement 16).

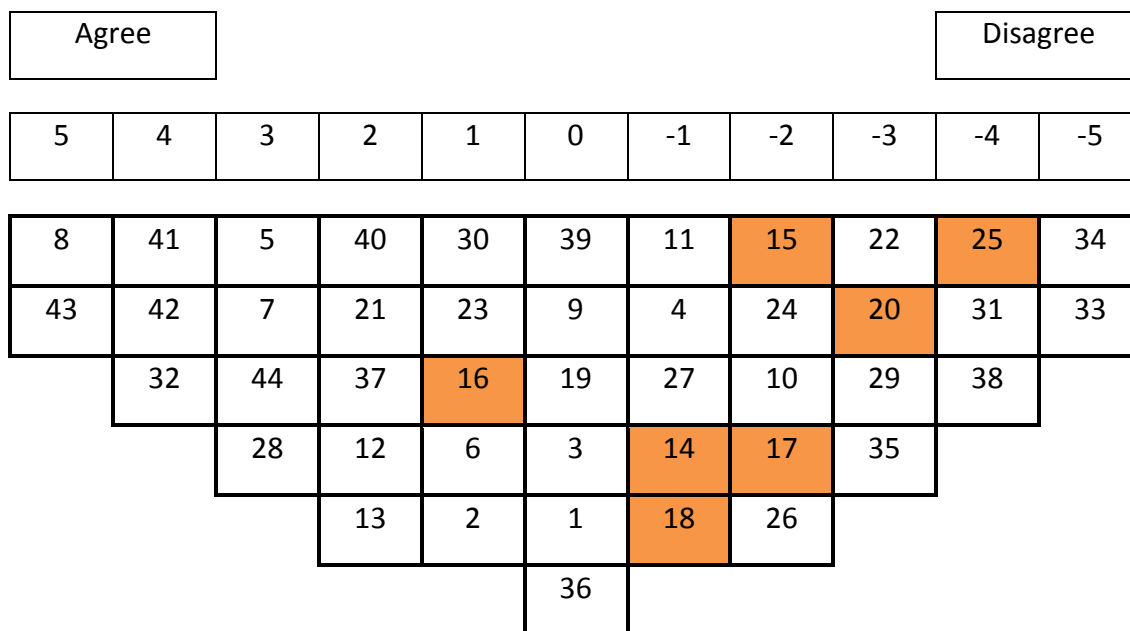


Figure 5.18. Pete Davies' Q Sort

'Learning' facing statements in orange.

- 14. I like media that inspires me to make things
- 15. I like media that helps me learn about the world
- 16. I like media that teaches me useful things
- 17. I like media that helps me learn new things
- 18. I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
- 20. I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
- 25. I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before

Frazer Price similarly suggests that “kids are probably more interested in their own lives”, with this sentiment broadly mirrored amongst other practitioners. Darren Garrett however considers children to have an interest in something of the ‘wider world’ within their media, and in a similar fashion Jen Johnson’s (Figure 5.19) Q Sort implies that she sees children as sharing some desire to learn about the world (statements 15 & 25).

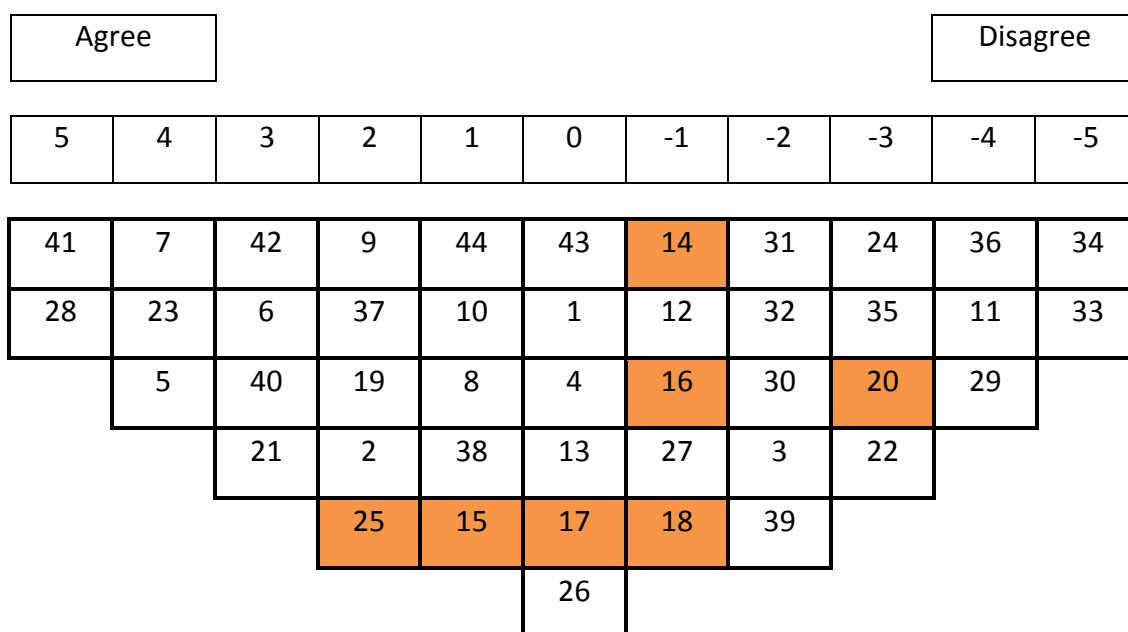


Figure 5.19. Jen Johnson’s Q Sort

With ‘Learning’ in orange.

