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Corresponding author:

Dr. Pekka Mertala
University of Oulu, Faculty of Education; KTK 323, 90014 University of Oulu, Finland
pekka-oskari.mertala@oulu.fi
+358407196796

Abstract

The need for media education in early childhood teacher education has been regularly emphasized. However, the questions of what and how student teachers should be taught about media education have remained unanswered. This paper contributes to resolving these questions by introducing the concept of media educational consciousness which we argue to be crucial for 21st century early childhood teachers and, thus, for teacher education. A compulsory digital media course for first year student teachers provides the empirical context for this paper. By using students' learning diaries as data we will demonstrate that the more aware teachers are of their underlying conceptions, the more potential there is for personal professional reflection and development.

Keywords

Consciousness; curriculum; early childhood education; media education; teacher education

Introduction

Young children today live in a media-saturated world. Their daily media practices include, for example, reading comics and books, playing digital games, and watching children's programs and movies on various gadgets including television, traditional computers, and mobile devices (Chaudron et al., 2015). Not all media is treated accordingly by the children, their parents and teachers, but the question of what media is considered "good" and "cool" is under constant negotiation between and within different stakeholders (e.g. Aarsand, 2010; Chaudron et al., 2015; Lehtikangas, & Mulari, 2016). These various aspects of media—devices, contents, practices, tastes,

values, and social issues—constitute what is called ‘media culture’, the lifeworld of today’s citizens, including young children.

Media culture plays a substantial role in the creation of one’s identity, as it is a source of cultural pedagogy that contributes to educating us about how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire (Kellner, 2003, p. 2). Thus, it is not surprising that the need for media education in teacher education has been regularly emphasized (e.g., Meehan, Ray. Wells, Walker, & Schwarz, 2015; Salomaa, Palsa, & Malinen, 2017; Souto-Manning & Price-Dennis, 2012; Tiede & Grafe, 2015). In this chapter, we will introduce the concept of *media educational consciousness*—which is the careful reflection of conceptions about media, children, educational goals, and values regarding oneself as an educator in the prevailing media culture, and of the importance of early childhood education (ECE) for human growth in media culture—as crucial for 21st century early childhood teachers and, thus, for teacher education. We also suggest that educational consciousness can be used as a cross-curricular framework for supporting student teachers’ professional growth and development.

While this paper is not an empirical research report, we will utilize data collected from a compulsory digital media course to represent the voice of student teachers. The core of the course design was two movie-making workshops, in which student teachers produced short films with 5–7-year-old children from a local kindergarten. The students’ diaries, which were written throughout the course, serve as the empirical body of the paper.

Media education

Media education has been conceptualized in several ways in the research literature. Some scholars have suggested that learning *with* media and learning *about* media both count as media education (Vesterinen, 2011). Others, in turn, argue that simply using media to teach something non-media-related is not media education, which must always contain intentional teaching about media (Buckingham, 2015). Our definition of media education draws from the latter viewpoint, inspired

by Kupiainen and Sintonen (2009), who have described media education as “goal-oriented interaction [...] involving the educator, the learner and media culture” (p. 31). The goal of this interactive process is media literacy. Media literacy applies to both “traditional” and “new” media and is a vast concept, defined as comprising the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media. It also includes participation, social abilities, self-expression, and ethics in a media context (Kupiainen & Sintonen, 2009).

To be useful to practitioners, media education should also be defined in a way that takes into account the social, cultural, and pedagogical traditions and characteristics of the context (Palsa & Ruokamo, 2015). In the Finnish national core curriculum for ECE (Finnish National Board of Education [FNBoE], 2016), media education is discussed as such, the task of which is seen as supporting children’s opportunities to be active and to express themselves in their community. Media content in relation to children’s lives, including its veracity, is reflected by and with children. Through this process, the emergent source and media criticism evolve. Play, drawing, and drama are examples of child-centered methods for exploring media-related themes. However, media literacy is not presented as a goal in itself but is included as one subset in a transversal competence area of “multiliteracy and information and communication technology,” an umbrella concept catering for several different literacies and competences. Transversal competence refers to an entity consisting of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and will. Competence also means an ability to apply knowledge and skills, as required in a given situation. Transversal competence is linked to life-long learning, which is needed for agency and citizenship in an ever-changing world (FNBoE, 2016). Thus, Kupiainen and Sintonen’s (2009) definition of media education can be further contextualized for ECE as follows:

Media education in institutional early childhood education is goal-orientated interaction involving educators, learners and media culture. The aim is to promote

early childhood education's general educational goals by enhancing media literacy.

