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CHAPTER 2

Doing comparative research with children and young people

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Approaching the task

Despite widespread speculation about the changing media environment, when we began this project many things were unknown about children and young people's use of media, especially the new media. Moreover, there are many ways of asking about the place of media in children and young people's lives. In this project, we wanted to discover the facts and figures, and the meanings and experiences, associated with media access and use. We also wanted to understand the social contexts of access and use - in terms of family, friends and school. And we wanted to get a handle on the consequences of use for different young people and in different contexts. In this chapter, we elaborate the methods used in the comparative project with the primary aim of making our working procedures transparent. We have learned a lot from designing and conducting this large-scale comparative project, and hope that others may benefit from our experience, particularly as cross-national projects are becoming increasingly common in Europe and elsewhere.

To give the headlines of the project design, we interviewed children and young people from twelve countries in Europe, from those just starting school at six years old to those coming to the end of their school career at 16 years old. Some live in rural surroundings, others in suburbs, others in city centers, and they come from households which vary considerably in income and social class. In all, we surveyed some 11,000 6-16 year olds in four age bands (6-7, 9-10, 12-13, and 15-16 years). Where funding allowed, we surveyed them face-to-face, many others completed questionnaires in their classrooms. Using qualitative, depth interviewing, we interviewed several hundred more. Their willing, often enthusiastic, participation in our project and their readiness to answer our questions at length added to the quality of the material collected. They were keen to contribute to a book about children and new media, feeling this to address issues of importance to them.

As our research questions centered on children and young people's access to, use of, and attitudes towards 16 distinct media, the result is a very large data set which has the potential to address some complex issues. Our primary task was to document which young people have access to which media and how they use them in different European countries. Inevitably, however, any data concerning access may become rapidly out of date. Hence, having documented access and use during 1997/8, we took the opportunity to segment the sample and recombine the variables in more complex ways to understand the more enduring patterns and trends. For we also wanted, more tentatively, to trace the consequences of technological and societal developments for children and

young people, to identify new opportunities and dangers, to critique misleading claims, and to inform debate.

Researching children and young people

Research on the uses of the domestic screen is generally conducted on households, by surveying adults. Yet parents and children may have different stories to tell about their everyday lives. Asking parents is not enough, nor is it satisfactory to treat children and young people as a homogenous group. But what, if anything, is specific about researching children and young people? Despite the pervasive call to give children a 'voice' in social research (Buckingham, 1993; Grieg and Taylor, 1999; Ireland and Holloway, 1996; Mahon et al, 1996; Morrow and Richards, 1996), children are still perceived by many researchers as powerless subjects, incompetent according to cognitive and emotional developmental criteria, and so incapable of accurately describing and analyzing their own experiences. Adults, be they researchers, parents, teachers, thus serve as informants for children's everyday lives. Yet their accounts may be misleading as a guide to understanding children's practices, pleasures and meanings. For example, in the British study we asked both parents and children how much time children spent with different media. We found that parents claim somewhat lower television viewing for their children but higher reading times, compared with the times reported by their children. Here a social desirability effect operating on the part of parents would seem at least as plausible as the normative claim that children are simply unreliable respondents.

How we perceive children affects how we study them. In this project, we invited children and young people to recount their own world view in regard to the area of their lives in which they are the most powerful and knowledgeable - their leisure culture. We had no interest in 'testing' their perceptions, evaluating their media usage or imposing our preconceptions on 'appropriate' behaviors. Rather, we were genuinely interested in hearing their own stories, from their own perspective, freed from adult value judgments. In this sense, our research is not merely 'on' children but 'with' them and 'for' them (Hood, Kelley and Mayall, 1996). Nonetheless, doing research with children is not an easy task, and we were constantly challenged by some major issues, including questions of age, language, location, context, and ethics. We discuss these issues below, outlining how each informed our research design.

Age

In many respects, the boundaries dividing children, young people and adults are culturally constructed with the education system, family law, the labor market, and cultural traditions all playing their part (James et al, 1998). Hence, rather than apply a cognitive-developmental approach to the variable of age

(thus implicitly measuring children's performance against adult standards) we have chosen to treat our four separate age bands as objects of study in their own right. Thus we assume that each child is capable of providing valid and insightful information, provided that s/he is approached appropriately and that the data are interpreted carefully.

