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# The influence of culture on child development

## Abstract

Over the past few years, media use among children and teens has become more prevalent than ever. With the launch of the iPod, the explosion in instant messaging, the birth of mobile video and YouTube, and the advent of social networking sites, young people are rarely out of contact, or out of reach of the media. Although culture and society have the potential to generate both positive and negative effects, everything depends on parents and parental supervision.

In this paper, I want to present benefits and drawbacks which culture carries, because humans are cultural beings. We learn to communicate and understand our world through the context of our languages, traditions, behaviours, beliefs and values. Our cultural experiences and values shape the way we see ourselves and what we think is important.

**Keywords:** child, development, media, art, reading, music.

## INTRODUCTION

Culture may be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features which characterise a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and habits.

Culture shapes experiences and influences children's development. Children's connection to their culture develops through their experiences. In particular, warm and secure emotional connections with the adults who care for them help children connect with their cultural identity. Having a strong sense of their own cultural history and the traditions associated with it helps children build a positive cultural identity for themselves. This also supports children's sense of belonging and, by extension, their mental health and wellbeing.

Early childhood is the most and rapid period of development in a human life. The years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional and physical growth of children. Young people are surrounded by influential imagery, especially that of popular media. It

is no longer possible for an identity to be constructed merely in a small community and only be influenced by family or culture. Nowadays, arguably everything concerning people lives is seen to be constructed by media.

Therefore, it is obvious that in constructing an identity adolescent would make use of imagery derived from the popular media. For example, it is becoming increasingly common for young children to have their own television and music systems in their bedrooms whilst also having easy and frequent access to magazines especially aimed at the developing child and/or teenager. So, if young people have such frequent access and an interest in the media, it is fair to say that their behaviour and their sense of self will be influenced to some degree by what they see, read, hear or discover by themselves. Such an influence may include a particular way of behaving or dressing to the kind of music a person chooses to listen to or a movie actress. These are all aspects which go towards constructing a person's own personal identity.

## MEDIA: BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

Television, movies, computer games and the internet can be a positive influence on your child, especially if you get involved when your child is using them and help your child make good choices. The benefits depend on how old child is, and what kind and quality of media child is using. For children aged 2-8 years, carefully chosen TV programs, movies, apps and computer games offer many developmental and social benefits. These can have even more value through middle and later childhood. Also, social networking sites can have social benefits for teenagers.

For younger children, the developmental benefits of media include developing:

- *literacy skills* – for example, learning letters of the alphabet through programs such as, or through educational computer games and apps;
- *numeracy skills* – for example, learning to count or identify shapes through programs;
- *social skills* – for example, learning cooperation by watching TV programs and using computer games and apps, and websites, which show cooperative and helping behaviour (Comstock, Strasburger, 1990).

For older children, there are:

- *intellectual benefits* - developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills by playing computer games designed to develop these skills, or developing ethical thinking by comparing family values with values in fiction or documentaries;
- *educational benefits* - encouraging reading, particularly after watching a program or movie based on a book;
- *social benefits* - joining online clubs, which teach children strategies for effectively and safely using social networking sites, or playing computer games with friends and family;

- *creative benefits* - developing skills in imagination, art and modelling, music and media, through using software and apps, or being inspired to make something by a TV show.
- Teenagers can develop their:
- reading, writing and critical thinking skills through using blogs and chat rooms
- social skills through connecting with others on social networking sites
- political and social awareness by watching news, current affairs and documentaries, or reading about issues online
- values through observing good role models in the media.

Researchers have identified three potential responses to media violence in children (Josephson 1995):

1. **Increased fear—also known as the “scary world syndrome”** Television frequently portrays a much more violent world than the real one, and this can have an effect on kids: children who have seen significant amounts of violence on TV are more likely to believe that the world is a frightening place. This effect is more powerful when the violence is portrayed realistically or when it is depictions of actual violence
2. **Desensitization to real-life violence** There is significant evidence that exposure to violence in real life can cause young people to see violence as acceptable or unremarkable. There is some evidence to suggest this may happen, on a smaller scale, as a result of exposure to media violence.
3. **Increased aggressive behaviour** There seems to be a relationship between violent media and aggression, but it's not clear whether violent media can make children more aggressive or whether kids who are already more aggressive are drawn to violent media. It's also possible that the two reinforce one another, so that kids who are prone to be aggressive choose more violent media which encourages their aggressiveness.