(Salomaa & Mertala, in press)

Understanding the complexity of media culture and recognizing the connections between media literacy and broader educational goals are not self-evident competencies. ECE professionals – including teachers – often encounter difficulty verbalizing abstract and complex phenomena in their work, and the professional tradition in ECE has respected practical experience and routines over questioning and reforming (Karila & Kupila, 2010; Mertala, 2015). However, changes in society as well as in (Finnish) ECE legislation and policies have shifted the focus from day care to education and toward more abstract and complex issues. Media culture is an example *par excellence* regarding this dilemma: it is global and contextual at the same time, evidently present in simple everyday life regarding ECE, but impossible to cover with one-size-fits-all solutions or lesson plans. Getting a grip of these multidimensional and complex professional demands requires conceptual and reflective tools to help teachers articulate and parse their conceptions. In what follows, we present one possible approach, that of media educational consciousness.

Media educational consciousness

The term “consciousness” is used to describe the way in which people become aware of things (material and immaterial) and themselves (Rosenthal, 2009; Vimal, 2009). Hirsjärvi (1981) has used the concept of “educational consciousness” to refer to educators’ awareness of acting in the role of an educator and the rights and responsibilities bound to that role. Research in the context of teacher education suggests that consciousness in relation to different curricular subjects and racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity are crucial in becoming and being a teacher. Lévesque and Zanzanian (2015) have highlighted the importance of historical consciousness, as it “impacts the way they [student teachers] learn, teach, and engage with history” (p. 408). Gay and Kirkland (2003) have stressed that teachers’ critical consciousness is imperative in improving the educational opportunities of children who come from backgrounds other than that of the majority population.

White (2008), in turn, has expressed concern about whether city-based teacher education programs prepare candidates for teaching in rural communities and has offered a place-conscious approach as one possible solution to this challenge. To sum up, the core message from these studies is that teachers need to be conscious about the complexity of different subjects and/or phenomena as well as about their personal relationships with these subjects and/or phenomena, as professionalism and subjectivity are deeply intertwined in being and becoming a teacher (see also Korthagen, 2004; Lanas & Kelchtermans, 2015).

In the field of media education, Salomaa (2016) has further contextualized the concept of educational consciousness into a model for media educational consciousness in ECE settings. The model suggests that media educational consciousness in early childhood includes four intertwined categories of conceptions: 1) educational goals and values in relation to media literacy; 2) human beings and their growth and development; 3) media; 4) the educator her/himself as a media educator and the importance of ECE for human growth in media culture (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Media educational consciousness (a streamlined version of Salomaa, 2016).

Hirsjärvi (1981) has suggested that the quality of educational consciousness becomes apparent in educational practise. To provide a simplified example, if a teacher understands media only as mass media, and her or his profession as nurturer with a mission to “protect childhood” and children as vulnerable objects “exposed” to media, the pedagogical implication would probably be to position children as an audience that needs to be protected from harmful content (see Mertala, 2017b). Conversely, a teacher conceptualizing media in a wider cultural sense and children as active subjects in their own lives would be more likely to position children as makers and shapers of

media and himself or herself as a mentor with a mission to promote children's self-expression (see Salomaa & Mertala, in press). In complex reality, educators' views of media are presumably not this black-and-white, and the link between conceptions and actions is hardly straightforward.

However, the more aware educators are of their underlying conceptions, the more potential there is for personal professional reflection and development and for joint, coherent pedagogical planning in working communities.

Course design

The empirical context of this paper was a compulsory two-credit¹ course, titled Digital Media in Learning and Teaching, in which the first author (Pekka) was the teacher. The participants (N=15) were first-year early childhood student teachers² in a Finnish university-based ECE teacher program. The course was divided into three sections: introduction, kindergarten movie project, and group reflection. The students wrote a diary throughout the course. Their compulsory readings included an article discussing media educational consciousness (Salomaa, 2016) and the Finnish national core curriculum (FNBoE, 2016), both of which needed to be discussed and cited in the diaries. Permission to use the diaries as research data was sought after the course, as opposed to before, so as to avoid influencing the content of diary entries (de Oliveria Nascimento & Knobel, 2017). As all but one of the participants were female, and as matters of gender are not discussed in this paper, all students are referred to by the feminine noun. Figure 2 provides an overview of the course design. A more detailed description is provided below.

