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Article

Children's News Media as a Space for Learning About Difference

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Abstract
In this article, we show how everyday difference is conceptualised in Finland through our analysis of media products for children (*HBL Junior*, *HS Lasten Uutiset*, and *Yle Mix*). We consider media as a part of the "lived curriculum" through which media professionals intentionally or unintentionally reproduce particular discourses of difference and sameness that become part of children's everyday learning and understanding of multicultural society. Our aim in doing so is to consider what marks these discourses produced specifically for children, and what versions of difference they replicate and advance. We find that children's media advances discourses of "comfortable conviviality" through the paradigms of colour-blind friendship, the universal experience of childhood, and through a firm belief in social cohesion as the master signifier of Finnish society. Through the lens of inclusiveness, we discuss the implications of these discourses on journalism and media literacy.

Keywords
children's journalism; conviviality; ethnic differences; Finland; media literacy education; media for children; racial differences

Issue
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1. Introduction

Driven by globalization and global injustice, the movement of people is on the increase despite a temporal slowdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Today, more people than ever live in a country other than the one in which they were born (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Migration from countries in the Global South to the Global North is a phenomenon that carries economic, political, and cultural implications and that greatly influences attitudes, belonging, and ways of living. This movement is aided, as Appadurai (1996, p. 3) points out, by media that creates and disseminates images of mobile lives and multicultural realities through pictures, movies, and traditional media outlets allowing for the "construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds." Media is consequently a means through which immigrants imagine new possibilities for their lives, themselves, and their children and through which both migrants and permanent citizens can learn new forms of togetherness (e.g., King & Wood, 2001; Orgad, 2012; Smets et al., 2020).

Because of this globalized environment where togetherness is commonplace, we are curious to know what marks these media depictions—specifically journalistic ones—of difference in a multicultural society, how these versions are replicated and produced in journalism, and the implications of this representation on journalism and media literacy education. In line with Dewey (1938/1968), Freire (1998), and hooks (2003), we stress that there is a close connection between education, experience, and daily life citizenship. More precisely, we see journalism as a part of the *lived curriculum* (Aoki, 1993) in which teaching and learning occur in daily interactions or, in this case, in the informal curriculum constructed by journalism professionals and media professionals through which children learn about diverse

societies. Therefore, in our reading, media content carries more than pedagogical potential—It is a pedagogy (of the everyday). Following Aoki's theory, this is the case even though it has been shown through empirical studies that when asked, journalists for children's media tend to avoid the position of the pedagogue (Brites & Pinto, 2017; Jaakkola, 2020).

From this position where journalism studies intersect with media and migration scholarship and media literacy scholarship, we examine if and how journalistic content on diversity matters for agendas that strive to "diversify" media literacy education (e.g., Neag, 2020; see also Bellardi et al., 2018). Following Christensen and Tufte (2010, p. 112), we understand media education as a "dynamic concept which constantly reflects upon the connection between children, young people, and media, during free time and in educational institutions." Media education is developed in the tension area between media educational practice, empirical knowledge, and theory (Christensen & Tufte, 2010, p. 112). It encompasses a set of practices and projects through which human actors plan and do teaching in formal settings for various types of learners, and it also covers informal learning and practices that develop media and information competencies (Christensen & Tufte, 2010, p. 113; Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Kotilainen & Arnolds-Granlund, 2010).

In the outside-of-school setting in which our study is situated, these practices are fundamentally versatile in nature and rarely encompass instructive approaches to learning about mediated dynamics, representations, and practices. Instead, inspired by Aoki's idea of media as lived curriculum, we see media education as a series of invites and possibilities for young readers to make independent and collective inquiries on the media.

With these conceptualizations of media and education, we examine the content in three contemporary news media products for young readers from Autumn 2020 (*Hufvudstadsbladet*'s *HBL Junior*, *Helsingin Sanomat's HS Lasten Uutiset*, and Yle's *Yle Mix*) through critical discourse analysis (CDA). We focus our empirical analysis on content that deals with and/or depicts racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious differences in Finland in general and mode(s) of co-living in particular. By examining content in rapidly produced and distributed media for children, we can begin to understand how we best can support children and young people with one of the crucial moral challenges for media literacy education: their relationship to the "different," the "unfamiliar," and the "other."

