Abstract

'Time to eat!' 'Okay, I'll just die first..' The computer in children's everyday life is a study of children's computer usage from an ethnological perspective. 101 children between the ages of 7 and 12 took part in interviews and participant observations, carried out for some weeks at a time during a period of 2 1/2 years.

The theories underlying the thesis are based on a new dynamic field of childhood research in the cultural sciences. The most significant aspects of this field are that childhood is regarded as a cultural construction and children are conceived of as active and reflecting cultural beings, who have a value here and now and not only in terms of what they will become in the future. Children are subject to the same societal conditions as adults, at the same time as children also live under specific cultural conditions. In the thesis this view of childhood is combined with a poststructuralist perspective, which focuses on how individuals in specific situations use different discourses for placing themselves in successful subject positions.

The text focuses on different aspects of children's computing. The computer is a common element in many families today and has established its place in daily life as a working tool, toy or pastime. Two aspects of childhood have shown to be important: gender and generation. Both boys and girls are aware of those differences as well as the hierarchical relation between male and female, adult and child. They use this knowledge to understand themselves in relation to others; they negotiate with and transgress stereotypes and present rather complex representations of themselves.

When children come together to play computer games it is an intricate mix of fun and joy, power struggles and negotiations, where the individuals use ownership and place, computer competence, gender identity and implicit rules of the game to position themselves and one another. It is difficult to refer to their activities as "children's culture", so the best way to comprehend these activities would be to talk about individuals' different cultural repertoires. This helps us to see that children's repertoires in some ways differ from those of adults, but that it is still not possible to interpret everything children do as an expression of their being children.

When it comes to questions about the violence in computer games and moral panic, which arise around children's computer game playing, it is useful to take into account these cultural repertoires. If and how children are affected when they play violent computer games depends on which meanings they invest in their game playing. On the other hand computer games are produced by adults and exist on a commercial market and the child's competence exists within specific cultural frames. Children constantly produce new meanings and understandings, and it is important that children are allowed to participate in the discussion about children and computers.

Key words: children, childhood, computer, IT, computer games, children's culture, media, play, gender, age, generation, moral panic, the competent child, new childhood research.