The question of age also raises that of the power differential between child and researcher. The latter runs the risk of collecting data which fits adult prior expectations while what the child is actually trying to convey, or is able to convey, about his or her world is missed (Graue and Walsh, 1998). To overcome such difficulties, we used various methods, adapted to the wide range of ages in our study. For example, some teams (e.g. UK and Italy) used illustrative cards with pictures of media on them in interviews with the youngest children, and invited them also to draw pictures. Face-to face interviews conducted with children of different ages employed different wordings of the same questions and different interviewing practices. Following pilot work, two versions of the self-completion questionnaires were developed, designed to adjust to different competencies and experiences. In those countries where the questionnaires were administered in the classrooms, the younger children were interviewed individually while the older ones received the version for self-completion. Generally, the 6-8 year olds were treated rather differently from the rest: certain questions, such as those estimating time spent with media, were not asked for this age group and other questions were asked in a simpler form or with more restricted response options.

Language

Key to the conduct of age-appropriate research is attention to the use of language, for there are dangers in researching children if one uses language, a form of 'performance', as the means of evaluating 'competence' (Buckingham, 1991; Hodge and Tripp, 1986). Children's production of linguistic utterances may fail to represent, sometimes over-representing and sometimes under-representing, their understandings and feelings (Lemish, 1997). In our study, we have chosen to assume that children's discourse in the personal interviews, and their responses to the questionnaires, are representative of what they chose to share with us about their leisure (Rudd, 1992). Thus, rather than an 'objective', measurable truth, their perceptions, expressed in their own words, were the center of our concern. This is not to say that we have analyzed their talk at face value, but we have not undervalued their accounts either.

In the qualitative work particularly, the terms children use to discuss media in particular were of central interest: the metaphors they used to describe, the values they imputed to, and the expectations they associated with different media allowed us insight into their perspectives on new and old media. Indeed

it emerged clearly from these interviews that even the terms 'old' and 'new' reflect adult rather than child perspectives. In the quantitative survey it was important to ensure, for key terminology such as that of 'computers' (though some difficulties arose also for other media, given changes in technology), that we both understood, and were understood by, the children we interviewed. The fact that 'computer' for many children means 'games machine' tells us much about the place of computers in children's lives and is not simply to be seen as an example of a restricted or careless use of language.

Location

In researching children it is important to pay attention to where, as well as how, the research takes place. Thus, children's responses to, and cooperation with, the research process should be understood in relation to the particular social context (Buckingham, 1993; Rudd, 1992). For example, we know that children, like adults, interact differently in individual settings versus group situations, at home as opposed to in a formal school setting, or with an adult who is perceived as a guest in the home or an adult who is perceived as another authoritative 'school' person. For various reasons, both conceptual and practical, our research took place in a variety of settings. Pilot work demonstrated that children and young people reveal different aspects of themselves and their relationship with the media, depending upon where they are interviewed. At home alone more personal idiosyncratic reactions are more easily admitted to a sympathetic interviewer. At home with their family, the impact of parents and siblings on behavior is most easily observed. Group interviews in schools give the opportunity to witness peer pressure in action, while interviews in the classroom may reveal more academic efforts to 'explain' or 'understand'. The advantages and disadvantages of each context were considered and integrated into the analysis.

Context

Where to interview children raises the broader question of contextualizing findings. Having eschewed a cognitive-developmental approach, our stress was on recognizing that children are positioned within a particular social context that both shapes and is shaped by their activities within it. If possible we needed to research not just children but also their parents and teachers: we needed to relate screen media to print and music and to relate the home to the community and the school. Survey questions to children therefore embraced the two worlds of home and school and covered a wide spectrum of leisure activities both inside and outside the home. In the majority of the twelve countries qualitative interviews with parents were integrated into research findings and in some interviews with teachers were also achieved. Without putting media use into context it is difficult to interpret one's observations or to identify the appropriate dimensions with which to compare demographic

groups, media or nations. Without context, how does one decide if 50% of 6-7 year olds having their own television set is a high or a low figure, and how does one understand why the 50% figure obtained in the United Kingdom is higher than the 25% obtained in Sweden? In analyzing children's media use, we also used the secondary data discussed in the previous chapter to elaborate two kinds of cuts through the larger context; one media-centered (how do media vary by country), the other society-centered (how do societies vary by country).

Ethics

Our respect for children's views demands sensitivity to ethical issues (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Each team followed the ethical guidelines required in their country, including the attainment of informed consent from children and parents in the case of home and school-based interviews (Holmes, 1998). Respondents' anonymity was guaranteed and upheld in the use of all research tools. Furthermore, children were allowed to drop in/out at any stage of the interview and/or when completing the questionnaire, and to refrain from answering questions with which they felt uncomfortable. We try hard in this book to provide a fair account of our findings and to represent the children's 'voice' authentically.