2. Media as Pedagogy: Finland as a Case in Point

Ellsworth and Miller (1996, p. 247) have said that identities and differences are constructed in and through the dynamics of our engagement with each other over time, not only in the service of oppressive relations such as racism and sexism but also in the service of the *contestation* of such oppressions. The media is one space where these relations and their contestation can be presented, discussed, and contextualized for children in ways that meet journalistic expectations on ethics and logics, while at the same time being adapted cognitively and affectively for their level. This view on the role of the media as a platform for learning, unlearning, and relearning about difference and multiculture has been highlighted by numerous scholars before us (see Cortés, 2000; Shah & Khurshid, 2017; Yosso, 2002). Also, more specifically, within the paradigm of media literacy education that draws on a Freirean legacy of critical pedagogy (e.g., Kellner & Share, 2019), we can see a recent increase in studies that address issues such as class, race, gender, sexuality, and power (e.g., Bruinenberg et al., 2021; Neag et al., 2022) in a European context. These studies are normative in character, and they call for the development of a more participatory and culturally sensitive media literacy education. In line with critical scholars on media and diversity such as Dreher (2009), they believe that enhanced listening to marginalized social and ethnic groups in and through media can lead to empowerment.

When discussing issues of diversity in relation to education and the media, it is important to acknowledge regional particularities. In Finland specifically, there are certain national particularities that likely influence how scholars, educators and journalists understand diversity and how this understanding manifests in products for young audiences. For example, the egalitarian society that the welfare state promotes tends to be linked to discourses of a "good" Finnish childhood. By international comparison, the UN Universal Rights of the Child are also heavily regarded (Aasgaard et al., 2018) and childhood generally is thought to be "important in its own right, not simply as a platform from which to become an adult" (Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006, p. 6). In Finland, as in the other Nordic countries, this discourse takes the form of a childhood in which children are centered and valued in the present, are given the freedom to play without "over-supervision and over-control" from adults around them yet develop strong relationships with adults, and finally, understand and develop their own "Nordicness" (Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006, p. 265). Within this ideological system, various actors have different roles to play that reflect the values Finns place on what it means to socialize children into being citizens and who is responsible for this socialization. We see the media as one actor in this socialization process—i.e., the integration of children into the construction of the welfare state.

Additionally, in historical terms, while Finland has been multicultural with so-called old minorities (Jews, Tatars, Romani, and Sámi) and a national linguistic minority, the Swedish-speaking Finns (5.2% according to Statistics Finland, 2020c), the nature of immigration changed in the 1990s with an increase of migrants from Somalia, Russia, and Estonia of which the last group tend to be travelling back and forth to work. From that time on, the share of people with foreign backgrounds

in Finland's population rose from 0.8% to 8% pointing to a fast but moderate immigration trend (Rotkirch, 2021; Statistics Finland, 2020a). The change towards diversity is particularly apparent when the focus is on children. The number of children between 0 and 18 with a foreign or multicultural background has changed rapidly in Finland (from only 3,735 children in 1990 to 105,178 children in 2020 including children born abroad and children born in Finland with at least one parent born abroad; Statistics Finland, 2020b). Migration to Finland is based increasingly on employment and studies (Ministry of the Interior, 2021) but also the number of asylum seekers has increased significantly compared to the pre-1990s. The record number of Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers entering in 2015 increased activism against racism and deportation (Näre, 2020) but also increased political right-wing nationalist organizing (Pettersson & Nortio, 2022).

The demographic change, racism, and the politicization of migration and diversity matter for this study for at least two reasons. Children living in Finland increasingly have diverse backgrounds (Statistics Finland, 2020b) but we do not know whether and how their lived realities are represented in journalistic reports, despite explicit aims in media policies about "reaching out" to marginalized social groups (Yle, 2020). Neither is it known how media professionals in Finland, who strive for balance and neutrality in their work, deal with highly politicized discourses of diversity. The reason for this is that children's media is understudied in general and in Finland in particular. Studies on the characteristics of contemporary children's journalism and its connections to media literacy exist (e.g., Brites & Pinto, 2017; Jaakkola, 2020; for Finland, see also Kyllönen, 2022; Mäkilä, 2022) but they do not focus on diversity.

