Maltese Children's Construction of Identities
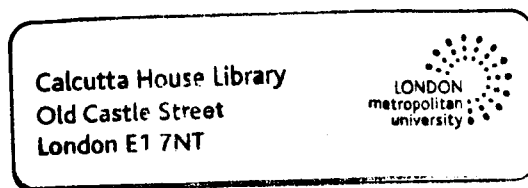
through their Engagement with the Media

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore how children construct identity through their engagement with a variety of media and communication technologies. This research was conducted with ten children who were aged between nine and ten at the start of the study and lived in Malta, a small bilingual island in the Mediterranean. Over the past two decades, the media has become a central phenomenon in the lives of Maltese children and as with their counterparts abroad, they are provided with broader opportunities for social relationships and space to interact and construct identity. By adopting a social constructionist perspective, this study examined how Maltese children's engagement with the media contributes towards the construction of their identities and likewise, how it is shaped by their identities.

The research design consisted of a series of online interactive sessions followed by small group interviews between the children and the researcher. The findings from this study showed that by actively engaging with the media, the children used various strategies to move through three stages, namely *initiating, sustaining* and *extending* the media experience. The researcher identified a number of discourses which the children drew upon in their engagement with the media, namely; an interplay between local and foreign media, parental regulations, intergenerational attitudes towards the media and perceptions of difference. This study has also identified three distinctive identity descriptors which are the *learner, hobbyist* and *consumer*. These identity descriptors could possibly be grouped as relating to social practices. Given the historical and cultural conditions of the current era, they seem to emerge at an early age and could potentially last until later on in life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that no portion of this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

Tania Muscat
September 2012

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
ESC	Eurovision Song Contest
GWU	General Workers' Union
IRF	Initiation Response Feedback
LOL	Laugh Out Loud
MBC	Middle East Broadcasting Centre
MIRC	Malta Internet Relay Chat
MKO	More Knowledgeable Others
MSN	Originally: The Microsoft Network; stylised as: msn
MTV	Music Television
MUD	Multi-User Domain
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NMC	National Minimum Curriculum
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PBS	Public Broadcasting Services
PSD	Personal & Social Development
RAI	Radiotelevisione Italiana S.p.A
TVM	Television Malta
UOL	Universo Online
WWE	World Wrestling Entertainment
www	World Wide Web
ZDP	Zone of Proximal Development

GLOSSARY

Avatar:
The graphical representation of a computer game user. It is an object representing the user.

Binary opposition:
In critical theory it refers to a pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning.

Deictic:
A word specifying identity or spatial or temporal location from the perspective of a speaker or hearer in the context in which the communication occurs.

Diaspora:
Any group that has been dispersed outside its traditional homeland.

Dichotomise:
The act to divide into two sharply different categories.

Différance:
This French term was coined by Jacques Derrida to imply that words are always at a distance from what they signify and, to complicate matters, must be described by using other words.

Discourse:
This term refers to language in a social context.

Discursive identity:
The way we speak is tied to who we are in the world.

Discursive practices:
This term refers to a historically and culturally specific set of rules for organising and producing forms of knowledge.

Epistemology:
The philosophy of knowledge. The study of the nature of knowledge and the methods of obtaining it.

Firewall:
Can either be a software-based or a hard-ware based and is used to help keep a network secure.

Ganutell: [Maltese word pronounced *gunutel*]
A Maltese craft form of making artificial flower designs out of wire, embroidery threads and coloured beads.

Għana: [Maltese word pronounced *aana*]
The foremost traditional Maltese folksong.

Hybridity:
Different cultural forms interacting in the same space

Macro level activity:
Activity at a strategic/institutional level.

Media systems:
Depending on the country context, media and communication technologies are simultaneously a tool for social development and a tool for propaganda – domestic or foreign.

Micro level activity:
Activity at a local level.

Multiliteracies:
This is a term coined by the New London Group. Since the way people practice literacy is changing due to globalisation, the advances of technology, and shifts in the usage of English language in different cultures. Consequently a new 'literacy' had to be developed, one which encompasses a broader range of knowledge, skills, process and behaviours.