¹ European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits

² The particular class was a segregated training group funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education. Due the different criteria for eligibility, the student population was more heterogeneous than in the "basic" class. Several students had worked in kindergartens as child minders, some had previous university degrees, while others had only graduated from high school, but had undergone basic studies in educational sciences as open university studies.

Figure 2. An overview of the course design.

The course began with an introductory session. First, the students were asked to draw a concept map around two themes: “children and media” and “media education”. They were further instructed to reflect on the kinds of presumptions that they have about children’s media use as well as what they understand about media education. These topics were then discussed in small groups as well as in the whole class. The concept maps were later written and used as the first input of the course diary. Thereafter, the course design and the concept of media educational consciousness were introduced. The students were informed that the course involved working with children and that the pedagogical aim of the kindergarten movie project was to explore stereotypes and intertextual layers of media cultural storylines and characters with children through movie making. The concept of intertextuality refers to structural relations between two or more texts. In the words of Kristeva, who coined the concept, “each text is an intersection of texts where at least one other text can be read” (1986, p. 37), which also applies to children’s media texts. Many Disney movies are more or less based on existing stories. For instance, the 2013 blockbuster *Frozen* was inspired by H. C. Andersen’s classical fairy tale *The Snow Queen*. There are also intertextual layers within Disney productions. One illustrative example is “funny sidekicks” such as Mater from *Cars*, Mushu from *Mulan*, Gus and Jaq from *Cinderella*, and snowman Olaf from *Frozen*. Olaf’s

transformation from matter into a conscious being contains notable similarities with *Pinocchio*, a 1940 Disney production based on a children's book published by Carlo Collodi in 1883.³ To familiarize the students with intertextuality, popular children's media texts—such as *Frozen*—were analyzed collaboratively. The students were also asked to design their own characters, from which media cultural roots were then traced together. Lastly, the students were taught how to use the devices as well as the applications for making the movie.⁴ In this phase, the basic features of both applications were introduced, and, the students, working in pairs or groups of three, created their own short movies by testing different kinds of techniques and materials.

The movie project took place over two consecutive days in the premises of a local kindergarten. The students had visited the group once earlier in the semester. The aim of the first day was to plan and create the story line, characters, and scenery. The second day was used for shooting and editing the movie. The students worked either in pairs or in groups of three. The children were divided into small groups of three or four by the educator of the group. Pekka, who was present both days acted as the pedagogical and technological support. It was up to the students and children to decide which techniques (i.e., animation, acting) they would use to create the movies. Unlike in many other digital storytelling projects (e.g., Sandvik, Smørdal, & Østerud, 2012; Wohlwend, 2017), the children were not offered ready-made characters, sceneries, or plots to work with, but the project was to be built on the children's media cultural interests and experiences. At the end of the course, the students presented their projects (including the movies) to others. For the presentation, they were instructed to articulate the pedagogical bases of the choices they had made during the project. The themes and questions arising from the presentations were discussed in the whole group. The diaries were to be returned two weeks after the last meeting.

Shaping of media educational consciousness of early childhood student teachers

³ A conscious snowman is also found in Raymond Briggs' (1978) picture book *The Snowman*, adapted into an academy awarded animated short film in 1982.

⁴ Tablet computers (iPads), iStopmotion and iMovie apps.

As noted in the course description, the media educational goal of the kindergarten movie project was to analyze the intertextuality and archetypes of the story lines and characters with the children. However, the analysis of the storylines and characters was discussed in some depth in only one diary. In the other cases, the students focused more on describing the process and methods of how the characters were made and the storyline conducted. This notion is interesting as well as troubling. Given that the students were trained –though only briefly– in how to identify the intertextual features of media texts and how to explore them with children, neglecting the media educational goal seemed quite strange. In the following sections, we will delve into the reasons by exploring the role of the different dimensions of media educational consciousness in the preservice teachers’ pedagogical decisions during the project. We will begin with conceptions about educational goals and the self as a media educator. We will then move on to conceptions about children and media.