The same contradiction applies to policies. The role of media for learning and in learning in Finland is strong as there is a long tradition of national initiatives using media pedagogies beginning in the 1970s (e.g., Finnish Government, 2018; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013; Minkkinen, 1978; Pekkala et al., 2013). These policy initiatives and industry implementations have nourished many initiatives, projects, and programs for children with a backstory stretching back a few decades. Internationally, Finland is often seen as a forerunner in media education. Finland scores highest in the Media Literacy Index, considers media education in national-level policies and structures, and was one of the first countries in the world to include media education in its national core curriculum (Palsa & Salomaa, 2020). Despite this position, diversity issues are not particularly underlined in policy documents on media literacy. In the most recent national strategy (Salomaa & Palsa, 2019, p. 26), there is one line on how "the ageing of the population and multiculturality affect the target groups and topics of media culture," but that is all.

The question of how diversity is depicted and constructed in media for children is a particularly pressing issue to examine in a framework of informal learning and media as pedagogy as children's news in Finland has seen a surge in recent years, beginning with *Helsingin Sanomat*'s distinct commercial venture for children, the news show *HS Lasten Uutiset*, and growing especially in 2020 with the advent of print and video content for children. In 2020, HS started a weekly print newspaper going under the same name *HS Lasten Uutiset*. Simultaneously, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, the largest newspaper in Swedish, launched *HBL Junior*, a semi-monthly print and Yle launched a new audiovisual program for children, *Yle Mix*, with news-focused videos published online twice a week.

Hence, in the light of recent policies (Salomaa & Palsa, 2019; Yle, 2020) and economic interest (i.e., to guarantee a next generation of newspaper subscribers, see, e.g., Mäkilä, 2022), the beginning of the 2020s where we situate our study marks a cornerstone—albeit understudied one—for children's journalism in Finland.

3. Material and Methods

We focus our empirical analysis on content in children's news media that deals with and/or depicts racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious differences in Finland in general and agency against racism in particular. Six issues of the weekly *HBL Junior* and six issues of the weekly *HS Lasten Uutiset* from September to Oct 2020 as well as 17 episodes of *Yle Mix* (3 September to 30 October 2020) have been analyzed through CDA (Wodak, 1996). These three journalistic media for children were launched in 2020 and they are aimed at children in elementary school (ages eight to 13).

Through processual re-reading and re-organizing the material during a period of several weeks, we searched for commonalities by focusing on different journalistic elements during different rounds of reading (headlines, introduction, storytelling, visual aspects, framework, and the interviewees, what they say and how they say it). Through our critical reading, we produced notes and codes that we modified throughout the process. Finally, the notes came to include a variety of commentary on content, format, and framework including marks on journalism, imagined members of the target group, and issues relating to social relations in general, race, and ethnicity in particular. The notes aided us to do the more structured form of the analyses, which we organized through codes.

We worked with the hands-on analyses in the following manner: *HBL Junior* was analyzed on paper with multicolor post-it notes for notes on commonalities and marker pens for rudimentary codes extracted in an inductive manner during the actual analyses with a focus on social relations and ways of co-living. *HS Lasten Uutiset* was digitized by the National Library. Hence, articles were read on their platform (https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/etusivu?set_language=en) and similar types of notes and codes were made in an Excel file.

Yle Mix was watched through the platform Yle Areena (https://areena.yle.fi/tv), and notes and codes were made in a separate Excel file.

At the final stage of the analysis, we formed nine codes. These were: a child's immediate world, marked by a middle-class lifestyle (school, hobbies, family members, celebrities, technology, pets); children's rights and/or the universal experience of being a child; the mobility-paradigm; nationalism in a variety of forms; distant others who are exotic and/or need our help; addressing and/or creating the white helper; empathy and anti-racism training; non-whites who are "just like us"; and norm-breaking or striving for that. Some of the codes overlap thematically, and we wanted to allow for that. When examining these codes and where they overlap through the critical lens of CDA, two discourses and one story-telling technique could be distinguished. These were Familiar Type of Difference, Finns and Foreign Others as discourses, and introducing the Unfamiliar Through the Familiar as a storytelling technique.