On adopting a multi-method design

Given the breadth of our research agenda and our stress on contextualizing media use, the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods was held to maximize the quality and interpretability of the data obtained. For practical reasons, the balance between, and timing of, qualitative and quantitative phases varied across the different national teams. The advantages of integrating qualitative and quantitative data are well-rehearsed in the methodological literature, offering the opportunity for triangulation of different methods onto a common object of inquiry (Flick, 1998). At various points in our cross-national project, each of the following approaches was adopted.

Qualitative phase precedes quantitative phase

Here, the qualitative research supports the design and construction of quantitative research instruments, playing a prior, subordinate role in order to improve and strengthen the validity of the quantitative study. Indeed, the use of qualitative in-depth interviews with children was crucial in providing us with insights and understandings that shaped to a large degree many of our decisions regarding the quantitative questionnaire, in terms of both its construction and interpretation. In the initial focus group discussions, for example, we experimented with different ways of referring to the media (e.g.

>Home computer= or >PC=, >multimedia computer= or >CD-Rom=) and different ways of estimating time spent with media. In using these insights to inform the design, construction and phrasing of the survey, in effect we treated this part of the qualitative research as a pilot study for the quantitative. Moreover, given the difficulties of designing a research instrument that worked equally well with very different kinds of children across a diversity of national settings, the process of sharing insights from the qualitative work carried out in each country was vital in ensuring the survey made sense on its administration.

Complementarity

This approach assumes that different research questions are best addressed by drawing on the strengths of different methods. Thus some questions are seen as best pursued through qualitative methods while quantitative methods are most appropriately used for other parts of the project. On this view, each part of the study stands in its own right rather than being subordinated to the other. For example, the questions about children=s perceptions of media were best pursued by very open, qualitative methods in which we as researchers provided no prior indication of appropriate or expected answers: such as, how do children distinguish between old and new media, or national and imported programs. By contrast, the questions about the relative importance of socio-structural factors - such as gender, social class, age - in framing the use of different media were better researched quantitatively. Here the survey provided direct comparability across individuals, allowing us to map these complex contingencies (as in the finding that those with media-rich bedrooms, who tend to be older and better off, also spend more time in their bedrooms, particularly if they are girls).

Mutuality

Rather than using different methods for different questions, the focus here is precisely on using both kinds of data to illuminate the same research question. Thus, quantitative research is used to interpret the qualitative and vice versa. For the former, the crucial concern is with representativeness. It is all too easy, when conducting qualitative research, to find several children in a row sharing the same experience and assume therefore that this is a common or normative experience. Similarly, it is easy to regard a detailed case study as full of unique characteristics, while a look at the related survey findings might reveal how widespread such characteristics actually are. Implicit claims for representativeness may be usefully >tested= against the survey findings to provide a sense of common or infrequent responses, to explore patterns of response, and to guard against implicit and unchecked assumptions about frequency distributions embedded in qualitative analysis (Lewis, 1997).

Conversely, qualitative research is often needed to interpret quantitative findings, for while it is often assumed that figures speak for themselves, this is far from the case. Because the researcher is at a distance from the research participants, and because a good survey instrument often asks the same related questions several times over, albeit in different ways, surveys commonly throw up puzzles and contradictions: why do items expected to intercorrelate not do so, why does the apparently same question asked in two ways generate different findings, etc. Qualitative research can often be scrutinized for some insights here, as well as providing a check on the validity of findings, a guide for what to look for in the quantitative data set, and a means of contextualizing bald facts.

As the research process incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods, we now describe each in turn.

Qualitative methods and design issues

In keeping with the epistemology of qualitative research, we have attempted to build on our understandings of children's media environment through use of an inductive discovery process based on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach is particularly useful in research situations where researchers are unwilling to impose an *a priori* theoretical framework onto the data. Such research seeks to build theoretical insights from the bottom up by adopting a contextualized, holistic, process-oriented perspective which aims to respect each individual's interpretation of their own experiences. The 'taken for granted' aspects of everyday life are granted legitimacy as topics for study and reflection, including those centered around the private sphere, the subjective and the emotional.

To give an example from our in-home interviews in the United Kingdom and Israel, we were frustrated by the difficulty of determining how parents regulate media use. Parents were much more likely than their children to claim that there were rules about media use in the family. Children were more likely to talk in terms of media habits, focusing on the practices which render rules unenforceable and/or irrelevant to family activities. It was tempting to decide on an interpretation of rules halfway between the parents' and children's accounts. But the point, of course, is that what is occurring is not simply the partial enforcement of some half-hearted rules, but a continual activity - engaged in by both parents and children - of negotiating access to and the meanings of shared space, time and resources, and, consequently, negotiating identities, relationships and domestic power (Corsaro, 1997). In short, the point of listening to children is not just a liberal fancy, but stresses the importance of discovering children's definitions, conceptions, priorities and assumptions rather than assuming that they endorse an adult understanding but express it imperfectly. Children act, interact, support each other, negotiate

with others, get involved or avoid situations all according to their understandings of the social world.