Multimodality:
A way of making meaning that allows for a variety of modes and semiotic systems.

Ontology:
The study of being and existence. The attempt to discover the fundamental categories of what exists.

Othering:
The process of perceiving or portraying someone or something as fundamentally different.

Pedagogue:
One who instructs, an educator.

Schema: [plural schemata or schemas].
In psychology or cognitive science refers to a mental structure of pre-conceived ideas, a framework representing some aspect of the world, or a system of organising and perceiving new information.

Semiotic systems:
The sets of signs or symbols in a text. There are five semiotic systems: linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial. For example, linguistic semiotic systems include letters, words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs.

Signifier:
The form which the sign takes.

Signified:
The concept the signifier represents.

Sign:
The whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified.

SKYPE:
Software application that allows users to make telephone calls over the internet. Additional features include instant messaging, file transfer and video conferencing.

Social constructionism:
The term refers to sociological theories of knowledge that consider how social phenomena or objects of consciousness develop in a social context.

Societal bilingualism:
Is where two languages or more are spoken by most of the population.

Subject position:
Implied position within a particular discourse which may be occupied or taken up by a person, providing a basis for their identity and experience.

Third space:
A space where individuals draw on different discourses that are in between other domains.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

1.	(round brackets)	Used for references, abbreviations and to add additional information, to the written text.
2.	[square brackets]	Used when specific information is added to further clarify the written or spoken text. Also used for descriptions about what is taking place at the time, for example, [points to arrow] and [laughs].
3.	Words in *italics*	Used to highlight specific terminology and concepts when used for the first time in the text, as well as for Maltese and foreign words. Also used for online activity game instructions, names of media programmes, newspapers and radio stations, etc.
4.	(...)	This signifies that the speaker did not continue his/her sentence – there is no missing text here. Also used to reflect an extended pause in speech.
5.	Capital letters	Commands given on the computer screen, such as PLAY.

CHAPTER ONE   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background to the study

This study explores how children at primary school level construct identities through their engagement with the media. Over the past two decades, the approach of the Maltese educational system to media has changed considerably. The main law regulating education in Malta is the Education Act (Chap. 327) of 1988. This Act, amended through various legal notices, encompasses the Maltese National Minimum Curriculum. This legal framework fundamentally 'defines the educational rights and obligations of students, parents, the state and NGOs (including the Catholic Church) (Vallejo and Dooly, 2008: 3).

The National Minimum Curriculum (NMC), entitled *Creating the Future Together* and issued just before the millenium, placed the media at the forefront of its approach to bring about change in Malta's educational system. It is interesting to note that the NMC (1999) document, which constitutes a binding foundation for the development of separate curricula, at three different levels of education, namely pre-primary, primary and secondary, presented the media as its eighth educational objective.

> Media Education - *Knowledge/Information* - Through the curricular experience, students should acquire knowledge in the following areas: - the Media and Society: basic knowledge of the different sectors of the media; knowledge of the media's social function; the media's relations with political and economic institutions; the symbiotic relationship between the media and society; how the school and the media influence each other ... (NMC, 1999: 44).

The NMC (1999) also refers to the importance of recognising media as a transnational industry, acknowledging the importance of the social impact on the consumption of media products, media content and language, knowledge of the internet and the media as a catalyst of change (*vide* Appendix A - NMC Objective No. 8 – Media Education).

This study has adopted a focused objective. The approach taken is not directly concerned with learning and classroom practice with respect to media education as an area in the curriculum *per se*. This study is concerned with how a group of Maltese children's use of media contributes towards the construction of their identities and likewise how the children's media practices are shaped by their identities.

In light of the above, a significant aspect of change brought about by media and information technology, is that being able to access and use new technology has become a basic prerequisite to match the demands of today's society. One such demand, which is of relevance to this study, is that since individuals use different forms of media in their interactions with each other, inevitably media becomes intimately connected to literacy practices in their day-to-day lives.