We will come to these specific findings soon, but first need to describe the content on a general level, as CDA researchers study discourse through an analysis of text in context.

On a general level, much of the content reflects major international news events of autumn 2020 including a pandemic, a presidential election in the US, and intensified movement for racial justice. In the three media that were analyzed, hard news and international/global events are "domesticated" (Joye, 2015), presented in an "age-appropriate way," and alternated with stories that take on local and light-hearted perspectives on various themes such as gaming, social media, talent shows, sports, hobbies, and seasonal traditions. In all three products, the journalistic and educational ambitions are high and it is clear that the media professionals producing these products work hard to inform young prosumers about contemporary matters in and through positive emotional experiences. Positive emotions are, for example, generated through pictures of happy-looking children in feature stories and vox pops, cute animals, delicious-looking food and recipes, and funny graphical figures. The overall paradigm of light-heartedness can be assumed to advance a feel-good experience of the children towards journalism, reading, and issues of societal relevance (on a general level, see, e.g., McIntyre, 2015), and perhaps also towards diversity and multicultural realities. However, read through a critical lens, there are certain parallel discursive trends that need to be considered as well.

The four sections to follow will focus on these trends, the challenges that they point at, and also their potential for advancing anti-racism and acceptance of difference. This discussion will not be particularly genre and format sensitive as we wish to take one step away from being media content-centric towards being more sociocultural and educationally focused. Despite this choice, evidently, audiovisual news content and newspaper articles published on paper are marked by different logics, traditions, and challenges in how to appeal to their target groups.

4. Constructing a Familiar Type of Difference

When examining the findings from the three media analyzed, *HBL Junior*, *HS Lasten Uutiset*, and *Yle Mix*, the analyses clearly show that the producers of all three media strive to depict Finland as diverse and inclusive. This can be seen when examining the visual level, and particularly well when graphics and images are analyzed. When these texts are more closely examined, there are two discourses on multiculturalism, diversity, and difference that are more prominent than others. These are Familiar Type of Difference and Finns and Foreign Others. Let us examine the first one through an example.

In Figure 1, we can see how the subject portrayed, a black version of the Nordic iconic children's book character Pippi Longstocking, is placed in a visual narrative with several connotations to a typically Finnish lifestyle. These are climate activism, generic "Western" clothing, and an independent outgoing and self-secure type of femininity. This is just one example but a representative one as, for example, girls or females wearing visible cultural and religious symbols such as hijabs can rarely be seen in the three media analyzed during the data-gathering period. Instead, the difference is depicted in relation to a paradigm of familiarity and cultural proximity.

Another example of how a familiar type of difference is constructed concerns the choice of hosts for the *Yle Mix* program which both can be positioned as having non-typically traditional Finnish features (Asian and Southern-European). They too, however, represent a familiar type of Finnishness. For example, when they pronounce foreign names and notions, they apply a clearly Finnish pronunciation and the way they dress and behave while on camera reflects a highly generic, standardized, mainstream, and middle-class type of Finnish and global youth culture, with all of its expectations on femininity, style, and behavior. In other words, though the two hosts of *Yle Mix* have darker skin color, everything they say, do, and how they do it, connects these women firmly to majoritarian society, culture, and religion. Hence, they represent an unthreatening "safe and well-known" type of otherness that generates positive curiosity rather than suspicion.