Conceptions about educational goals and the self as a media educator

Even though media educational goals relating to the intertextuality of media texts were not addressed in the projects, we do not suggest that the students carried out a “laissez-faire” pedagogy with little or no educational intention. In terms of media education, the students commented that, through the project, the children learned about how animated movies are made. However, while understanding the production mechanisms of media texts is at the core of media literacy (Buckingham, 2015) and, thus, an important and valuable media educational goal, in the context of the present course, movie making was supposed to be the method, not the main goal of the activity. The diaries were also rich with examples of how the students had integrated several non-media educational goals into the project. The most prominent theme was the learning of socio-emotional skills. One student, for instance, wrote that a major goal of their project was:

Working together and learning social skills, for example, respecting and listening to others. In the collaborative film project, every child got his/her voice heard, with everyone listening.

Fruitful moments of learning to listen to one another occurred when one child thought his/her ideas for a long time, and another child had quite a few ideas to tell. (Student 12)

Pedagogical themes that were broader than supporting some specific skills were also identified to guide the students' pedagogical choices. Several students wrote that their desire was to implement child-initiated pedagogy, which refers to approaches in which children's ideas and wishes are listened to and implemented in pedagogical practices (Helavaara Robertson, Kinos, Barbour, Pukk, & Rosqvist, 2015). Child-initiated pedagogy is also included in the Finnish core curriculum, as it maintains that children's topics of interest are the central starting point of practice (FNBoE, 2016, p. 40). The students, for example, expressed that they did not want to restrain the children's initiatives by excessively controlling the process of movie making.

Child-initiated pedagogy is reflected in the fact that the children have had the lead role in designing, implementing, and preparing, etc. [Name of a classmate] and I just provided a safe framework for implementing this project (Student 10).

Our goal was to implement child-initiated pedagogy and try not to guide the course of the project too much (Student 1).

We understand the multiplicity of educational goals in reflecting the pedagogical traditions of ECE and an individual's conception of what he or she is expected to provide as an early childhood teacher. In Finland, ECE is integrative in nature (FNBoE, 2016, p. 36), and early childhood teachers are considered as "educational generalists"; they are not specialists in any particular subject, but they know a little about everything (Rusanen, 2007). Thus, one's conception of the self as a media educator is subordinate to one's conception of the self as an early childhood teacher. In fact, promoting children's socio-emotional skills—brought up as an educational goal by student 12 and several others—is considered the most important goal of ECE among preservice and in-service early childhood teachers (Mertala, 2017a; Niikko, 2004). As previously discussed, it is important

that media literacy (as a media educational outcome) is connected to the general educational goals of ECE. Nevertheless, the content of the diaries suggests that the students were taking a “shortcut,” as they were using collaborative aspects of the movie project to support the children’s socio-emotional development, without focusing on media literacy in relation to intertextuality, despite this being the explicit assignment. That said, we do not state that it would be wrong to use media (and media culture) to teach children curricular-related factors or general educational issues other than media literacy. Returning to the “Buckinghamian” (Buckingham, 2015) description of media education, one can ask whether the teacher in this case is a media educator or an educator who uses media to achieve other educational purposes. As the lifeworld of today’s children is highly mediatised (Chaudron et al., 2015) the “generalist” nature of ECE does not make the specific (sub-) goal-setting of media literacy unnecessary

Conceptions about children

It seems that the students’ conceptions of child-initiated pedagogy were based on the idea that if the children were given control, they would eventually come up with the questions and ideas needed for achieving the media educational goals. This view has its roots in Rousseau’s idealistic ideas that children learn best “[i]f educators let the child always be himself, attending to only what touches him immediately” (Oelkers, 2002, p. 683). Such an understanding of child-initiated pedagogy is, however, oversimplified. Helavaara Robertson et al. (2015), who have theorized about child-initiated pedagogy, argue that child-initiated pedagogy rests on the process of the co-construction of learning experiences between children, adults, and the environment, and the ideal is not that the educators would intervene only a little or not at all in a child’s actions. What is interesting here is that the students did intentionally intervene in the children’s actions when their aim was to support the learning of socio-emotional skills. Why then did they take a much more passive role in relation to media education? It seems that the answers lay in their conceptions about children and media.

For instance, in their first diary entries, some students commented that young children are more knowledgeable and skillful with media than adults.

I think that already small children are much more competent than adults. Today, children are born around media, especially social media, so they get used to it better, compared to an adult who has lived a different life long before social media. (Student 14.)