Children=s interview schedule

Within the nine countries who completed the qualitative research phase, a common set of questions were established and an interview guide drawn up by the British team. This included questions initially of particular interest to one or several teams which ultimately proved valuable for all. For example, questions such as 'What=s it like living around here?' and 'What=s it like being your age?' were suggested to put children at their ease at the beginning of the interview: in fact these generated some valuable context which supported cross-cultural comparisons (e.g. Chapter 8). While detailed interview guides were prepared, with simplified versions being drawn up for the youngest children, these were not intended to be followed verbatim in any interview, as the priority was for discussion to develop naturally, following the children=s lead and exploring the topics of most interest to them. However the interviewers were expected to ensure that all topics addressed in the guides were covered in the groups as a whole. An outline of topics addressed is shown below. (INSERT TABLE 2.1: Outline of interview schedule)

Interviewing: who and where?

In an attempt to account for national diversity, an effort was made in each country to include basic national divisions. We did so by interviewing children representing the various cultural profiles (according mainly to gender, social class, ethnicity, urban/rural and geographical location). For a variety of reasons, different national teams made different decisions about the types of interviews to be conducted. For example, in Israel a quota for religious families was set, whereas in the United Kingdom (where religion plays a less central role in national life, see Chapter 1) this was not an important criterion. Similarly, in Israel interviews with the whole family present proved highly productive, whereas in other countries this was felt likely to inhibit discussion and parents and children were interviewed separately. While several teams used multiple qualitative methods here, the final data set includes individual, family, or peer-group interviews, conducted at home, at school, or elsewhere. Interviewing children and young people individually in their homes gave us access to their domestic media environment, so that the place of the media in the lives of children and their families could be observed directly. In this setting, discussion of media use and family rules about media arose naturally and could be pursued in context and in depth. Interviewing in schools, on the other hand, allowed us to observe the peer context in the group situation, thereby revealing other aspects of media meanings for children. Notwithstanding some peer pressure, we found that most children were able to express their individuality in the groups at school.

The type of qualitative research undertaken by each national team and the numbers involved are shown in

2.2. (INSERT TABLE 2.2)

Data analysis and presentation

As is the nature of such a project, massive amounts of interview data were produced (all transcribed per verbatim) in various languages, most of which could not be read by the other collaborating teams. This intensified mutual dependency on interpretation and analysis. As a result, most of the comparative qualitative work was performed on a second level of analysis, following each team's own immersion in their data and the inherent reduction process involved in the creation of prioritized, sensible categories. Simple categories such as people, behaviors, places, times, technologies, etc, were included with more complex ones such as concepts, ideas, attitudes, motifs, relationships, gratifications, etc.

The most innovative, yet difficult, aspect of the qualitative research was the attempt at a comparative analysis. A typical process of qualitative data-categorization involves two levels: first, the participants' own account, as transcribed from interviews; and second, the researcher's own account, which is based on the first account but provides a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) which incorporates his/her own interpretation. In our project, we added a third level, namely a comparative analysis resulting from an ongoing process of negotiation between team members themselves and between the 'country team' and other teams. This third level of comparison allowed the researchers to look at the more general trends in each country, rather than focus on the contextualized, often non-comparable details of each situation. In practice, this was a difficult, often bumpy road to take, resulting at times in disagreements and even overt conflicts of interpretation. However, in the long run, both agreements and disagreements contributed greatly to our ability to probe even deeper into the children's world and to consider the multiplicity of possible meanings it carries.

Applying evaluative criteria for qualitative research (such as the common questions of validity, reliability and generalizability) is always a thorny issue. As is commonly practiced, researchers were expected to report in detail on his/her role in the research situation and to apply a 'disciplined subjectivity'. Triangulation of data from various sources and validation of conclusions by the study's participants themselves were often applied (Lindlof, 1995). Here, we have attempted, to follow the guidelines offered by Anderson (1987): to engage not only in a description of media-related activities, but also to document the meanings they have for our children, to provide first hand information from the children themselves; to present evidence of a committed

study on our part (with investment of time, effort, thought, self-reflection); to present as complete a picture as possible so as to address most possible questions that may arise for the interested reader; and to convey respect for the participants' perspectives, both the children and the researchers.