In the three media analyzed, this discourse is further strengthened through the construction of a standardized type of upper-middle-class Finnish lifestyle with all that it encompasses: individualism rather than cross-generational communitarianism, certain hobbies such as reading books or doing volunteer work, an interest in pets and other animals, secularism and scientific worldviews, and so on. For example, there are no depictions in the three media of a more communal way of living and spending leisure time, common for many families with histories of migration or affiliations


14 Kultur & nöje

99 En bra illustration för mig är en sådan som får en att utbrista "nej men vad smart!".

Jenny Lucander, illustratör

Pippi Långstrump fyller 75 år i år. Pippis födelsedag till ära har Jenny Lucander skapat en modern version av Pippi Långstrump för HBL Junior.
ILLUSTRATION: JENNY LUCANDER

Du behöver inte vara jättebra på att rita för att bli illustratör

Jenny Lucander vann Nordiska rådets pris för barn- och ungdomslitteratur. Nu delar hon med sig av sina bästa tips för hur man kan bli en bra illustratör.

Figure 1. The Nordic blackness depicted in children's journalism (*HBL Junior*, 10 December 2020).

to minority cultures; images of cross-generational large families spending time in public parks; or images of transnational familial relationships that immigrants in Finland actively seek to maintain (see Chajed, 2022). Neither can we in the material find stories of children simply hanging out in the neighborhoods, a leisure time activity which Oittinen et al. (2022) have shown to be a marker of lower socioeconomic background in Finland. Instead, the imagined prosumer of these media is a child who has organized hobbies such as ice hockey or football, animals, values nature, masters the storyline of the most influential Nordic children's books, has a recent mobile phone with unlimited or at least a fair amount of usage, cares for people who are deprived in terms of their socioeconomic status, and has the skills required to independently seek help when in need (feeling lonely, for example).

5. Constructing "Finns" and "Foreign Others": Where Do Immigrant Children Fit in?

While in the context of Finland, racial and ethnic differences are depicted as safe and familiar, in a global context, they tend to relate to a paradigm of cultural distance, victimhood, and racialization. This paradigm produces a discourse of Finns and Foreign Others—a contrast structure (Gill, 2000)—in which presumed "wes" and presumed "theys" are positioned at different ends. Various cues (Davies & Harré, 1990) in the text and its context indicate how actors are positioned. These cues can relate to journalistic choices that create emotional distance, like the practice of not providing names in the image texts for people from the Global South who illustrate a generic news topic, such as the Covid-19 disease (e.g., *HS Lasten Uutiset*, 30 September 2020 and 21 October 2020). They can also relate to frequently used words and expressions such as "poor," "illiterate," and "deprived of rights" (e.g., *HS Lasten Uutiset*, 7 October 2020). Particularly in news on migration, the stories are consequently constructed so that there is an explicit "we" who is expected to help a victim, "they" (e.g., "The migrant question is about whether we should help others and why we should help. It may be that we will need help one day"; *HBL Junior*, 10 December 2020, p. 7).

As an illustration, although the upcoming Finnish independence day clearly has influenced a quiz featured in *HBL Junior* on 26 November, it is noteworthy how the imagined prosumer is invited to be interested in (a) the final word in the lyrics of the national anthem, (b) a yearly media spectacle organized by the Finnish PSB company for raising money for children in the Global South, (c) a game launched by a Finnish gaming company, (d) the institution that is behind the children's convention, and (e) a Finnish war film from 1955 with a story about the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union shown on the Finnish PSB company (for adult audiences) on Independence Day. Although this is just one quiz amongst many others, it exemplifies how the discourse on Finns and Foreign Others is constructed, through its depictions of Finnishness compared to foreign others who are portrayed as being elsewhere and significantly different from us in terms of race, culture, and socioeconomic background.

Despite the fact that the media occasionally engages in border crossing in terms of challenging norms and conventions (e.g., allowing for Lucia to be a boy and including drawings on black Nordics to illustrate generic news topics; e.g., *HBL Junior*, 15 October 2020, pp. 12–13),

there is an educational undertone that strives to educate the imagined prosumers about the ideo-historical aspects of the state, "good" citizenry, global solidarity, internationalization, and digitalization skills, resonating with what Billig (1995) has coined "banal nationalism.'' Through representations of the healthy, wealthy white Nordics and the far-away, poor, and black in need, a racialized foreign other is constructed in and maintained in journalism, irrespective of good intentions. In this dichotomized construct, immigrant and transnational children with mobile family histories risk feeling non-represented and unheard. They must choose between either Finnishness or foreignness. If they cannot, perhaps, they create for themselves a position of non-belonging. This can be a quite lonesome position and bewildering part of growing up.