The extract above reminds us of Prensky's (2001) famous claim of younger generations being "digital natives," who are surrounded by and use various digital devices and content and, thus, are "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games, and the internet. Older generations, in turn, are described as "digital immigrants," who despite their efforts to adapt to the new digital environment, always retain, to some degree, their "accent" because today's older folk were socialized differently from their children and are now in the process of learning a new language (Prensky, 2001, pp. 1–2). This unfounded belief (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017) is common among preservice early childhood teachers (Mertala, 2017b). Thus, in the introductory session, Pekka sought to tackle this belief by providing research-based examples of how children's digital skills are largely generated by their parents' intentional or unintentional tutoring (Chaudron et al., 2015; Plowman, et al., 2008). However, it seems that the movie project rather enforced some students' views of children as handy and born-competent users of digital media, as they alluded to the recognition of the children's functional (digital) media skills as their main learning experience of the course.

Perhaps the most important thing I have learned from this course is that kids are really capable technology users. Children should only be given the opportunity to express themselves with digital devices. (Student 3)

These viewpoints also challenge the teacher candidates' conceptions about the importance of ECE for human growth in media culture. The model for media educational consciousness suggests that

this notion of conception includes conceptions of the importance of interaction between educator and educatee as well as of how different environments, actions, situations, contents, and materials affect growth and development in media culture (Salomaa, 2016). Nevertheless, if educators are seeing educatees as born-competent in media literacy, is it possible that they give themselves “permission” to neglect professional reflection in media education?

We do not claim here that the students’ observations and experiences of children being handy with tablet computers and the applications used are false. However, it is important to remember that what the children were asked to do was not exceptionally technically demanding. Their tasks were mainly to take pictures for the stop-motion movie and to drag video clips across the screen, both simple functions that even three-year-olds are often able to perform unassisted (Friedman, 2016; Marsh et al., 2015). Moreover, the logic of considering the ability to take pictures and drag items as evidence of broader technological skills is awkward, and having functional skills do not mean that children would be able to critically evaluate (digital) media texts.

Conceptions about media

Research involving in-service early childhood teachers implies that the term “media education” has strong technical connotations (Kupiainen, Niinistö, Pohjola, & Kotilainen, 2006; Salomaa & Mertala, in press). Similarly, at the beginning of the course, the students connected media particularly with digital media: digital devices (i.e., smartphones and tablet computers), digital contents (i.e., digital games), and digital environments (i.e., the internet).

It is also interesting to think that when I think about media education, I think about the web and the virtual world. Media, however, also include much more than the web, for example, television, radio, newspapers, magazines. (Student 9.)

Approaching media mainly as digital devices and content is understandable, as they are more manageable entities than the complex and ever-changing media culture. Moreover, while media cultural intertextuality was opened up by using concrete examples and exercises (e.g., analysis of

the intertextual layers in *Frozen* and designing their own media characters), it is evident that one lesson is not enough to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the rich body of media targeted at children, not to mention the role of media in society or the multilayered nature of intertextuality. This means that students' subjective knowledge of media texts plays a major role in whether or not they are able to recognize the connections between different media texts. In this project, there were occasions where the children's ideas regarding the plot included clear references to media texts, rich with intertextual layers. An illustrative example was a project inspired by the 2007 movie *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, which is about three chipmunks having to leave their home tree due it being cut down.⁵ Such a starting point for a story is not unique, but it appeared that the students were not aware of any other media texts, including such scenery, and found it difficult to explore the topic with the children.

We talked with the teacher [Pekka] during the project, and he told us that our movie, which we started to design, has media-cultural intertextuality. Our film had the same features as Onneli's and Anneli's *Winter*⁶ and *Watership Down*⁷. In both films, the forest is cut down, and the characters are forced to move to another location. (Student 14.)

It is noteworthy that even though Pekka informed the students about the reference movies, these connections were not introduced and discussed with the children. Given that *Onneli's and Anneli's Winter* was a box office hit (Finnish Film Foundation, 2016) and well-known among even those Finnish kindergartens who had not seen the movie (Lehtikangas & Mulari, 2016), it is plausible that the children would have been familiar with the plot, and pinpointing this similarity would have served as a fruitful starting point for a media educational explorative discussion with the children.

Why then did this pedagogical possibility remain un-actualized? Previous research suggests that it

⁵ *Alvin and the Chipmunks* is originally an American animated music coup created by Ross Bagdasarian in 1958.

⁶ *Onneli's and Anneli's Winter* is a Finnish children's book by Marjatta Kurenniemi (1968). It was adapted into a motion picture in 2015.