14. I like media that inspires me to make things
15. I like media that helps me learn about the world
16. I like media that teaches me useful things
17. I like media that helps me learn new things
18. I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world
20. I like media that helps me experience and learn about the lives of others
25. I like media that takes me to places that I have never been to, or seen before

Across the interactions children tended to show a measure of interest in the ‘learning journeys’ of others (statement 18). One participant for example excitedly relayed how a *Blue Peter* presenter had undertaken “this challenge to swim across the English Channel and he succeeded, and now he’d learnt something new”. Practitioners notably however did not share an understanding with the child participants here (and indeed the ‘I like media where the presenters or characters learn something new about themselves or the world’ statement (18) was the second most strongly disagreed with amongst practitioners).

Even though he noted the success of productions like *Blue Peter*, Frazer Price pointed out that media that is learning-facing can be too teacher like and “sometimes be quite patronising”. Anne Brogan recognised that a child might be drawn to those *Blue Peter* specials in which presenters “go to different places in the world and learn new things”, but she argued that children “wouldn't necessarily pick that out as something that was appealing in a program”, and significantly that children would not necessarily express themselves in a way that chimed with how the Q Set statements are constructed. To Anne it is not the “intellectual drive that I'm disagreeing with, it's the phrasing of it”; she believes the tone too “worthy” and “teacherly” for children to respond to. This was a refrain within interactions with practitioners, with Ellie Haworth, when discussing whether children would express a preference for media that taught them useful things, similarly suggesting that she “would be quite surprised if they expressed it” such.

Pete Davies, addressing learning, was similarly persuaded that children would not “rate it particularly high, in terms of the media that they'd choose to consume”. To him:

“Children are naturally inquisitive, but they're not naturally inquisitive in an academic way, or self-learning way. I just think it's a little bit further back in their priorities”

With a couple of exceptions, practitioners within their Q Sorts tended not to recognise children as having a preference for learning within media made for them, or if they might hold such a preference, they would not explicitly conceptualise it as such. Children within this study however appeared quite comfortable with sharing on a preference for learning within their ideal media.

Perhaps we can turn to Marc Goodchild for a closing thought here. Even though his Q Sort layout implies that he does not consider children as likely to express a preference for the learning-facing within their ideal media, when reflecting on his Q Sort choices, he did however note that learning might not actually be the “dirty word that we think it is” to children. Marc went on to suggest that children may not consider learning, in a more ‘traditional’ sense, as being “incompatible” with learning “outside of school”, and in line with this position the research interactions with children here lead us to recognise children as generally comfortable with learning – wherever it may happen.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Learning and Kindness - Children's Cross-Platform Media Preferences

This thesis began with a discussion on cross-platform media practice. Early conceptualisation, enacted prior to the research interactions, was set in place to help offer footings from which to move on to ask children to share their preferences on media. Some of this conceptualisation, in light of following the voices of research participants, has of course been left slightly behind, but similarly there is much that seems to 'talk' to the outcomes of the study - in particular the ways in which media may be seen as less 'siloes' by children, than it is by practice (or the academy).

After the initial discussion on cross-platform media phenomena the thesis turned to consider the ways in which we understand and position children, and in particular how children are addressed within research, with much of this thought feeding in to the study's methodology - its conceptual orientation as well as how the study was designed, enacted and analysed. The description chapter then focussed on the two main 'findings' within the study; these being shaped around 'learning' and 'kindness' within children's media. The following chapter briefly returns to these two outcomes; firstly the description on learning.

The Place of 'Learning' within Children's Media

The preceding description summarised a body of meaning-making whereby child participants appeared comfortable to express a preference for learning within children's media. Children offered a clear sense of actively wanting to learn and saw media as a legitimate means towards doing so. Description started by looking at some of the media concepts shared within the children's drawing-led interactions. Participants wove learning led thought in to many of their children's media production ideas - sometimes explicitly, sometimes less so. With concepts spanning those in which children could access "useful information", through to those positioned as more directly educational. The description then moved on to address the Q Sort interactions and the manner whereby child participants consistently agreed with

learning facing statements, whilst intriguingly the practitioner participants did not see children as having any particular preference to learn through children's media.

Looking further back to the early cross-platform contextualisation within this thesis, the first media example drawn upon was *Blue Peter*, and its various 'spin-offs'. The BBC production was not referenced in light of learning at this point however, but as an exemplar of where a media phenomenon, which might not have historically been recognised as cross-platform, can be addressed as such when considered in relation to how users actually engage with it. *Blue Peter* also came in to play within later discussion on media research with children, and here there was mention of the production team's desire to 'entertain and educate simultaneously' (Noble, 1975, p.180).

Other cross-platform media phenomena were drawn upon by means of example across the study that can ultimately be said to have an educational sensibility to them. For example *Horrible Histories*, as introduced in relation to the pace it moved across platform, can be said to introduce History through a comedic approach, and *Relic: Guardians of the Museum*, a game show shaped around the British Museum's historical artefacts, can also be argued to trigger an interest in History. *Deadly 60* can similarly be seen as both out-and-out entertainment, and learning facing in relation to Natural History (and in its *Deadly Art* spin off also to encourage Art/Crafts).

Productions of this nature, even though educational, can be said to firstly entertain, and as such operate as a springboard to 'stealth learning'? (Sharp, 2012). Intriguingly however this study's outcomes may suggest that there is not only room for more of these 'serendipitous' media learning experiences, but also potentially for more overtly educational media. Even though practitioners within the study predominantly saw explicit learning as something that children would not show a preference for within their media, the interactions with children suggested otherwise. Unlike in media production for younger children (where the balance appears more weighted to the educational), for the age group featured within this study the range of media that are directly learning facing is quite limited, yet, if the outcomes of this study hold weight, productions like *Blue Peter* and *Horrible Histories* still have their place,

and media practice may be able to reject 'no learning' or 'stealth learning' production habits in favour of more openly educational ones.