It is also opportune to mention that in 2011, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) published a draft document of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) entitled *Towards a Quality Education for All*. One of the aims of this document was to evaluate what has been achieved in the decade since the NMC was published.

At the time the study was being finalised, consultations with the various stakeholders were being undertaken and the researcher was able to refer to the initial draft document of the NCF. One of the stakeholders, the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) presented a document with its reaction about this draft (MUT, 2011). In its document, the MUT observed that although the Maltese society is increasingly influenced by media and technology, there is no mention of media education in the NCF. While the NCF refers to eight learning areas, one of which is Technology Education (to include design, technology and digital literacy), the NCF writers make no specific reference to the role of media and popular culture in children's lives.

Over the past thirty years, researchers have moved away from conceptualisations of literacy as a set of decontextualised skills to an understanding of literacy as a social practice (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). More recently, scholars working within the New Literacy Studies (NLS) framework acknowledged that the nature of literacy is changing due to developments in technology and increasing cultural/linguistic diversity (Unsworth, 2002). This implies that literacy practices require that individuals master how to access different semiotic systems other than the conventional oral and written linguistic semiotic system (Kress, 2003). Furthermore, being literate today means that one has to have a broader knowledge of all the potential types of different text and the related practices with which one may engage in everyday life (Anstey and Bull, 2003).

On the local scene, the NMC (1999) also adopted a sociocultural approach to literacy. One of the objectives mentioned in the document recommends that:

> The [primary] educational experience ... should be based on an appreciation of the manner in which the information technology is influencing language, the way we speak, write, listen and observe and understand the world around us (NMC, 1999: 77).

This recommendation, together with the researcher's work experience as a pedagogue at the University of Malta caused her to reflect on how she could apply her skills and dispositions to a research undertaking that would deliver contributions to knowledge, particularly in this regard. In the course of the researcher's work at the University, when she delivers various study units to undergraduate students on the teaching and learning of language, a sociocultural approach is adopted. To this end, prospective teachers are encouraged to adopt wider conceptualisations of literacy in their teaching methodology.

The researcher's work also involves teaching practice supervision. During the numerous teaching practice supervision sessions conducted by the researcher over the years, the more lessons she observed, the more evident it was that primary school children draw upon literacy practices, such as viewing, listening, reading, instant messaging, chatting, online playing and shopping, all made possible by media and communication technologies. After reflecting and reading more upon the subject, it was decided to conduct a study that would explore how Maltese children's engagement with the media contributes towards the construction of their identities and likewise how their media practices are shaped by their identities.

The case for exploring this issue was particularly timely due to the media landscape in Malta (which will be described in greater detail in Section 1.4). As in other countries, this has become an opportunity whereby local media users 'meet' global

media users. That is, through their engagement with media and communication technologies, Maltese children and young people have become part of a global community constructed through social networks (Kenway and Bullen, 2008). Moreover, global media allows them to share programmes, music, branded merchandise, information and games (Lemish, 2007). Maltese children and young people, as with their counterparts abroad, are provided with broader resources and opportunities for social relationships and spaces in which to interact and construct their identities.

In this section, issues relating to the centrality of media and technology in children's lives were considered. It was also suggested that the media is a major provider of cultural resources for the construction of identities. In the next section, a brief explanation of the methodology is given to show how the assumptions and beliefs held by the researcher guided her towards the research design which was adopted. The subsequent sections outline the socio-historical context and the contemporary media landscape within which this study is set. Finally, the research questions that this study aims to address are presented.

1.1.1 Adopting a socio constructionist approach

This study adopts a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism recognises that our time and culture-bound ways of understanding the world, including ourselves as individuals, are constructed from everyday interactions primarily through language (Burr, 2003). From this perspective, identity is regarded as being continually produced through joint-action as individuals develop an understanding of themselves and of how they are understood by others (Shotter,

1993a). With reference to identity, social constructionism proposes that language is the 'means and medium' through which social beings construct identities (Barker, 1999).

