

## Media literacy in Europe: inspiring ways to involve parents

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Credit: Tim Verbist



Parents have a responsibility for supporting their children's media literacy, but should be supported to do so, argues **Tim Verbist**. He is the Director of **Media Meets Literacy** and has been working for the **Evens Foundation** for more than 10 years, where he developed and leads the **Media Program**. This program focuses on initiating and supporting projects that enhance media literacy in Europe. It awards the biennial **Evens Prize for Media Education** for which **Parenting for a Digital Future's Sonia Livingstone** serves on the jury.

**Media literacy** is now a key competence. As media are omnipresent, it is important to teach children how to use media in a sensible way, and to develop a critical attitude towards media. For this, children need good role models that show an interest in them and can set boundaries if necessary. The responsibility for the media education of children and adolescents can therefore not be outsourced solely to teachers and schools – rather, it's the family where the keystones of personal development are set, and thus the family should also play an active part in children's media education.

In this post I would like to bring your attention to the **Evens Foundation's** second edition of **Media Literacy in Europe**, where we decided to focus entirely on the role that parents play (or should play) in their children's media education. After all, the first place where children are confronted with media is within the family, so parents (and grandparents, too) play a crucial role. This is why we decided to highlight a series of good and inspiring practices from all over Europe. We describe projects that raise parents' interest in and understanding of their children's media activities, that offer advice on how to introduce children to digital media devices, and that teach parents and children (together) the mechanics of the new media.

These projects allow parents and children to discover media together, empowering parents to question, evaluate and discuss the use of media within their home. This is crucial because it is the family that creates a media culture, determining from the beginning what kind of media the children will get in touch with, and what importance media and media activities will have in their

everyday lives. How children will use media outside the family depends on how they have experienced media (usage) within it. Therefore, media education is more than ever a family affair.

## Academic research

This belief is motivated in an [article](#) by [Sara Pereira](#) of the [University of Minho](#) in Portugal, where she explains the importance of parental mediation, one of the principal questions being how parents should attend to their children's media use. The most important prerequisite for good mediation is that parents know what their children are doing with media, what they use media for, why they are attracted by media, etc., and that they are interested in and know the media worlds of their children. Ultimately, 'parents must be coherent in their family educational project; they need to be persistent in their intentions and consistent in their actions' ([Alicia Blum-Ross](#) recently wrote about [what works when managing kid's media use](#) on this blog as well).

And, of course, if you want to support parents in their children's media education and develop projects that contribute to that, it is important that you know what you are talking about. This is where it is important to have access to the proper data to back up your work. A good example of this is [the Finnish Children's Media Barometer](#)<sup>1</sup>, described by [University of Tampere](#) professor [Sirku Kotilainen](#). This tool provides annual data on the media use of children, starting from infancy. We can only hope that a study of this kind will be conducted at a European level.

## Common-sense education

In children's media education, we also need to use our common sense: as in regular education, it is important to show interest, to communicate openly and regularly, to set boundaries, and above all, to be good role models. One effective way to help parents understand the importance and the functions that media have for their children could be to organise workshops or projects that parents and children attend together. Here they can experience media together, and learn where they can support one another.

We hope that this blog helps to first, show how essential it is for parents to be actively engaged in their children's media literacy education, and second, to stimulate readers with a selection of good practices to serve as sources of inspiration for future projects. Supporting parents in their media education is the responsibility of many actors, such as policy-makers, schools and NGOs, so we hope, too, that many of them will also be inspired to action in the near future.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This [study](#) was conducted by Annikka Suoninen for the Finnish Youth Research Network/Finnish Youth Research Society, 2014.

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