At this point it is perhaps fitting to frame a tentative distinction between 'media learning' and 'learning media', with the examples discussed offering media learning opportunities not shaped in light of any formal learning outcome. There are examples within contemporary practice that span this distinction, and here S4C's Welsh language *Ditectifs Hanes* (History Detectives) (2012-) television broadcast acts as media learning, in that it sets out to generally entertain and trigger interest, whilst its web based short films have been created to help teach the History of Wales (Key Stage 2) curriculum. Media learning and learning media rarely meet within one media phenomenon however, and UK children's media for the age group here is almost exclusively shaped around entertainment, not school-work imperatives.

Much of this discussion has focussed on media phenomena that would be described as sitting between factual and entertainment. This leaves us questioning if children would see there as being room to learn in more fictional settings, like the aforementioned *Doctor Who*, *Star Wars* or *Pokémon*. Here we might usefully turn to Swann's (2013) study whereby she asked child 'participants to consider a television programme from which they had learned something and to draw a scene' from it (p.146). Within these interactions children:

were just as likely to list dramas, whether live-action or animated (and including soaps and other non-children's formats) as they were to list the more obvious learning formats such as factual shows. Every time they watch a television show, they are prepared to learn (Ibid, p.150).

Participants saw themselves as learning in what we might consider quite unexpected places, for example (animated comedy) *SpongeBob SquarePants* (1999-) was the most cited programme, with lessons in 'friendship' coming to light here. In a way that resonates loudly with the outcomes of this study, children appeared just as 'happy to point to the 'soft' learning benefits of narrative as to the more obvious pedagogic learning aspects' (Ibid). Here it might be worth adding that any singular media utterance sits within a wider, often channel led, repertoire of media engagement, and hence any particular production, whether perceived as more entertainment or learning facing, should be seen in relation to its surrounding offerings, and thus production level distinctions between fiction and factual, entertainment and educational, come in to question.

Nixon once noted how the ‘intertextual discourses of television, film, advertisements and lifestyle magazines [provide] a matrix of teaching and learning’ opportunities (1998, p.23), and similarly transmedial cross-platform engagement has recently come in to focus pedagogically:

Through immersive, interconnected, and dynamic narratives, trans-media engages multiple literacies, including textual, visual, and media literacies, as well as multiple intelligences. It is highly engaging and allows for important social sharing among collaborators (Herr-Stephenson & Alper, 2013, p.2).

Transmedia in a participatory, playful and constructivist sense ‘encourages additive comprehension. We learn something new as we follow the story across media’ (Jenkins 2013, p.7). Coupled with the sentiment shared by children within this study on learning as having a place within their media, these transmedial learning possibilities promise much – as children are perhaps freed to engage with their interests, wherever they will.

The children that took part in this study appeared interested in the lives of others and as happy to follow them on a learning journey. Even though practitioners here might have recognised children as perhaps being more “self-centred”, children themselves tended toward ‘outward looking’ responses, and in particular they showed a preference for that media learning that might be personal interest or personally useful - and appreciated media as a trigger to ‘creating’. Intriguingly much of this thought chimes with constructivist ways of seeing children as actively and socially co-constructing their own learning (Vygotsky, 1978), and in turn it may be possible to then vision cross-platform media as a constructivist ‘playground’.

There is a clear sense within this study that children presume media to be a place of ‘doing’ (in a manner fitting to the doing/reflecting research design). Looking back to Piaget (1951, Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) and Vygotsky (1978), when they acknowledge the importance of action in learning, we might infer that the more interactive, transmedial, and ‘hands-on’ media engagement allow children to actively co-construct meaning across platforms in intriguingly learning rich ways. Vygotsky (1978, 1998) and Winnicott (1971) likewise suggest that play, in particular imitative and creative play, is vital in a child’s cognitive development, and again we could see more interactively playful media as offering opportunities for learning. Papert’s (1980) ‘learning-by-making’ constructionism may hold some significance

to this discussion, in that he stresses the place of the active creation of physical artefacts (fashioned within both a private and social discourse) within learning. Cross-platform media may, or may not, trigger the creation of a physical artefact, but we can argue that it provides room for complex and social meaning-making (whether abstract or tangible).

It might be worth briefly turning to the contemporary block building game *Minecraft* (2011-). Here we can see how children might play directly with the game itself, and that this play could trigger an intra-game learning response (around for example, the properties of building materials used within the game). Beyond this however we might also discern an extra-game learning response, in that as *Minecraft* originally came with no official manual and little instruction, users have turned to co-create a very active online community for mutual support - with YouTube being the first port of call for many. As a note on scale there are, at the time of writing, 95,200,000 results tagged as being *Minecraft* related on YouTube, and user Stampylonghead's *Minecraft* focussed YouTube channel has over 3,600,000 subscribers. Those that engage with *Minecraft* do so alongside others, in a goal directed and learning focussed fashion, and here we might begin to recognise the benefits of making space (across platform?) for children to turn to each other for learning.

As early as Mead (1913) there have been those that noted the importance of social interaction on child development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that a social inter-relatedness helps shape cognitive development (Inhelder & Piaget, 1962), and that through the 'cultural tools' of language and other sign systems, like media, children come to reproduce 'the knowledge of generations' (Corsaro, 2011, p.15). Here then it becomes possible to see the pedagogic significance of the interplay between a child and their symbolic/cultural tools as potentially located across media platforms, and in this scenario 'the world as symbolically presented by the internet, YouTube-type sites or video gaming would be a cultural "tool" that can be used strategically to affect the child's developing understanding of the world' (Goswami, 2008, p.4).