⁷ *Watership Down* (1972) is a fantasy novel by Richard Adams, which was adapted into an animated movie (1978) and children's television series (1999–2001).

does not feel natural for student teachers to introduce media texts to children about which they are not very familiar, as they think that they should always be more knowledgeable than children (Souto-Manning & Price-Dennis, 2012). Here, conceptions about media overlap with conceptions about teacherhood as well as about children: Media were understood mainly as digital media, which the children were believed to have mastered better than adults. This premise was at odds with the pedagogical ideal that the teacher should be the top expert.

We have already challenged the belief that children are tech-savvy digital natives, but it is also worth asking how much knowledge about some particular media texts does one actually need to have to be able to conduct media education. It is impossible for anyone to be familiar with all the possible traditional and contemporary media texts, but teachers should have the means to guide children's attention toward the possible similarities between the media texts that children are aware of. In this case, even though the students had no references in mind, they could have still stimulated the children's thinking by asking the children whether they were aware of any other movies, children's programs, stories in which someone has to leave his or her home – be it tree or not. Here, more than focusing on specific practical action, educational consciousness would help to seize the pedagogical moment and its implications for developing media literacy.

Discussion

In this chapter, we have introduced the concept of media educational consciousness, which we saw as crucial for 21st century early childhood teachers and, consequently, for teacher education. By using examples from the course diaries of 15 first-year student teachers, we have demonstrated that goal-oriented media education is not a matter of course for student teachers: The media educational goal of the kindergarten movie project was supposed to be to analyze the intertextuality and archetypes of the story lines and characters with the children. However, the students' attention was more on making the movie than on analyzing its media cultural roots. It appears, that it was more

difficult for the students to either set or verbalize the more abstract educational media literacy goals than the practical aspects of movie making

It is evident that the focus on filming the movie instead of on media analysis shaped the students' learning experience. Thus, unsurprisingly, the most prominent theme in the diaries was that the students reported learning new functional skills and gaining professional self-assurance in using digital media devices with children. Several students also commented that their attitudes toward media education have become more positive, as they recognized how media education can be carried out by using methods that are in line with ECE traditions (i.e., play, crafts, and drama). Some also commented that their understanding of what is meant by media and media culture expanded during the course. While the students appeared to be happy with the course and reported learning several skills that are important in media education, we –Pekka as the teacher educator and Saara as the founder of the concept of media educational consciousness– remain pensive. While the thinness of media educational goal orientation can be explained with the emerging stage of the participants' media educational consciousness, it is important to also pay attention to the social, material, and historical contexts in which the course took place.

Critical evaluation of the course design

First, we argue that the course design largely determines the frames inside which the students' learning can take place. While student feedback was mainly positive, some important critical remarks were also made. A few students commented that eight hours (two forenoons) was insufficient to conduct both tasks: analyze the storylines and characters and film the actual movie.

Unfortunately, with limited time, there wasn't much profound reflection about the characters (Student 9).

It is understandable that the students wanted to ensure that they could bring the project to a scheduled end, as it would be unpleasant (and seem unprofessional) to leave the children with an unfinished project. In other words, it seems that the fear of running out of time propelled the

students to rush through the intertextual media analysis component. This fear, however, was overemphasized, as all the groups finished their projects well before the deadline. Perhaps one way of avoiding this overwhelming focusing on the end product (the movie) would be to involve the students from the beginning in designing their own projects, in which the goal would be to study intertextuality in media, and the students would have to pedagogically justify their choices and the chosen method and medium used.

Second, it is important to remember that no student starts any course from a *tabula rasa* position (Takuchi, 2007). For example, child-initiated pedagogy –a major theme in the diaries– was not introduced to the students in this course; they had learned about it from other sources. As demonstrated earlier, the student teachers’ oversimplified understanding of child-initiated pedagogy was a main reason for the lack of analytical exploration of media culture in the movie project. To sum up, the student teachers’ preconceptions played a notable role in their learning, and thus, these preconceptions should have been examined and articulated in greater depth at the beginning of the course. During the final meeting, Pekka managed to problematize the students’ conceptions about child-initiated pedagogy by challenging them to think about the role and responsibilities of a teacher. These discussions enabled some of the students to critically reflect on their understanding of child-initiated pedagogy:

I think our teacher said it well to us when he asked: “what is the role of the teacher if she does not say anything to the children?” The teacher is always the one with the responsibility, whether she intervenes in things and guides children or not. (Student 2.)