Today children are bombarded with sexual messages and images in all media: television, magazines, advertisements, music, movies and the Internet. Adults are often concerned about whether these messages are healthy. While television can be a powerful tool for educating young people about the responsibilities and risks of sexual behaviour, such issues are seldom mentioned or dealt with in a meaningful way in programs containing sexual content (Kutner, Cheryl, 2008).

Television viewing frequently limits children's time for vital activities such as playing, reading, learning to talk, spending time with peers and family, storytelling, participating in regular exercise, and developing other necessary physical, mental and social skills. In addition to the amount of time spent in front of the television, other factors that influence the medium's effect on children include the child's developmental level, individual susceptibility and whether children watch television alone or with their parents (Gentile, 2003).

The Internet has a significant potential for providing children and youth with access to educational information, and can be compared with a huge home library. However, the lack of editorial standards limits the Internet's credibility as a source of information. There are other concerns as well.

The amount of time spent watching television and sitting in front of computers can affect a child's postural development (48). Excessive amounts of time at a computer can contribute to obesity, undeveloped social skills and a form of addictive behaviour (9). Although rare, some children with seizure disorders are more prone to attacks brought on by a flickering television or computer screen. No data suggest that television viewing causes weakness of the eyes. It may be different when a child is closely exposed to a computer screen for long periods, although there are no definitive references to support this. There is also the potential for children to be exposed to pornographic material. Parents can use technology that blocks access to pornography and sex talk on the Internet, but must be aware that this technology does not replace their supervision or guidance. These dangers must be unmasked and a wise parent will learn how to protect their children by immersing themselves in the medium and taking advice from the many resources aimed at protecting children while allowing them to reap the rich benefits in a safe environment.

To sum up, media can be a powerful entertainment and education tool for children by given the right programming. However, studies have shown media in general, can also have a very negative influence. Some studies indicate it can shorten attention span, distort body image, work in conjunction with other factors to escalate obesity, create fear, and increase aggressive and anti-social behaviours if exposure is unmonitored and unlimited.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF READING

Research has shown that the single most important thing that a parent can do to help their child acquire language, prepare their child for school, and install a love of learning in their child, is to read to them (Russ, 2007). Reading to a child is one of the easiest ways to prevent future learning problems, and yet many people do not fully understand the enormous, positive impact that this simple act has on the life of a child.

Many studies have demonstrated that reading to children has many positive effects. Reading to children is one of the most effective way of building the language neural connections in their growing brains. Books teach child thinking skills early. While reading, child learns to understand cause and effect, he learns to exercise logic, as well as think in abstract terms. He learns the consequences of actions, and the basics of what is right and wrong.

Books teach children about relationships, situations, personalities, and what is good and what is bad in the world they live in. Fantasy books provide material for their imagination and free play. Fairy tales fascinate children, and help them distinguish between what is real and what is not. When child reaches a new stage in

his growth, or experiences a new and unfamiliar situation, reading to child about a story relevant to his new experience can relieve his anxiety and help him cope. For example, if child is stressed about his first day in school, or about moving to a new location, parents can read a book to him that shows that these should not be painful experiences. Children learn early that reading is fun and not a chore. When child grows up, parents will not be stressed about getting him to read, as reading has become, for him, a pleasurable habit.

A study by Keller and Just (2009) found that when a child listens to someone reading, there is increased activity in the language output centre in his or her brain as they are trying to store the spoken words into their memory. This is a crucial step in understanding language because children's knowledge of the sound system of language enables them to move from oral to written language, understand the individual components of language, and develop an understanding that letters make sounds (Roberston, 2011). Thus, being read to reading aloud has been shown to build the kinds of language skills that are essential for later success in learning to read (Russ, 2007).

## ROLE OF MUSIC

Many parents, teachers, scholars, and businesses are interested in learning more about the influence of music on the development of children.

Anvari, Trainor, Woodside, and Levy (2002) support claims of a relationship between musical training and linguistic development. Anvari et al. (2002) found that music skills were correlated with phonological awareness and early reading skills. The basic auditory skills for music perception were similar to early reading skills which shared some of the same auditory mechanisms that predicted reading ability. Moreno, Marques, Santos, Santos, Castro, and Besson (2009) found that training in music helps build skills important to reading.

Enhanced listening skills help develop linguistic organization. In a study Milovanov, Tervaniemi, and Gustafsson (2004) suggest that there is a connection between music and language skill. This led Milovanov et al (2007) to believe that musical expertise might possibly affect the dominance of one side of the brain in controlling the musical and linguistic processing in the brain.