Representing our qualitative findings as comprehensively as they deserve in this book has been no easy task. The thematic approach adopted for each chapter does not allow for a detailed account of qualitative data and its interpretation. In searching for the most economical illustration to present, one can easily be tempted to choose the most vivid striking examples, ones which tend to be noticed but do not necessarily represent the typical occurrence of the phenomenon discussed. Practical constraints may also result in the presentation of decontextualized, fragmented data, rather than an integral part of the presentation. We have attempted to use the qualitative illustrations as representative exemplars (Lindlof, 1995): those which attempt to capture as many features as possible of the phenomenon and to provide the reader with better access to its understanding. However, perhaps inevitably, the complexity of both the issues at hand and the comparative design resulted in diversity in standards of application of these principles and guidelines. We urge the readers to use their own judgments in evaluating our work and to cross-examine our interpretations. It should nevertheless be stressed that shared insights from the qualitative phase of our research have informed and illuminated every stage of the project. It thus has made a significant, if not immediately apparent, contribution to every chapter in this book.

Quantitative methods and design issues

As Lewis (1997) notes, many claims made about media use are implicitly if not explicitly quantitative in nature. We are commonly concerned with discovering frequency of media use, with comparing the degree of use of one group compared with another, and with putting some figures into the academic and policy debate, while not prejudging whether these figures will confirm or confound prior assumptions. Quantification also permits a search for patterns: over and above simple figures, one can seek for trends and tendencies, revealing a more nuanced and complex picture of media use.

Children's survey questionnaire

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the promise of surveying a large number of children and young people across Europe, and asking them many questions of academic and policy interest, was worth our efforts, even if the figures we produced were 'ball park' figures and if the comparisons made must be treated with care. Not only were our initial research aims broad, but also our 12 national teams combined considerable multi-disciplinary expertise as well as

previous research within the field; hence the final survey instrument represented a wide range of issues and questions.

Areas covered by the survey are shown in Table 2.3. The majority of the national teams included most of these questions while the main questions on media ownership and use were asked by all twelve.

(INSERT TABLE 2.3)

The survey questionnaire was produced in two versions - a face-to-face interview and a self-completion questionnaire. The selected questions were then translated into their own languages and then piloted by the national teams. The final instrument was lengthy for two reasons. First, we measured key variables (e.g. media exposure) in several ways to increase reliability (see Appendix 3 for details). Second, we invited a considerable amount of background information to contextualize our findings. However, children's willingness to answer many questions, placed a practical limit on the questionnaire length (on average, this took 45 minutes to complete).

Where appropriate we distinguished between the different uses of a medium. Hence, we measured time spent using 'the PC - not for games', distinguishing this from 'playing electronic games' (whether on the PC or another medium). We also distinguished between types of reading activity, and focused particularly on time spent reading 'books - not for school'. And as it proved difficult for children to distinguish which medium they listened to music on, we simply asked about time spent 'listening to music'. For television, days of the week made a difference: thus, with some cross-national variation, we asked about time spent watching television on weekdays, on Saturdays and on Sundays (see Appendix 3).

Sampling

All twelve participating countries completed the survey as shown in Table 2.4. While all national teams aimed for representative sampling within their country, limited funding made for some practical compromises, particularly for those surveys administered as self-completion questionnaires through schools, though most encompass the geographic and regional diversity of their country. (INSERT TABLE 2.4)

Quotas were set for age, gender and social class. However, for a variety of practical reasons, the achieved samples were imperfectly balanced (see Table 2.5).

(INSERT TABLE 2.5)

These imbalances make it inappropriate for us to collapse the data across countries or age bands in this volume. This is because firstly, the samples are neither representative of the relative size of the countries concerned, nor are countries equally represented (e.g. the Swiss, Danish and Swedish samples are half as large again as those of some other countries) and secondly, not only are age bands discontinuous but they are not all equally represented in each country (e.g. the Italian sample includes none under 12). Consequently, caution should be exercised in interpreting 'gender' and 'SES' groupings. Where an 'all' figure is provided, unless otherwise stated, this is an 'average of the averages', calculated by giving an equal weight to each country rather than a simple average over all respondents across Europe. Thus 'all' figures should not be taken as simply representative of 'European children'. In addition, caution should be exercised in interpreting any grouping such as 'gender' or 'SES' as these are based on an aggregate of the four age bands.

There are particular difficulties surrounding the classification of socio-economic status (SES) and no cross-national standard definition. In most cases, SES was derived from information about the income/ employment/ educational level of parents, though in some countries classification was based on information about the school. Each country then classified their sample into high, medium and low SES in a manner which made most sense in terms of their country, resulting in some discrepancies in the proportions assigned to each category. We cannot therefore assume direct comparability between the three categories across different countries, although we can compare trends within countries with confidence.