With respect to this study, adopting a social constructionist stance permitted an examination of how a group of Maltese children's use of different forms of media contributes towards the construction of their identities. At the start of the fieldwork, the children who participated in the study were between nine and ten. They came from a working class background and their first language was Maltese. They attended state-run schools in which Maltese was widely spoken and utilised for the teaching of various subjects, such as Social Studies, Religion (Catholic) and, naturally Maltese, the children's mother tongue. Given that English is one of the two official languages of the island along with Maltese (*vide* Section 1.2), the children formally learn the language at school and are also partly instructed in English. This language is also an integral part of their everyday experiences, whether this involves books, handouts, computer software, online material, music and television viewing.

To date, no empirical research has been undertaken to examine how Maltese children's use of media contribute to their understanding and construction of knowledge about the world, including themselves. The constructions that are presented in this study therefore represent an original contribution to the theoretical understanding of the social construction of reality. The reflections drawn from this study are considered to be beneficial in the light of policy and curricular changes aimed at exploring pedagogical possibilities which go beyond the confines of the

classroom, ones which in particular, take into account other social environments and realities children come across in their lives. It is hoped that these reflections would then help to contribute critically to local discussions on education, the role of the media in children's lives and ways by which children make sense of their time and culture-bound knowledge of the world.

1.1.2 Parameters of this study

Since the fieldwork for this study was carried out between late 2005 and mid 2007, the media in Malta consisted mainly of television, personal computers, the internet, computer games and radio/music. The study did not and could not include later technology on the media market, such as iPods and Wii consoles, current media productions in circulation on television and cinema nor recent media phenomena, such as Hello Kitty, Cars as well as Facebook, Twitter and other social networks.

The researcher's values, beliefs and attitudes guided her to conduct a qualitative case study. The researcher's interest was to develop research 'focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied' (Merriam, 1988: 3). However, just as it was assumed that the children represented how they came to view the world, including themselves through the language that they shared, she was likewise aware that any observed 'reality' as a researcher, was a context-dependent personal interpretation of events (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

By employing observations and interviews as methods of inquiry, the study not only took into account the 'voice' of the children in their own familiar setting, it also allowed them to take an active role by sharing their experiences and expressing

their own perspectives and worldview. Of course, the researcher was aware that this case study provides but a snap-shot of the children's experiences during a specific time period and context and therefore, its findings cannot be generalised.

This study therefore focuses on how a group of Maltese children engage with the media to construct their identities. Although the participants were young, elements of the context in which they lived can be traced much further back in time. Hence, it is salient to this study to outline the cultural and social context in which the children were located, and how it impinged on their lives. This will serve as background information for the analysis of the findings presented later in this study. As will be demonstrated in later sections of this thesis, Malta's socio-linguistic history directly or indirectly determines the kind of text, languages and practices that the children chose, engaged with and understood.

1.1.3 Approach to data collection

The first phase of the data collection consisted of a series of observation sessions where the children interacted with various online activities. These sessions provided a good opportunity for the researcher to observe the children talk and interact simultaneously with each other and with multimodal text, in this case online games which had a combination of some or all of the following: print, voice over reading, music, sound effects, still and moving images. It also allowed the researcher to invite them to talk about the actual media activity, as well as explore links to their everyday knowledge and the cultural experiences in their lives. The data was intended to provide the researcher with insights into broad themes and discourses. After the online activities were carried out, it was determined to further

elaborate upon these broad themes and discourses through a second cycle of data collection which involved a series of group interviews.

1.2   Malta's historical background - a socio linguistic perspective

The Maltese archipelago, consisting of three islands, is situated in the Mediterranean Sea between Sicily and North Africa. The main island, Malta covers 316 square kilometres (similar in size to a quarter of the town of Manchester in the U.K.) and has a population of just over 400,000 (National Statistics Office, 2005: pg. v). Around 96% claim to be Roman Catholic (Gellel and Sultana, 2008). The native language of Malta – *il-Malti* (the Maltese language) – is a cultural combination, with a Semitic core and lexical elements of Romance and English (Camilleri, 1995). English is the co-official language of the country alongside Maltese. After 165 years of colonial rule, Malta gained independence from Britain in 1964 and became a Republic in 1974. Malta joined the European Union (EU) in 2004.