In arguing that language and social connections are essential in a child's development, we could however be returned to those negative Effects readings that focus on seemingly more solitary media activities (that have been associated with video games, television or internet

use for example), and position media as potentially isolating, distracting and disabling to learning. More optimistically however, it is also possible to argue that the affordances of cross-platform media may encourage deeply active and social participation - and in turn enable and encourage learning (as well as answer many of the 'anti-social' and 'isolating' criticisms laid at the door of media).

Ultimately the significance here could be that cross-platform media can be said to make room for children to actively claim ownership of the media experience. Looking back at *Harry Potter*, and the discussion on the ways in which those that write related fan fiction can be said to negotiate a sense of ownership (or in other words, add an utterance to an open and unfinalisable dialogue), we might not picture *Harry Potter* as explicitly educational. Yet as users engage in deeply social expressions of agency – as they claim a measure of platform spanning 'ownership' – we begin to recognise some intriguing pedagogic possibilities. Putting aside questions of how much actual agency may be at play, children can be seen as actors within a dialogic media experience, and the interactive participatory affordances of cross-platform media do appear aligned to learning. As the outcomes of this study suggest, children are happy for that learning to very much be part of the media that is made for them.

Practitioners within their Q Sort reflections on children's media preferences tended not to recognise children as having a preference for learning within their media, and they seemed cautious of media that was perhaps too "teacherly". As Pete Davies, discussing his position on learning, suggests:

"I partly put it possibly quite low down as a reaction to my time at CBBC, where there was a constant kind of battle between those who considered themselves there to entertain and those who were there with a more formal or informal learning agenda"

Here practitioners could be vocalising some sense of opposition to how children's media might be perceived as educational in practice, with Pete Davies adding that to him children do inherently want "to learn more about the world, but [...] in parts of the media we massively overplay it". Intriguing a majority of the practitioners within this study have experience working within PSBs - organisations that hold an 'obligation to provide educational programming' (Hesmondhalgh, 2012, p.138).

It is unlikely that the Q Sort interactions were the first time any of the practitioners had questioned the place of learning in children's media; practice experience and identities could have shaped practitioner responses in quite institution facing (or rejecting) 'dug-in' ways. Practitioners could be seen to be operating within a repertoire of responses, built around many years of institutional practice (and exposure to institutional rhetoric), whilst child participants could be argued to have reflected less on children's media production, and this distinction might be said to explain, in part, the difference between how practitioners and children visioned learning within media for children here. This reflection aside, there does appear to be a clear distinction between child and practitioner Q Sort positions, and the interactions within this study suggest that those in practice may underappreciate not only children's preferences around media and learning, but also children's capabilities in terms of understanding and articulating those preferences. Here last words might best be left to one of the child participants, as they suggest media "helps me to learn more things, and it will become useful in like my life".

The Place of 'Kindness' within Children's Media

The children that took part in this study showed a distinct disinclination towards a body of meaning-making recognised under the heading of 'kindness'. With this term, used more descriptively than conceptually, gathering together the ways in which child participants tended (when reflecting on media for them) to share a disinclination towards unfairness and 'bad' behaviour, as well as an aversion to witnessing others argue, lose, get hurt, be in danger or fighting (with this thought intriguingly counter to much of that which permeates the Media Effects research tradition). Beyond 'kindness' there are of course other headings under which this thought could have be combined and addressed, including those of 'empathy' or 'morality', but with both of these terms coming with a particular, potentially distracting, conceptual history (psychological and sociological), the neutrality of kindness seemed appropriate in helping discussion move forward.

The description on the child participant's Q Sorts started by highlighting a resistance towards bad behaviour and unfairness within media for them. Children's responses suggested that they wanted to see others win, not lose, and be 'rewarded for getting things right or behaving well'. There appeared to be an aversion to injustice at play, even if at times it may have been

a little binary. Practitioners shared some understanding on this sense of justice, even if some saw children as liking 'naughty' characters. As practitioner Daniel Lennard suggested on this, there is room for a character who "gets away with stuff and goes off and does what they're not supposed to". Interestingly however children's media could generally be said to be 'fair', and there are often 'consequences' for out-and-out 'bad' behaviour; indeed within television for example bad behaviour has historically rarely gone unpunished, or not regretted upon (Belson, 1978). Here a distinction could be made between that which pushes at the edge of normative behaviour, in a perhaps playful fashion, and that which children might perceive to be genuinely transgressing norms (that they themselves might be expected to operate within).

Children within the Q Sort interactions tended to share a disinclination towards fighting, arguing, threatened or being hurt (or in danger of it), with the 'see people get hurt' statement being the one that children disagreed with most strongly. This aversion to harm coming to others was echoed within interactions with practitioners, but practitioners did however make space for 'jeopardy' - with this perhaps borne from an awareness of contemporary media forms and commissioning practices. Both practitioners and children recognised a difference between that harm that feels 'real world', and that whereby it is clearly 'made up'. From a practitioner's perspective there was a sense that they were cautious towards media in which violence felt 'too close to home'. The further from reality then, the less aversion children might feel – with this recognisable in how acts of harm/unkindness, that could appear fitting to more fantastical media, may seem less so within media that was more 'familiar' and representative of a child's everyday experience.