Data interpretation

Care is required when interpreting the survey findings. In our analyses in this volume, and depending on the issue at hand, we may report findings for a particular age group, or we may report findings only for those who have access to a medium, or only for those who actually use it. These distinctions make a difference, and for different research questions we try to present the data that are most relevant.

Furthermore, one must beware of overinterpreting small variations in the data: given our large sample size, many of our findings are statistically significant, but this may not make them socially significant, and thus only findings which we judged both sizeable and reliable (as well as being statistically significant at $p < 0.05$) are given attention in this volume. One must also beware of comparing the incomparable: while it is tempting to use statistical analysis to compare across our 12 countries, our team meetings revealed sufficient variations in interpretation and contextualization of our key measures as to make this inappropriate.¹

Analytically, a contextual focus invites several kinds of analysis beyond the straightforward description of media use by categories of children and/or categories of media. First, one can consider combinations or clusters or typologies of media use. Thus we may explore how children and young people combine media to construct their own media-leisure environments (e.g. Chapter 6). Further, the conditional analysis of data allows one to explore how media use is conditional on certain contextual factors (thus for example, in Chapter 8 we show how children with a television in their bedroom watch in a different way from those who do not).

Conducting research in comparative perspective

Early on, our project generated a heuristic metaphor for collaborative work. Our '>flower' model discriminated the directly comparable data collected (the flower centre) from additional national variations (the petals). Thus for both qualitative and quantitative phases, we could construct shared instruments (survey questions, interview schedules) while permitting countries to add their own 'petals' which would not be involved in subsequent comparisons. A '>tree' model might capture the process event better: here, the 'roots' represent the multiple intellectual disciplines and methodological preferences which sustained the project, these feeding into a common 'trunk' (namely, shared aims, design, sampling, schedules, survey questions). The main 'branches' were generally agreed also, these being the themes which form the empirical chapters of this book, while the 'twigs' allow for national 'variations on a theme'. These variations are telling in themselves - the Israeli team added questions about national identity and globalization versus localization, the British team added questions about media regulation - but are not addressed within this volume.

Such talk of flowers and trees may seem fanciful, but in fact, a key lesson learned about the conduct of comparative research is the importance of evolving a common conceptual language, necessary to co-orient participants to that temporary academic community, 'the international project team'. Funding for regular meetings was vital for this process, for *ad hoc* meetings and email can supplement but do not suffice to create and sustain a comparative framework. While each national team obtained funding for its national project, the network as a whole received pan-European grants for meetings from the European Parliament, the European Commission's Youth for Europe Programme and European Science Foundation. Such funding matters more for some types of collaboration than others: the present project is neither a collection of national studies (as in Coleman and Rollet, 1997; Lull, 1988), but nor was it constructed by one team and imposed, top-down, on all others; rather we wished to draw upon the multi-disciplinarity and the multinational nature of the project by determining appropriate theories and methods through

discussion. In essence, if one believes in national variation in key concepts and measures as well as in the object of study, and if one believes in the importance of local contextualization of findings, one cannot just design a questionnaire in one country and then hand it out in the others, despite the apparent simplicity of this strategy. However, a hard lesson from the present comparison has been of the importance of not underestimating the very considerable collaborative work that must then be put into both co-designing and, especially, co-interpreting the comparative findings.

In practical terms, the workshops were therefore indispensable. In all, we held eight main meetings, at approximately six month intervals over the four years of the project's duration, as well as several additional meetings with two or three teams. These served as a forum for negotiating differences in opinion, a quality assurance check on the standard and comparability of work, and a context for the interpretation of comparative findings. In addition, in these meetings we constructed interview schedules, the survey questionnaire, coding schemes, data interpretation, discussion of chapter drafts, etc. It proved beneficial academically also to hold the workshops in different countries (as required, by the EC and ESF), allowing us to gain a >feel= for different cultural environments. Between meetings, it proved vital to have one nominated link person who acted as the central node in the supporting Email network. Comparative conference presentations and interim publications supported the development of conclusions satisfactory for all (e.g. Livingstone, 1998). Moreover, in writing this volume, the chapters have been circulated in draft form from country to country and in each researchers have taken the time to check data concerning their own country, correct misunderstandings, explain surprising or interesting findings, and provide qualitative exemplars. Despite its many satisfactions, research remains a laborious, intensive, time-consuming process: we must here, once again, acknowledge the very considerable generosity and good will required of, and freely given by, all team members to ensure the completion of this comparative project.