The legacy of foreign influence is reflected in the languages with which the Maltese people have become familiar with. The Maltese islands have been occupied by a succession of foreign powers including the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, the Order of the Knights of St John, the French and finally and most recently, the British.

From the time of the Knights of St. John in the late sixteenth century, a mixture of Latin, Sicilian and Italian dialects was widely used in Malta by people living within the harbour area who came in constant contact with the Sicilian and Italian marine

community in the Mediterranean (Cassar, 2001). The inhabitants who lived in remote villages, and who earned a living from farming retained the Semitic element of their native tongue (Felice Pace, 1995). The powerful Catholic Church in Malta used Latin and later Italian, as a consequence of its ecclesiastical relations with the Vatican in Rome and its close ties with the diocese of Palermo (Bezzina, 1994).

In the eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth century, the language of the local, educated elite and nobility was Italian and the use of the native tongue was discouraged (Cassar, 2001). This continued well into the British Period in the history of Malta. The Maltese language, which could only boast of an oral history, was relegated to the status of the 'language of the kitchen', that is the language of the masses (Borg, 2009). The work of a few Maltese scholars during the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century succeeded in gradually elevating the Maltese language from the vernacular to the status of a written language. However, it was only in the early 1930s that a standard Maltese alphabet and orthography were finally established (Brincat, 2011).

In the course of the nineteenth century, the English language started to gain ascendancy as naval business and trade activities increased on the island (Frendo, 2004). Furthermore, English became the language of the administration. Compulsory schooling was introduced in the late 1940s (Sultana, 1999). At this time, Maltese was the language of instruction whilst English was taught in later grades at primary level with Italian and as an optional subject taught at secondary level (Zammit Mangion, 2000). Over the years, some school authorities, particularly those in private schools, suggested that English should be used as a

medium of instruction given the growing importance of the language (Zammit Mangion, 2000).

Presently, Maltese and English are taught as compulsory subjects and as languages of instruction at primary and secondary level. In secondary schools, students opt to study one or two of the following foreign languages: Italian, French, German, Spanish and Arabic. This exposure to various languages is further supported by the fact that the Maltese population is exposed on a regular basis to both their language and to other foreign languages. This is due to the fact that tourism is so strong, mixed marriages are common and there are numerous foreign workers residing on the Island.

As from the 1950s, the Italian language received exposure through the diffusion of Italian *RAI* (*Radiotelevisione Italiana S.p.A*) television channels reaching the Island. The only local state-owned television station, which was set up in 1961, transmitted programmes in both Maltese and English (Cutajar, 2001).

The researcher grew up watching television programmes that were predominantly in English, followed by Italian and Maltese. In recent years, exposure of the Italian language in Malta has become less common (Caruana, 2007) due to the variety of media available. The next section outlines a study which was carried out on Mediterranean media systems by Hallin and Mancini (2004).

1.3   A study on Mediterranean media systems

Hallin and Mancini (2004) noted that the media systems of eight countries located in southern Europe, namely Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Malta, share some characteristics which mark them as different from those found in other regions. The authors point out that these countries, besides having had a religion-dominated cultural life, have had an industrial transformation and a market which was slow to develop. The media systems in these countries are, to some extent, still dependent on the political parties of the day or on institutions such as the Church and/or private entrepreneurs. For this reason, Hallin and Mancini classified the media systems of these countries as the 'The Polarised Pluralistic Model' (2004: 191).