Even though there were a some exceptions, child participants tended not to show a preference for scary media within their Q Sort interactions, and in a quite pronounced fashion they rejected the place of 'sadness'. It is worth reminding ourselves at this point that children within the study were asked to reflect on 'media made for them', yet a lot of the media children engage with would not necessarily sit within a conventional understanding of 'children's media'; indeed the most popular programmes with children are generally not made for children (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999; BARB, 2010). Here we could be triggered to ask questions around whether children go to 'adult' media for the likes of the sad and scary,

and in turn might position media made for children as more of a 'sanctuary'. It could be that children do not see 'their media' as the place for the scary for example, but they are fully aware that the scary is out there in more adult media spaces, if they wish to find it. Turning then to a production like *EastEnders* (1985-), as generally popular across all ages, we might (although it is moralistic and kind to some measure) consider it free to include acts that would seem unsuitable within media explicitly made for children.

A similar argument could be applied of course to much of the thought aired within this discussion – even the most 'moral' of the child participants could be positioning 'their media' as kind, knowing that adult media may operate, and offer outlets, in distinctly different ways. Intriguingly then, we could picture children as inherently understanding normative media practices across both adult and children's media (jeopardy and 'made up' harm included), and that this understanding might have fed in to what child participants here have claimed to prefer within media made explicitly for them - something that would complicate the outcomes of this study. A corrective in any future research in this area could be to ask children to look beyond children's media and reflect more so on their holistic media engagement.

Discourses old and new have focussed on the immorality of children (see Holland (1992; 2008) and Jenks (1996)), yet arguments have recently shifted toward recognising children, from a very young age, as having a sense of empathy (Gopnik, 2011) and concern for the welfare of others (Hepach et al., 2012); with even babies, counter to Piagetian developmental models, now understood as sharing a 'spontaneous tendency to identify with another's discomfort' (Damon, 1988, p.14). Here we should remain alert to universalising, particularly as children across cultures have been seen to demonstrate notably different manners of 'perspective-taking' (Eisenberg et al., 1997), but we should also not be surprised by suggestions that 'moral emotions are a natural component of a child's social repertoire' (Damon, 1988, p.13). Following the discussion within the chapter on children and childhoods, it would indeed feel quite problematic to position children as being any less capable of empathy than adults (even if they might be accused of operating within a slightly less nuanced moral framework). After all, children 'are no less fascinated by other people than

adults' (Doherty, 2009, p.2) and as social beings, child and adult both, we are all perhaps built for 'moral reciprocity' (Gibbs, 2014).

Children's 'morality' has been addressed within the Effects tradition, with the child somehow often positioned as being morally 'pure', prior to the imposition of (often violent) media (Kramer & Valkenburg, 1999; Dunn & Hughes, 2001). Arguments are shaped around whether media trigger a 'prosocial' response, with prosocial notably prefixed with words like 'decreased' or 'reduced' or 'low' (see Van Evra, 2008, for example). Even though Effects led approaches may tend toward simplistic readings it is possible to perceive media as affecting social cognition, moral development (Hoffman, 2000), and, in turn, prosocial behaviour (Mares & Woodard, 2001). Here Goswami (2008) has suggested that the more interactive media technologies (like video gaming and the internet) are likely to impact on social cognition and 'theory of mind'— this being the ability to ascribe and understand others' beliefs (Doherty, 2009). In this way then we can picture cross-platform media as potentially significant to a child's moral and prosocial development (Goswami, 2008). Goswami goes on to speculate, in light of prosocial development being reliant on 'rich communicative linguistic experiences about feelings, behaviour and emotions, either during pretend play or in family contexts' (2008, p.50) (as we might recognise within shared adult/child interactions with a media phenomenon like *EastEnders*), that 'engagement with new media might reduce opportunities for the family discussions and communicative experiences that are critical for prosocial development' (Ibid). In this Goswami misses how deeply social media have become (and have long been?), and a return to the cross-platform, cross-person interaction of *Minecraft* could remind us that what might appear to be antisocial and isolating, may instead offer rich social connection.

Intriguingly discourse here is perhaps quick to ask if media can harm children morally, but slower to acknowledge that media may offer room in which to 'play' with morality and other complex abstracts. Indeed it is difficult to imagine 'the development of moral emotions and morality' in isolation from socially located play (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007, p.35), and cross-platform media might in this light be seen as just as significant a location for this social play as any other. The thought of those, like Gauntlett (1998) and Buckingham (2007), who counter simplistic negative Effects positions with more potentially positive ones, may

promise a useful corrective; notably when they argue, as Buckingham does, that media might help encourage the development of moral values and prosocial behaviour.

We could see child participant's responses as reflecting an ongoing process of socialisation, particularly in light of an (Effects led) argument that, media, or television according to some, 'has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (usually cloaked in the form of entertainment) for otherwise heterogeneous populations [...] television brings virtually everyone into a shared national culture' (Gerbner et al., 2002, p.44). Perhaps we should accept that children's positions here might to some extent reflect a revoicing of normative morality, but this does not devalue the preferences as expressed by participants. More so it reminds us that the research interactions, as utterances of lived experience, sit within a highly complex dialogic field, and cannot be isolated from a broader polyphony of meaning-making.

This discussion has tried to operationalise the thought aired within the study under the heading of 'kindness'. In attempting to work in a more descriptive than overly conceptual manner discussion avoided a detour towards the developmental (Piaget, 1997; Kohlberg, 1984), sociological (Durkheim, 1979) or even evolutionary (Dawkins, 1976). Yet, even though cautious of being distracted by post hoc conceptualisation, there might be some worth in again briefly turning to constructivist accounts on how abstract thinking (that would shape a child's understanding of kindness or morality for example) can be said to be scaffolded through play (Vygotsky, 1978). Here then we might recognise playful cross-platform transmedial engagement as allowing space for children to rehearse conceptual nuances - and complicate the 'black and white' morality as described by practitioners within this study.