Nonetheless, despite our best efforts, a number of problems remained. Anticipating the consequences of inevitable design compromises is one; contextualizing the emergent differences across national studies is another. Qualitative and quantitative phases posed different problems. Superficially at least, cross-national research appears easier to conduct using quantitative than qualitative methods. By its very nature, quantitative research is oriented towards a standardized output, while qualitative research is, conversely, necessarily receptive to the variable and contingent factors encountered during the conduct of the research, placing it in tension with the principle of comparability or equivalence of methods (Samuel, 1985; Steiner, 1995). We found it easier to specify and check upon the conduct of the survey in each of our 12 countries than we did the qualitative research. Researchers everywhere,

it seems, share an understanding of the decisions involved in selecting quota or random samples, face-to-face interviews or self-completion questionnaires, and the construction of an SPSS data file. But researchers everywhere do not necessarily conduct or interpret a focus group interview in a standard fashion.

Quantitative and qualitative data also differ in how readily they may be shared and compared cross-nationally. Our survey data could be combined into a single, albeit very large, file containing data from 12 nations, some 11,000 children in all; indeed, the production of this common file was crucial to the quantitative comparisons. Moreover, the data could be summarized and circulated as a series of standardized cross-tabulations. But our qualitative data remain as collections of the tapes and transcripts, in nine different languages, each in the countries where they were collected, along with the hand-written notes, children's pictures, and other contextual information which accompany them. The multiplicity of languages meant that reading each other's transcripts was not practicable, and so any sharing of these data was filtered through the translations, interpretations and summaries of the researchers involved. Thus, as noted earlier, the comparative qualitative work was conducted at a secondary level of analysis, through each team's own immersion in their data and the inherent reduction process involved in the creation of prioritized, sensible categories.

Yet while it is hard to overstate the demands and difficulties of comparing cross-national qualitative research, and it is perhaps here that we have been least successful, it would be misleading to underplay the difficulties of comparing apparently comparable statistics. For example, we faced problems of slight differences in phrasing, whether inadvertent or unavoidable, problems of question routing (so that base sizes, or subgroup definitions, might vary), problems in constructing composite variables, and, as discussed earlier, inevitable differences in the meaning of the standard table breaks. Social class categories mean different things in different countries, and even age is complicated by cross-national variation in its mapping onto school year. In short, behind the rows and columns of standardized tables lie a series of decisions, not always exactly parallel in every country, which determine their meaning.

Overview

In sum, the twelve participating countries in this project completed a survey on a nationally representative sample of children and young people, using mutually agreed core questions. In addition, in nine countries in-depth individual and group interviews were held, allowing for qualitative and quantitative methods to be combined. These interviews were similarly based on a mutually agreed interviewing schedule. In this chapter we have outlined our rationale for determining the comparative research design as well as some

of the methodological consequences of stressing the importance of contextualizing findings within a cultural and historical framework.

As discussed in the previous chapter, contexts can be seen as nested, with local contexts (the home, street, school) embedded within larger, overlapping contexts (community, region, nation). However, contextualizing findings is not so easy, and the question of where context stops, in practical terms at least, is far from obvious in advance; thus an enormous body of data is easily generated and rather less easily analyzed. Similarly, while the theoretical justification for conducting cross-national comparative research is strong, as discussed in the previous chapter, we have here reflected on some of the practical difficulties in implementing comparative research, some of which were apparent at the outset (language and funding, for example) while others (differing interview practices, differing ethical requirements, for example) became apparent only later.

Despite these difficulties, the advantages of collecting cross-national data according to a common framework and using common instruments are obvious. While for both logistical and financial reasons, cross-national projects do not often combine depth and breadth on such a scale as the present project, we hope that the present attempt to compare contextualized investigations of media use in each of twelve nations is of value to our readers.

TABLES FOR INCLUSION IN TEXT

Table 2.1: Outline of interview schedule

Topics for open-ended discussion

- The area where children live - freedom and facilities in public spaces
- Being their age
- Media use in context of other activities – considered as enjoyable/ boring things to do
- Meanings of a range of media e.g. spontaneous associations, conceptual maps, definitions of old and new media
- Social contexts of media use, especially domestic practices and friendship networks
- Changes in access - recent acquisitions, future desires for media
- Television content, including a focus on one selected genre - soaps/ music/sport etc
- Computer use and games content, including the Internet
- Emerging media issues - global media products, consumer and peer pressure
- Expectations of the media future