6. Introducing the "Unfamiliar" Through the Familiar

Besides these two dominating discourses, we could, through the material, note a certain storytelling technique through which discussions on diversity, co-living, and anti-racism in Finland were turned into *teachable moments* (Hobbs, 2011). When analyzing the material rather closely to see how these moments are constructed and timed, we can see some common features. For one, these moments tend to be introduced into the storyline in an unexpected manner. In other words, articles, reports, and video inserts rarely have a lead or a formal introduction that would relate to race or ethnicity in Finland/the Nordics, to racism/anti-racism, or other types of tensions within diverse societies. Instead, when race or ethnicity is introduced, it is often unexpected and unannounced. This finding particularly concerns *Yle Mix*, where several content modules/inserts are compiled so that a certain theme such as Halloween, bullying, or the US presidential election, is introduced on a generic level after which there is a sudden turn to an educational note made on race, ethnicity, or diverse society (*Yle Mix*, 30 September, 7 October, and 30 October 2020).

The sudden and unannounced appearance of teachable moments in relation to race and ethnicity is particularly apparent in the *Yle Mix* video from 30 October 2020.

In the video (Figure 2), the host discusses Halloween from a historical perspective (0.00–3.16 min) without any references to racism or cultural appropriation, followed by a brief insert focusing on Halloween lights and décor in an elementary school (3.16–4.00 min) and costume trends on a general level (4–5.30 min). After this, the focus turns to costumes, first on a generic level, but then taking a sudden educational turn to cultural appropriation (at 5.30 min)—a central aspect of contemporary public debates on race and ethnicity internationally and increasingly also in Finland. First, the discussion on appropriation deals with a US context and then Finland (at 6.20 min). At this point, when the host tells the prosumers an example of cultus variation in a Finnish context, the light-hearted background music stops and there is no other soundtrack than the voice of the host, which further underlines the seriousness of the point she is making. The example that she gives is about the Sámi (i.e., the indigenous peoples of the northern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula) and how they have not been allowed to wear traditional clothes but how replicas of their clothing are sold in tourist shops, thus monetizing their culture. The actual educational point (at 6.40 min) is how "it is not particularly respectful or fair to dress in the traditional clothing of minorities for pleasantry [*hassuttelumielessä*].'' After that, the discussion on cultural appropriation continues until a more general type of comic relief at the very end of the video (7.25–8.09 min).

The *Yle Mix* videos from 7 October 2020 and 30 September 2020 are two other examples of this storytelling technique. In the video on the US presidential election (*Yle Mix*, 7 October 2020), the story starts with a general discussion on the importance of voting and children's thoughts on democracy and continues with a discussion on how the two candidates' agendas differ from each other. When a Yle correspondent reporting

Figure 2. The suddenness of the teachable moment on diversity (*Yle Mix*, 30 October 2020, 8.09 min).

from the US links the discussion to Finland and rhetorically asks why Finns should care about the outcome of the election, a teachable moment occurs. Finns should care as trends in American culture, music trends, and celebrity culture tend to be copied in Finland; so "if many people there think that people of a different color are not as valuable [as whites], then it may reflect how we here treat each other" (4.02–4.07 min). In the video on bullying again (*Yle Mix*, 30 September 2020), the informant continuously mentions how her accent, facial features, last name, and parents' mother tongue were at the center of the bully's attention for years, and at one point she makes an explicit appeal to the prosumers on how they should "accept difference." Despite her appeal, the overall storyline is on bullying on a generic level, as all experts interviewed and the host avoid dealing with racism, race, or ethnicity.

There are various ways to make sense of this narration technique. It may be that the production team has ambitions to teach prosumers about how to act as politically correct citizens with social consciousness and high awareness of human rights issues yet feel that opening up with a normative and politicized perspective may turn prosumers away. Instead, they lead prosumers towards the teachable moment via a sort of narrative backdoor. In our viewing, this practice can also show how news producers of children's journalism function as "journalistic actors who promote learning" (Jaakkola, 2020); having a title or introduction on a politicized topic, such as anti-racism and/or cultural appropriation, could be interpreted by the youth as overtly educational and/or simply "not interesting." In this way, by starting from a totally different and sassier topic but coming to an educational point on race, ethnicity, and/or multiculturalism at some point, prosumers are invited to learn about something that they possibly would not have chosen to learn themselves.