Looking at both the ideal media and the Q Sort interactions, there could be an argument made that the reflective nature of the design could have moved children toward offering more 'carefully' constructed meaning-making, and in turn heightened a 'moral overlay'. Within this scenario we perceive children as 'editing out' some of the more 'violent', 'argumentative' and 'naughty' responses (particularly if we again reflect on the school setting). And indeed this editing is something that might have been witnessed during one Q Sort interaction, when a child participant (even though the room had been set out such as to

avoid face-to-face interaction) appeared to actively seek out eye contact when positioning the 'I want to see people get hurt' statement card - in a way that felt to the researcher at the time like they might have been checking if their response would be 'sanctionable'.

Accepting the complexities reflected on here (and that they could in part be said to be revoicing/reflecting established media forms and the educational setting) children within the study did appear ultimately to consider media, made for them, as being a space in which fairness should prevail and fighting, arguing and harm (or the threat of harm) would be unwelcome. Broadly speaking practitioners within the study shared a common understanding with children, but could be said to not fully appreciate the child participant's strength of feeling in these areas. Practitioners did picture children to be averse to seeing harm come to others, but quite significantly, they appeared to underestimate children's disinclination toward 'bad' behaviour and fighting/arguing. Notably however practitioners did recognise children as being "overwhelmingly kind to each other".

The description and discussion operationalised under the headings of learning and kindness was shaped in light of the areas that appeared to hold most significance to the children who took part in the Q Sort. The other categories of description that emerged from within the coding, although not addressed directly within this thesis, may however warrant mention, particularly as within the 'reporting on' of research interactions there is a danger of overgeneralising and oversimplifying, as well as of underplaying that which does not fit (Denscombe, 2007, p.313). Indeed one of the practitioner participants, Frazer Price similarly stated within a Q Sort interaction, that "it's bothering me that I'm making these big generalisations". In sharing a want to briefly touch on the 'other findings' within the study it is worth noting that children did not offer thought on what was categorised under learning and kindness in isolation of other meaning-making; here responses were shaped relationally.

Taken at a whole the research interactions suggest that both children and practitioners saw laughter and fun as being at the heart of what children want from their media (with the 'makes me laugh' statement the most strongly agreed with for both groups of participants). This should come as little surprise to those familiar with how children engage with media. And again, looking at the other categories of description, there would also be little surprise

perhaps that both children and practitioners acknowledged the place of ‘great stories’ within children’s media.

Categories of description also emerged around play within children’s media, but interestingly practitioners placed far more emphasis on play than children. In part it could be that there is a difference between how children and practitioners conceptualise play, whilst there could also be something noteworthy in the way that the practitioners with experience in ‘interactive’ children’s media placed more weight on play than the more traditional ‘television led’ practitioners. The interactive background of many of the practitioners may also be behind how practitioners tended to see children as wanting to ‘interact and connect’ through their media, whilst children appeared not to express interests in this direction within their ideal media. At this point it might be worth highlighting that these interactive practitioners could also be said to be well versed in addressing media as something that conceptually spans platforms.

“It’s all Cross-platform to Me!”

The description and discussion is firmly shaped around that thought which emerged as being of most significance *to children* within the study, yet there were early claims made in the conceptualisation and contextualisation of the cross-platform landscape for recognising media as being near cross-platform by ‘default’. It is to this argument, as can be said to have emerged out of its lack of presence within the Q Sort interactions with children that we now turn.

The ideal media stage of the research was shaped out of ‘platform led’ interactions with children – in that children were initially asked to come up with a media concept in a specific space, like television, or online, and then ‘translate’ that concept onto other platforms. The later Q Sort interactions were however shaped around a more ‘platform agnostic’ set of Q Set statements, where meaning-making and reflection on children’s media was constructed without resort to platform led terminology, and here media was addressed in a more conceptual platform-spanning manner. During Q Sort interactions children notably did not tend to focus in on particular platforms, and operated at a media wide level (Appendix 22).

There was mention of television, internet, phone and so forth, but children appeared quicker to discuss character and narrative, than platform.

The near absence of platform specifics within these interactions with children revealed something of 'negative space' significance - and if we project ahead to when these child participants become adults, this 'de-platforming' may intriguingly challenge current understandings of how media is addressed. It might not be that the child participants were oblivious to platform, but they did tend to be comfortable to complicate and step across them. Those that created *Buzz the Question* for example seemed to express an understanding of media as separate from platform (or at least, TV being separable from the 'TV set'). Whilst similarly the child that created the *Game Roadshow* concept noted how "You get TV on the internet and internet on the TV", and the child that created *Supercow* appeared at ease with their bovine hero being equally accessible through television and online.

Whilst children offered little sense that they saw the platform itself as overridingly significant to their 'holistic' media engagement, and addressed media in a more 'conceptual', or at least less platform led manner, practitioners appeared (unsurprisingly considering their experience and knowledge) very aware of the nature and affordances of each platform. Here for example Estelle Hughes, when reflecting on violence and her understanding of children's media preferences, noted that even though she conducted her Q Sort from 'the perspective of a 10 or 11 year old child', she was still thinking "in terms of TV". Estelle went on to suggest that if she had been reflecting on her Q Sort from a gaming perspective, she would have been more likely to have seen children as expressing a desire for fighting within their media; with this highlighting an awareness of the affordances of platforms and the practices that surround them, as well as a tendency to perhaps think 'through platforms'. This discussion is of significance to the researcher himself, in that he experienced a measure of 'de-platforming' across the course of the study. Being a television practitioner by background there was much pre-supposition at play in his understanding of children's media engagement, and even though he had some experience of working within more 'interactive' environments (within the BBC Children's Interactive department for example), he felt, initially at least, more aligned with a 'TV first' approach than a platform agnostic one.