Table 2.2: Qualitative interviews

Country	Type of interview	Numbers of interviewees
BE-vlg	None	-
CH	Groups in school (German speaking region only)	80
DE	None	-
DK	Groups in school and day clubs	100
	Individual interviews in home	50
ES	Groups in school	50
	Individual interviews	25
FI	Groups in school	350
FR	Groups in school	150
	Individual interviews at home	50
GB	Groups in school	150
	Individual interviews at home	50
IL	Groups in school and at home	82
	Family interviews at home	44
IT	Groups in school	250
NL	None	-
SE	Individual interviews in school	20
	Groups in school	80

Table 2.3: Areas covered by survey questionnaire

Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction with local amenities, freedom within local environment • Ownership (in bedroom and/or elsewhere in the home) and use of each of 16 media • Access to computers and the Internet in school
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure activities engaged in (19 listed, including 7 non-media-related) • Typical number of days per week spent on each of 16 media in leisure time • Length of time spent (hours/minutes) which these media on a typical day • Times of day television switched on/watched in the home • Time spent on use of computers at school • Bedtime, and proportion of leisure time at home spent in bedroom
Use/ modes of engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which media child uses personally, which child would miss most, which want to get next birthday • Which media child chooses when bored/ wants to relax/ wants

	<p>excitement/ wants not to feel left out/ which does child concentrate on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which media child talks about to friends and which are parents keen for child to do • Which media child finds best for following main interest (named in <i>Values/interests</i>) • For media-related goods (books, magazines, comics, music tapes etc, computer games, videos, clothes, toys, things you collect), which does child buy with own money and which does child swap with friends • For television, how often/when does child flick channels • What are computers at home/ in school used for and what is the Internet used for
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of favorite television program(s) • Understanding of who program is for (older/younger people), whether child talks to friends about it, whether parents keen for child to watch it • Type of favorite electronic game
Social context of use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who child spends most of free time with • Who usually watches favorite television program/ plays electronic games with • Who asks for advice about computers • How often do things with parents (eat main meal/ watch TV/play or make things/talk about things that matter/ talk about things on news) • Whether child visits friends to use (which) media not available at home
Parental mediation (for father/ mother separately)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For each of watching television/videos, using/ playing on computer, listening to music, making telephone calls, reading books and going out, for which is child told when can/can't do and which media do parents talk to child about
Attitudes Values/ interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of 14 topics interests the child most • Perceptions of what makes someone child=s age popular • What will be most/least important to child when grown up
Background and personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who child lives with • If lived abroad where they would prefer • Whether child worries/ gets bored/ likes being the way they are/ finds

	it hard to make friends
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Table 2.4: Survey sample type and size, by country

	Type of survey	Sample Size
BE-vlg	In school	608
CH	In school	1131
DE	In home face-to-face	829
DK	In school	1391
ES	In school	937
FI	In school	753
FR	In school	931
GB	In home face-to-face	871
IL	In school	904
IT	In school	825
NL	In home telephone	893
SE	In school	1295
Total		11368

Note 1: Comparisons are conducted throughout this volume are based on data collected from discontinuous age bands (as to maximize the age range covered while economizing on research costs). In fact, many samples were larger than reported in this volume, as some countries surveyed children in the entire age range 6-17.

Note 2: the definition of the population is not always obvious. The key points to note here are that the Swiss sample included all three language communities, the Belgian sample included just Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), Israel had only sampled from the Jewish population (approx. 80% of total) when this volume was prepared, Finland excluded the Swedish-speaking population (approx. 5% of total), and the United Kingdom includes Northern Ireland.

Table 2.5: Demographic characteristics of samples, by country

	BE- vlg	CH	DE	DK	ES	FI	FR	GB	IL	IT	NL	SE
Gender												
Boy	50	46	55	47	49	49	50	51	47	45	50	51
Girl	50	54	45	53	51	51	50	49	53	55	50	49
N	608	1126	829	1392	936	753	931	871	900	825	893	1294
Age												
6-7	19	7	20	15	22	25	27	23	24	-	25	11
9-10	22	31	25	27	24	26	18	24	23	-	25	27
12-13	25	29	28	30	28	24	28	27	26	49	25	29
15-16	34	32	27	28	27	25	27	26	26	51	25	33
N	608	1131	829	1391	937	753	931	871	904	825	893	1295
SES												
High	41	17	28	56		39	22	17	20	26	20	33
Medium	38	60	41	33	N/A	34	47	27	55	51	38	46
Low	21	23	32	11		27	30	56	25	23	42	21
N	608	1086	373	1321		737	899	868	896	757	893	825

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Footnotes

¹Statistical comparisons within national data sets are appropriate however. For these we have adopted the convention, unless otherwise stated, of noting significant differences as follows: * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$. For practical reasons, these analyses could not be conducted for the French or Danish data sets.