7. Discussing the Findings: Journalistic Practices and Representation of Togetherness

In this section, we take a step back from our analysis of the content to place our findings alongside journalism practices of representation and storytelling. When content in three recently launched children's news media products in Finland is read through a critical lens and in the context of media as *lived curriculum* (Aoki, 2005), we can notice that media producers make an effort to depict children's realities as diverse. Particularly on the visual level when considering pictures, illustrations, iconography, and the choice of hosts, black and other non-white subjects regularly are featured in reports on all sorts of generic news topics in the cultural or political sphere with little or no relation to race, ethnicity, and diversity. When these reports deal with domestic news topics, racial and ethnic differences in Finland are presented as safe and familiar. These efforts are valuable as "feeling represented" in and by the media has an important positive effect on minority children and youth (e.g., Nikunen, 2011). It is similarly important to show in the media and through the media that "mixed friendships" (Vertelyte, 2022) and diverse comingling are possible, "normal," and enrichening, particularly as research shows (e.g., Oittinen et al., 2022) that school realities in Finland are increasingly segregated. These representations are thus in line with what scholars have termed *conviviality* (see Gilroy, 2006; Wise & Noble, 2016), where togetherness in diverse societies is depicted in the everyday interactions of ordinary citizens.

There is a downside to the discourse of familiar difference too as it advances paradigms of color-blind friendship, the universal experience of childhood, and a firm belief in social cohesion as the master signifier of Finnish society. Besides, familiar difference does not challenge, and perhaps even perpetuates, discourses of binaries between Finns and Foreign Others, who are presented in a contrasting structure where others are anonymous beings often in need of "our" help. This happens through journalistic practices and discursive choices that echo banal nationalism and white-savior mentality although packaged into what in Finland is known as global education (*kansainvälisyyskasvatus* or *globaalikasvatus*; e.g., Riitaoja, 2013), namely a pedagogical approach with good intentions that strives to foster critical awareness of global challenges, but often fails to avoid colonialism and nationalism.

It seems that in this framework—marked by a safe type of diversity "as we know it" that does not test boundaries of cultural, religious, or ethical codes and conventions, and the more unpredictable type of diversity outside the borders of Finland—does not acknowledge transnational lifestyles and such ethical and cultural dilemmas that children see and experience in their immediate living environment. The reasons for this unwillingness to tell stories about important but difficult problems in a multicultural society are many: These themes may not be considered to be age-appropriate, the consensual history of Finland and the important role the media has played in keeping up illusions of consensus (e.g., Lounasmeri & Ylä-Anttila, 2015) has left a mark on journalistic traditions, and, perhaps, the children's media wish to explicitly counter-act the hate-rhetoric on migrants and minorities put forward by the Finns party and often also echoed in generic legacy news media (Pantti et al., 2019).

Furthermore, a recent movement within journalism called "constructive journalism" has argued that journalism should not only focus on social problems but also the possible solutions and spaces of action in their coverage and that this would lead to positive social impact and committed readership through better audience engagement (Ahva & Hautakangas, 2018). This tendency can also be read as a side-effect of discourses on "regional representability" constructed by producers in the newsrooms of children's media. When the producers are concerned about how to be regionally inclusive in order to

create a product that feels relevant for various audience segments (Kyllönen, 2022), they may miss other types of meaningful differences that matter for identification and relevance too, such as transnational family-situation, language, religion, socio-economic status, lifestyle, feeling of belonging, and, most importantly, how these differences can cause conflicting expectations, beliefs, and behaviors. Complicating this discussion, Finland is a multilingual state and Swedish-language media form a complete media system with newspapers, radio, television, and web-based content in order to cater for a Swedish language minority. This is particularly true for minority language children's media such as *HBL Junior*, where the primary we-group constructed is geographically scattered but linguistically united. As our analysis considered Finnish and Swedish language products together, the comparison of representation within content in these two languages remains an area for further study.

