



## Review

## “Who vs. Whom AND Where Should We Go Through?”: A reflection towards clarifying the effect of media and entertainment on children’s development for future research

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Available online 22 February 2012

## Keywords:

Media  
Entertainment  
Children’s development  
Self-Arousal Learning

## ABSTRACT

Despite the massive body of research on the effect of media and entertainment on children’s development, especially through computer that clearly stands as the most interactive and appealing medium not only between children but also among people, the research, up to date, still lacks a true understanding of the powerful effect of the communication between children, generally all users, and the *content* of the entertainment. Thus, the present reflection paper was conducted towards clarifying the directions of the future research concerning the effect of media and entertainment on young children’s development based on the literature’s theoretical critiques. However, the present paper only paid attention to the most effective studies in the literature given the fact that many and many studies are just repeating what already available in the literature. The conclusion came up with two main directions of the future research on children’s development, (1) media as a quasi-human’s external regulator and (2) entertainment as a context of the learning process. Both directions yielded a new phase of learning (Self-Arousal Learning (SAL)) that the future research has to take it into account and consideration. The main topics of the SAL were stated as guidance for the main two directions of the future research.

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### 1. Introduction

Since the time of the seminal research concerning children’s development by Vygotsky in 1920s through Piaget 1950s so far,

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research still uses *media and entertainment* only as a facilitator/factor in the experimental design where children still guided by a human as an external regulator either before/during/after the progression without realizing the cognitive fact that human’s external regulation is an actual human–human interaction and social intervention that all distort, if not hinder, the natural process of children’s development especially self-regulation (Agina, Kommers,

& Steehouder, 2011a; Agina, Kommers, & Steehouder, 2011b; Agina, Kommers, & Steehouder, 2011c; Agina, Kommers, & Steehouder, 2011d, 2012; Agina, Tennyson, Kommers, & Steehouder, in press: hereafter Aginian's studies).

Remarkably, the research, up to date, still lacks a true understanding of the powerful effect of the communication between children, generally all users, and the *content* of the entertainment itself despite the massive body of research on children and media and the associated entertainment, especially through computer that clearly stands as the most interactive and appealing medium not only between children but also among people.

Thus, the present study was conducted to contribute in clarifying the direction of the future research given the fact that the researches, up to date, are clearly contradicting each other insofar supporting one research in such a direction is, simultaneously, producing a collision, or even a confliction, with another research in other direction. For instance, minimizing the arousal through the external control makes a clear collision with the ultimate goal of self-regulation, which is minimizing the external control itself (Agina & Kommers, 2008).

### 1.1. Media and children's development

Since 1970 computer video games were entered to the children's world where the visual and auditory coding is necessary for the successful games (Real, 1996). The games' main subject was/is always *violence* through *adventure* (Friedman, 1995; Gunter, 2002) in which children become, simultaneously, satisfied with their emotional needs because they do not only feel, but also 'taste' the *arousal* when playing against the rules (Agina & Kommers, 2008).

Researchers (e.g., Greenfield, 1994; Gunter, 2002; Sneed & Runco, 1996) believed that children interested to play challenging as well as preferred computer and video games than TV in which their parents have negative attitude toward these games because of their children's later behavior, academic achievement, and skills.

Other researchers (e.g., Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007) has shown that playing video games can be problematic for some youth as they achieved lower grades over the course, showed more aggressive impulses, promoted their violence, and were more likely to infer hostile intent when none existed. This was related to heightened levels of aggressive behavior and a variety of psychosocial and health problems (Gentile, 2009).

Accordingly, it is not surprising that teachers and parents are most concerned with violent games interfering with schoolwork, social skills, and exercises where many parents felt that computer games activated negative emotions such as aggression, lose of environmental attention, and social withdrawal (Kutner, Olson, Warner, & Hertzog, 2008). One of the main concerns that had constantly risen against violent games is that most of games claimed to feature aggressive elements. This issue is ever more important because new games like "RESIDENT-EVIL", "SILENT-HILL", "PUNISHER", "DOOM", and "CAR-RACING" are realistic violence games. Other researchers (e.g., Chambers & Ascione, 1987) claimed that most of the computer games are violent in nature and have no effect on teenagers as on young children.

Given the fact that, as the media an intervening agency that provides wide reaching communication and has significant influence on people (Morris, 1975) and the fact that the media has also a significant effect on adolescents so drastically because they are at an actual vulnerable stage in their life (Adams, Abraham, & Markstrom, 2000), the most important issue that should be seriously taken into account nowadays is that, media has also a significant influence on young children's development even at an early age dramatically. This effect could be positively or negatively depending on the extent of our understanding of the effect of media and

entertainment on children's psychological and cognitive development, which is the topic that still needs to be deeply investigated given the fact that the literature still lacks the investigation on the positive effect of the violent arousal on children's development (Agina & Kommers, 2008).

### 1.2. The most significant components of children's development

Children's development involves psychological issues (mainly: self-regulation learning) and cognitive issues (mainly: children's speech and thinking aloud). Despite several and various definitions available in the literature of self-regulation learning, the most general definition has been formulated by Pintrich (2000, p. 453), who defined SRL as "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment". Emphasis of self-regulation can be seen on self-generation (e.g., Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989), self-motivation (e.g., Boekaerts, 1999), self-control (e.g., Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), or self-management (e.g., Stright, Neitzel, Sears, & Hoke-Sinex, 2001).

Despite that variety of the definitions' emphasis, SRL, as the three words imply, emphasizes autonomy and control by the individual who monitors, directs, and regulates actions toward goals of information acquisition, expanding expertise, and self-improvement (Paris & Paris, 2001). In Aginian's studies, therefore, self-regulation learning was defined as "the learners' ability to direct their verbalization process and, simultaneously, monitoring their learning process's goals" and considered as one of the main components of the children's behavioral regulation, which refers, as introduced by Aginian's studies, to the level of the children's speech use, the differentiation and difference between private speech, social speech, and thinking aloud, and the degree of the children's self-regulation learning and satisfaction during learning tasks when children act alone and without any human-human interaction or social intervention during learning tasks.

Remarkably, the research in the literature concerning children's development can be divided into two main branches. The first branch of the studies on children's development (e.g., Fernyhough & Fradley, 2005; Girbau, 2002; Muraven, 2010; Tang, Bartsch, & Nunez, 2007; Winsler, Abar, Feder, Schunn, & Rubio, 2007) followed the Vygotskyian's view that self-regulation is *behavioral*, appears after and as a result of regulation by others in a specific task and promoted by external regulators. The second branch of research on children's development (e.g., DeVries & Zan, 1992; Kamii & DeVries, 1980) followed the Piagetian's view that self-regulation is *psychological* and promoted by giving children extensive opportunities to make choices and decisions.

However, both branches still rely on offering children external intervention (regulation/instructions) and guidance during learning process despite the fact that Piaget (1932) argued that regulation by others hinders the development of self-regulation. Consequentially, it is the time to consider where we should go through in our future research to avoid repeating what is already available in the literature.

## 2. Who vs. whom?

### 2.1. Media vs. content

Media convergence is the process by which formerly distinct methods of communication merge to create new media (Wartella, O'Keefe & Scantlin, 2000). As convergence increasingly enters the media world, television will disappear in which the digital systems, including digital television, will allow vivid high-definition images and online interactivity. Increasingly, children will live and devel-

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