The above example illustrates well how the contents and themes of different courses overlap with those of others. This, however, happened often in a rather haphazard way, as there was no planned purpose to discuss the students’ conceptions of child-initiated pedagogy in the digital media course. Thus, it can be assumed that the students’ media educational consciousness will inadvertently be shaped during the remaining two years of their initial training. This is by no means a desired

phenomenon, and we will end this paper with a suggestion on how early childhood teacher education could be improved by using educational consciousness as a cross-curricular framework.

Suggestions for teacher education: Educational consciousness as a cross-curricular framework

It has been advocated that media education in teacher education could be positioned as a cross-cultural theme and not as a separate subject (Meehan et al., 2015). Based on our experience from preservice and in-service teacher training, it is crucial that media culture, media education, and media literacy are discussed as central topics so as to avoid the risk of understanding media only as devices and content, media education only as using media for learning, and the teaching of other curricular subjects as too big (see also Salomaa & Mertala, in press). We acknowledge that cross-curricular approaches contain notable potential for improving teacher education. However, instead of positioning one particular subject –such as media education– as a cross-curricular theme, it should be the core questions and concepts of ECE that are intentionally, critically, and systematically examined and reflected throughout teacher training. In the present chapter, the students’ understanding of concepts such as child-initiated pedagogy was simplified, but it had a notable effect on their (media) educational decisions. As other studies have also identified student teachers as possessing awkward educational conceptions (e.g., Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Mertala, 2017c), it is vital to develop the whole enterprise of teacher education toward a focus on more conscious and pedagogically goal-oriented professionalism.

We argue that educational consciousness has the attributes needed for a cross-curricular framework for supporting student teachers’ professional growth and development. One major advantage is the way in which the conceptual dimensions of consciousness seamlessly combine both professional and personal aspects of teacherhood. Such a holistic approach does not only provide the candidates with the knowledge and competences needed to act as teachers (the “how” of teaching), but also positively contributes to the construction of their professional identity (the

“who” of teaching) (Korthagen, 2004; Lanas & Kechltermans, 2015). The model representing a cross-curricular approach is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Educational consciousness as a cross-curricular framework⁸

The model is based on the idea that within each course, students are required to articulate their fundamental conceptions about education, teacherhood, and children. Different subjects do not only provide diverse perspectives for this critical reflection; they also demand that students reflect on the congruence of their conceptions: Are their conceptions about children and their development similar, even though the subject changes? Do their conceptions of themselves as professional educators vary within different subjects? Previous research suggests that factors such as children’s age and student teachers’ personal relationship with the subject are meaningful in shaping their conceptions about educational goals and methods as well as about themselves as educators (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2014; Mertala, 2017c). Students, however, are not necessarily conscious about these variations.

Put differently, having students regularly challenge their conceptions would help them to move beyond superficial levels and to become more conscious about the multifaceted and complex nature of education and teacherhood. Taguchi (2007) has used the metaphor of a “toolbox” to

⁸ The list of subjects serves to exemplify and is not exhaustive.

illustrate the importance of such a reflective process. She states that students enter their training with a toolbox already filled (and continuously refilling itself) with educational theories and methods that need to be critically unpacked (as in the case of child-initiated pedagogy in this paper). For her, teacher education is about practicing a continuous process of unpacking and repacking what is already in this toolbox, relating it to other ways of thinking, and constructing new transgressive supplements. These, in turn, need to be deconstructed and repeatedly reconsidered as a continuous self-reflexive process (Taguchi, 2007). The demand for a reflection on the goals and values of education, in turn, obliges students into a critical cogitation of a practice-oriented understanding of ECE, which is dominant in the Finnish context (Karila & Kupila, 2010) and was highly apparent in the course diaries.

Continuous and profound reflection is a demanding task, and it would be unreasonable to ask student teachers to go through it by themselves. To be truly meaningful and efficient, the use of educational consciousness as a cross-curricular framework requires notable input from teacher educators. This includes systematic collaboration between teacher educators who teach different courses, which again accounts for regular collaborative planning and evaluation as a matter of necessity. Thus, the use of educational consciousness as a cross-curricular framework cannot be based on a tacit agreement or considered as additional work. It should be explicitly included in the syllabus of teacher education programs. All this being said, it is evident that the educational consciousness model is not the quickest or easiest way to advocate media education in ECE. The same applies to its use as a cross-curricular framework in teacher education. However, it would be intellectually and pedagogically dishonest to even advocate that there are easy solutions to working with phenomena as complex as media culture and professional identity.

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