This practice of highlighting regionality does not mean that the producers would fully ignore themes or discussions in relation to diversity that potentially could upset prosumers. Instead, our analysis shows that when uncomfortable themes in relation to difference, such as racism and cultural appropriation, are introduced to children, it happens through a more joyful, neutral, or generic topic. Our empirical material covering three media for two months is not large enough to say how common the strategy is to "introduce the unfamiliar through the familiar." Neither can we yet say what the impact of this technique is on agendas that call for more inclusiveness in the media for pedagogical and/or societal purposes. Rather, what we can say is that despite valuable efforts to depict difference, be inclusive, and connect with the child, this storytelling technique and the two dominating discourses show a tendency in the children's media to refrain from engaging in uncomfortable conversations. This, in our viewing, reinforces the comfort that is afforded to the white majority in discussions about race (see also Leonardo & Porter, 2010). The result is that conflict is ignored, and in line with universalist ideals, all individuals are considered the same.

The concept of *comfortable conviviality* can help us to understand this process, give it a name, and connect it to ongoing scholarly discussions on difference and togetherness. This concept has implications for media literacy which we turn to briefly to conclude.

8. The Implications of *Comfortable Conviviality* for Journalism and Media Education

As we see it, comfortable conviviality presents a society of diverse comingling in various social and mediated spaces as an optimal society in which "feelings of togetherness…[are] actively produced through social practices, often in the face of change and conflict" (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 424). The problem with such ideals is that existing power structures rooted in race and colonial history make such comingling always unequal (Back & Sinha, 2016; Lapiņa, 2016; Wise & Noble, 2016). Even while the children's media acknowledges diversity then, the understanding of what diversity encompasses is limited by the majority's desire for safety, comfort, and predictability. Thus, uncomfortable differences (i.e., religion, segregation, multiple belongings and conflicting sympathies, and non-normative ideologies) are left out and "others" are made to fit into more familiar boxes in their values, behaviors, and interests. In this reasoning, cosmetic diversity can become a "smokescreen" (Deverell, 2009) that hinders "listening across difference" (Dreher, 2009) in cases where the habits, beliefs, and norms of minorities are seen to hinder social cohesion. This assimilation occurs regardless of the intent of the media professionals creating this content for children. Furthermore, this togetherness is limited to the national borders as colonial discourses are used to represent others who are *not* in Finland and are depicted as being inherently less "developed" than their Western counterparts and thus in need of their help (see Cronin-Furman et al., 2017).

What then are the implications of comfortable conviviality for media literacy education in general and agendas that strive to advocate for stronger recognition of cultural diversity within literacy movements? When children's journalism is seen both as lived curriculum in a setting of everyday life and as a plausible tool for instruction (when integrated into formal teaching), these comfort-seeking discourses can be valuable as contributions to constructive journalism. However, they can become harmful too, as they do not acknowledge differences beyond skin color, particularly differences in the experience of power and privilege. The risk with too comfortable and convivial a gaze on children's multicultural realities is that children's media products lose credibility in the eyes of their potential prosumers. When these realities neither match more agonistic personal social media flows nor more conflict-centered depictions of a multicultural society in generic news media, we may end with cognitive dissonance and lost educational opportunity.

In sum, due to the tendency in children's journalism to see diversity through the lens of comfort and conviviality, we should be careful in thinking that children's journalism would advance social justice and communicative rights for marginalized groups just because it "shows difference." Living together can be hard. It can create practical challenges and evoke complex affective responses where dejection, envy, and frustration co-emerge with more positive feelings such as awareness of cultural affinity and belonging despite difference. Not everyone can identify with the polished and child-proofed version of a socially cohesive multicultural society. If the producers of children's journalism begin to listen and value children's own stories of their complex feelings of belonging and their lived multicultural realities on a local level, even on the level of the neighborhood, the media products could reach out to new groups of prosumers. In a best-case scenario, this could lead to an increased interest in reading, journalism, and developing early citizenship skills.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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