Discussion on platform specifics intriguingly led one of the practitioners (who requested anonymity on this) to argue that, even when '360' degree commissioning and production practices are valorised, commissioning habits are stuck in a platform led mind-set. The participant noted how attempts were made at BBC Children's (even though it played against the institutions self-avowed cross-platform rhetoric) to "bolt on a web site, bolt on something else to make it 360", even when the core proposition was still understood as television. As a corrective the participant expressed a wish for "truly 360 ideas [to] happen more at the concept stage", and at this point we might note a possible 'lag' between the rhetoric of those that head up children's media production within the UK, and the institutional structures and habits under which media are actually created. The thought shared here resonates quite neatly with the 'conceptual' (as opposed to 'platform led') model of cross-platform discussed earlier, and other practitioners within the study similarly either claimed to, or aimed to, operate across platforms in a more 'conceptual' manner. Notably Pete Davies (even though he drew on the term 'digital' to locate meaning) stated that media, by preference, should be "totally integrated [across platforms] in order to work", and Ellie Haworth shared a vision of effective development practices in which production teams would discuss "who are the characters, what are the stories?" before all else. Other practitioners however clearly positioned themselves in a platform delineated manner. Estelle Hughes for example states (even though she is responsible for creating media that has spanned, screen, book, toy and beyond) that her development practice "always start[s] from TV". As noted the researcher himself began his media career within television before turning to other platforms (initially web, then mobile, then event) – and here he recognises that his cross-platform engagement was probably motivated more so by a want to draw attention to television content, than anything else.

We could see practice as having created demarcation where children might not. Reiterating this point, why would a child not assume that they can access, co-opt and re-create media in a space, and time, and fashion, of their own choosing? When a child is immersed in a complex mediated-lived experience (Deuze, 2011; Jones, 2014), they might not picture any individual platform to be of great significance – it is the overall platform spanning repertoire of media (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006) or 'media mix' (Ito, 2008) that could instead count. In this light, we might return to recognising each utterance of media, in a Bakhtinian sense, to be in dialogue with each other utterance, and there may be some justification for not addressing any

medium, in the singular, as a 'discreet' utterance, even if institutional structures and production habits may act as barrier to synchronous and conceptually led development practices. Here then may sit a useful note to practice - to acknowledge the ways in which children are capable of engaging with texts in a platform agnostic manner, whilst also to accept that children, within media made for them, appear comfortable with that which might once have felt 'worthy'.

Where Now?

This research project was orientated to view each 'utterance' of meaning-making, be that on the scale of research interaction, or media phenomena, as relational to each other utterance. It operates within a phenomenology that appreciates subjective experience as being dialogic. Thus the description of the experience that is the research act (and the 'life-world' it sits within) is intersubjective, and in turn socially constructed. Research then is positioned as a lived experience in itself, and therefore became part of an active and unfinalisable dialogue (that at times here felt weighted more towards 'problem' than 'solution'). The study of course can be said to have a beginning, as expressed within this written record, and by most measures it has an end, yet its dissemination, and the ways in which it has the potential to inform future research and practice (in a manner that resonates with Derrida's 'open text'), could be seen to challenge any fixed closure.

As noted within the introduction the study could not have been shaped in as fully a linear fashion as mapped out here. Conceptualisation and actualisation did not run back-to-back, but instead they informed and challenged each other; indeed chapters can be said to have been in active dialogue. Beyond not operating in a strictly linear and 'neat' fashion, the research was far from being isolatable from that which surrounds it; significantly it was shaped in light of the author's professional practice and engagement with the academy. It here then becomes potentially necessary to remind ourselves that the manner whereby we perceive knowledge and being shapes research from inception through to dissemination, and that it would have been highly problematic to try and separate the researcher(-practitioner) from research design and process.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

The 'voice' of the researcher was considered earlier within this thesis, and sat at the heart of its core conceptual struggle. The early drawing led interactions with children, for example, led the researcher (at this point perhaps placing interpretation over description) to initially recognise children as sharing a 'want' for more violent media. Yet as the study progressed this interpretation was softened, then overwritten, by a more nuanced and participant guided turn within the method, and here child participants within the Q Sort interactions ultimately appeared to express disinclination toward violence and harm within media for them. Participants were free to mitigate (mis)interpretation on the part of the researcher, and we can see the Q Sort's worth (unshackled from a Q Method statistical overlay) as helping participants not just to make-meaning, but to reopen, reclaim, complicate and overturn it. There was a danger that the study, in addressing a field that the researcher has historically operated within, could have become just a series of 'cosy' interviews with onetime colleagues; interviews in which questions would be shaped from within adult bound 'insider' knowledge. The method however allowed meaning-making, and what was seen to be significant within it, to become a negotiated act across parties – and it is here, within the method, that the study's original contribution to knowledge sits. In that it offered space for participant preferences to be reflectively expressed, whilst mitigating any researcher 'ventriloquism' and over-validation of the (adult) 'expert'.