As children get older, they begin to expand their vocabulary and they start to make connections with words and their meanings. Another way that children can enhance language development can be found through music and ear training. Forgeard (2008) found that instrumental music training may enhance auditory discrimination, vocabulary, and non-verbal reasoning skills. Forgeard (2008) found that children who received musical training not only outperformed the children in the control group, but that the duration of the musical training was important. The longer children received musical training, the more likely they were to outperform children who did not receive musical training.

Musical training not only affects reading, vocabulary, and pre-reading skills, but also speech skills when it comes to language development. Children who receive

musical training will develop aural skills for spoken sounds and spoken words faster than children who did not receive musical instruction, which helps when it comes to learning in the classroom.

Southgate and Roscigno (2009) examined the relationship between music training and academic achievement in schools among children and adolescents 13-17 years old. The researchers found that music involvement had a positive association with grades and math and reading scores. What was concluded was that music is meaningful not as predictor of achievement but as a medium to support children's achievement.

Franklin et al. (2008) concluded that musicians perform better on verbal working memory tasks as well as verbal long-term memory tasks than non-musicians. This may be because musicians have a more developed verbal rehearsal mechanism. Finally, he found evidence for greater verbal working memory span in musicians than non-musicians.

Gromko (2005) showed that children who receive musical training will develop aural skills for spoken sounds and spoken words faster than children who did not receive musical instruction.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF ART

Children love art because it's fun and provides them with authentic self-expression, but how important is art to a child's healthy development? Children's art is many things to many people. To a parent, art is a display of a child's imagination. To an educator, it's a teaching tool. To a psychologist, art is a way to understand a child's mind. To a grandparent, it's a way to feel connected. To a librarian, it's a way to enhance book knowledge. To a child, art is a way to have fun, make decisions, and express choices (Dissanayake, 2003).

Picasso wrote, "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Is children's art an act of genius? Are children more creative than adults? Perhaps Picasso was simply impressed by the spontaneity of children's art. Child art, like most child behaviour, is direct and uncensored. A young child doesn't critique his work – he paints freely and with pleasure, enjoying the fine and gross motor experience of moving paint over paper and watching lines, shapes, and colours come to life. Art puts a child in the "driver's seat" and provides freedom: the freedom of choice, thought, and feeling.

Physiologically, the human brain consists of 2 parts, the left and the right hemisphere. The left brain is used in logical thinking and analytical processes. This is typically what is trained in school work that consists of math, reading and science. The right brain is used in emotional perception, intuition and creativity. It is the right brain that is mainly used when a person is involved in creative endeavours such as making art. It is this part of the brain that typical school environment neglects to train. It is shown that when gifted kids solve problems in their areas of giftedness, there is increased electrical activity in both hemispheres. It appears that

for the brain to be efficient, the two hemispheres of the brains must work together (Beveridge, 2010).

By stimulating and exercising the right hemisphere of the brain, the arts strengthen the connection between the hemispheres. Children should be exposed to the arts as their cognitive skills mature so that their right brain will be as developed as the left, and both hemispheres work in tandem, thus achieving the full potential of the mind.

Researchers from the Michigan State University have found a very strong correlation between childhood engagement in the creative arts and measurable success later in life. Children who were exposed to a wide variety of arts and crafts were more likely to create unique inventions that is worthy of patents, come up with ideas good enough to start a new company, or publish provocative papers on science and technology. The researchers suggest that children exposed to arts and crafts are able to think out of the box since a lot of working with hands involve figuring out how to solve problems creatively (Hetland, 2000).

Arts education and appreciation were also found to have benefits on young people's brains. In a study by researchers from University of Kansas, students who were selected to visit a museum shows stronger critical thinking skills, displayed higher levels of social tolerance, exhibited greater historical empathy and developed a taste for art museums and cultural institutions (Murfee, 1995).

Studies show that there is a correlation between art and other achievement. A report by Americans for the Arts states that young people who participate regularly in the arts (three hours a day on three days each week through one full year) are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, to participate in a math and science fair or to win an award for writing an essay or poem than children who do not participate (Deasy, 2002).

## CONCLUSION

Early childhood development is the key to a full and productive life for a child and to the progress of a nation. Early childhood is a critical stage of development that forms the foundation for children's future well-being and learning. Research has shown that half of a person's intelligence potential is developed by age four and that early childhood interventions can have a lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality, and social behaviour. Parents should take care about their children. Not only, they ought to show culture, but also protect children from the danger, which is also caused by the nowadays aspects of culture.

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