With children's preferences woven in to all stages of the research design, the sketches of their ideal media concepts operated as an effective means of encouraging children to share something of their media preferences (in a manner that traditional questionnaire or interview based methods may have struggled to replicate), whilst the side-by-side nature of the Q Sort interactions offered a novel challenge for participants (with none of those involved having previously taken part in Q based research). Both the drawing led interactions and the card sorts allowed participants to physically connect with the study, with this physical connection freeing participants to engage in active meaning-making and reflection, and helping downplay researcher status and centrality. Beyond the pleasure children took from having their opinions valued, both groups of participants appeared to find the interactions to be enjoyable - and here we can discern the multi-methods design to be usefully 'person friendly' and 'research friendly' (Punch, 2002, p.337). Some of the practitioners were initially

hesitant about the card sorts, but a few minutes in to each interaction there seemed to be an appreciation that they were not involved in 'just another interview'.

The method has its limitations of course, and as reflected upon across the study there are points at which anyone aligned to a specific research approach might have felt troubled. Yet it is worth reminding ourselves, that phenomenologically speaking, the research act may only truly represent the research act, as described. Even though the study draws on conceptualisation from across disciplines, it does not, and cannot, speak with the voice of any one of them. Outcomes can only be supported by these particular interactions with these particular participants, and as such are ripe for complication, or even being overturned. In some manner, in that we cannot talk authoritatively of bigger pictures, this might leave us frustrated by a lack of applicability, or even closure, but returning to a Bakhtinian dialogism here, we could maybe accept, and even celebrate, that research rarely (if ever) tells a whole 'truth'; it is rarely 'tied up' (Cook, 2010), neatly summarised or closed.

The success or otherwise of research design should be addressed in relation to how it aligned to the research imperative and orientation, and ultimately to how it served to answer the research question – even if we should be warned against expecting answer to fit question in a neat 'hand-to-glove' fashion (Cook, 2010, p.221). The researcher feels persuaded that the conceptual orientation and design fed in to each other in constructive ways, that the method helped bring the voices of children and practice together, and that the tools were effective in encouraging child participants to express their preferences, whilst also enabling practitioners to usefully reflect on these preferences and their own practice.

In light of it bringing together research tools in a unique fashion, and in that through a negotiated co-construction of meaning-making and reflection it effectively operationalised children's media preferences, the method is recognised as being part of this study's original contribution to knowledge. Noting the earlier rejection of off-the-shelf method however, there is no suggestion made that others should adopt the design as it stands here, more so that the method might offer much if 'reversioned' or 'localised' to another study's imperatives. It would be intriguing to revisit the method within another setting. To fully turn this study on its head for example, to see the creative-reflective concourse development

used with adult participants, and to then see children offering their understandings of these adult positions. Ultimately significance sits in the method's utility for encouraging voice and offering space for reflection. The method as constructed within this study could be drawn upon again where researchers look to 'reveal' discourse, yet hope to play against their own positing power, and where they wish to encourage cross-group dialogue on the subjectivities of others.

In considering the worth of the method we are led to address that other thought that emerged within the study that seems to be of significance. The headline outcomes do appear telling, and in relation to learning within media for children, they suggest an intriguing disconnect between children and children's media practice. If there was a cautiously framed 'take home' argument to share on to practice, it would be (returning to the broader, maybe obvious, categories of description), that practice should look to create media that is 'fun' and features a 'great story', whilst not overly worrying about interactivity, unless it is playful. Practice should also note that children might not 'see' the platform, whilst returning to the headline outcomes of the study practitioners should in particular look to keep media production for children kind and not be afraid of the place of learning. Children appear happy to learn where they will, and as this is a position that practitioners here did not fully appreciate, there is justification for taking the outcomes of the study back to practice.

Beyond sharing an interest in reengaging with the tools utilised here the researcher is persuaded that there would be value to focusing in on either the place of 'learning' or 'kindness' within children's media (or even in light of one child participant's comment that "you don't want to teach the kids bad behaviour", the 'learning of kindness'). By preference any further research would be open to the voice of both user and practice, particularly as much thought in these areas could be said to have been shaped in a 'top-down' manner and there is a paucity of research that takes children's media engagement at face value.

At this point an argument could be made that the outcomes of the study should be returned to the child participants. The children that kindly agreed to take part in the study are however now scattered across multiple secondary schools. With this in mind, within any future research of this kind an effort should perhaps be made to design in an earlier 'report back'

to all participants. There is a tentative argument to be made that dissemination to practice could potentially feedback in to the ways in which children's media is created, but ultimately there is a feeling that the research project as a whole is imbalanced here. This thought, and the perceived success of the more participatory aspects of the multi-methods design, would lead the researcher to look toward engaging in more fully participatory approaches. Within this study for example children could have played a part in early design discussions, as well as being involved in managing research interactions, coding and analysis, and reporting on of outcomes (a metaphor that comes to mind here however is that you perhaps need to learn to ride a bike, to know that you can let go of the handlebars). Corsaro suggests that one of 'the most important things that adults can do to enhance children's lives is to give them more of their time' (2011, p.352). This study may have been limited by the complications, not least logistically, of working with children, yet the ambition of spending more time with children within future research would seem a fitting one.

So I took my rough sketches out of my pocket. The little prince looked at them and laughed as he said: 'Your baobabs are a bit like cabbages.'

'Oh!' And I had been so proud of my baobab!

'Your fox... its ears... they look a bit like horns... and are too long!'

And he laughed again.

'You are unfair, little prince. Remember I could only draw boa constrictors from the outside and boa constrictors from the inside.'

'Oh! That's enough,' he said. 'Children understand'

The Little Prince
de Saint- Exupéry
1944

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