Hallin and Mancini note that Malta is more similar to Greece and Italy since these countries have a strong tradition of political polarisation. The authors also found that although political parallelism between the above mentioned countries in the Mediterranean study is high, variations do exist. For example, Malta never experienced authoritarianism in the same way as in Italy, or dictatorship as in Spain and Portugal or the military coups such as those which occurred in Turkey and Portugal. The above information has been presented in order to provide a backdrop for the next section which outlines the Maltese media landscape in view of the contemporary global media systems.

1.4   The Maltese media landscape

Over the past few decades, Malta's media landscape has been ever changing. From a time of print and radio, Malta now enjoys a media set up on a par with any

European developing country to still include print and radio, as well as television and internet. Most of these services are offered through private enterprise.

In Malta, the two main political parties (the Nationalist Party and the Labour Party) have always played an influential role in the media, especially when they opted to have their own media platforms which include the broadcast radio and television, print, internet and telephony (Borg, 2007). These radio and television stations cannot be regarded as being controlled by strong private interests of influential industrialists or large conglomerates as found in Italy, Turkey, Greece and Spain. Similarly, the University of Malta and the Maltese Catholic Church also run their own radio stations. In Malta, one does not generally find allegiances to principal media conglomerates as one finds in Spain.

1.4.1   The different forms of media in Malta

As stated earlier, the first public broadcast television was set up in Malta in 1961. Drawing on the researcher's experience, as a child born in the early sixties, her parents purchased their first black and white television set around that time and they were one of the few families on their street who owned a television receiver. In comparison, around the same time in the U.K., more than four out of five families owed a television set (Mackay, 1995).

By the 1960s, various channels from neighbouring Italy, reached the island. In the 1970s and the 1980s more Italian television channels, including the commercial network *Mediaset* started reaching Malta (Caruana, 2007). The official deregulation of local broadcasting in the early 1990s led to the introduction of cable

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television (Grixti, 2006) and later satellite reception at home. Cable television re-broadcasts a vast array of channels including local, Italian and a number of satellite channels from Europe, the US, Russia and the Arab world (Borg, 2007). Today, virtually all Maltese households have at least one television and the majority have more than one (NSO, 2010). Pay TV subscription is widely diffused and a small but increasing number of households have satellite reception at home (Xuereb, 2010).

There are five major local television stations. The state-run station is *Television Malta* (*TVM, TVM 2*) run by the Public Broadcasting Services (PBS). The two main political parties each run a TV station: *One* by the Labour Party (Democratic Socialism) and *Net TV* by the Nationalist Party (Christian Democrats). In addition, there are two commercial stations, *Smash TV* and *Favourite TV*. Since the introduction of deregulation, Maltese has become the dominant language in television production and to this effect, the majority of all programmes are local productions (Borg, 2009). Grixti (2006) further noted that this is quite a marked difference when compared to the time when there was just one public channel on the Island (before the official deregulation of local broadcasting) and only 43% of all programmes were local productions.

Over the past fifteen years, Malta has experienced further deregulation in the telecommunications sector by opening the industry, business, academic and household spheres to mobile telephony and the internet. At the time this study was conducted, a survey (National Statistics Office, 2005) with 1,200 interviewees, found that 46% had internet access at home. It is also worth noting the availability

of internet within local schools during this particular period. In 2005, all secondary schools and 85% of primary schools were connected to the internet (NSO, 2005). Another survey conducted six years later (NSO, 2011) with 1,400 respondents found that 75% had internet access at home. These results show that internet access within the Maltese households has increased extensively in recent years. The majority of subscribers had broadband access.

Today, virtually all state schools are equipped with computers that have internet access and teachers are provided with a personal computer. The internet has become an integral part of everyday life in Malta and it is now common to find that it is used in conjunction with other media, particularly TV. For example, various popular local television series and programmes are twinned with websites which inform viewers about programme concepts, sponsors, highlights, presenters'/participants' profiles, multi-media forum and so on. Some local radio and television programmes are also streamed via the internet.

Until 1991, there was only one FM radio station in Malta: the state-run *Radju Malta* (Cutajar, 2001). In 1991, radio pluralism was introduced and currently there are thirteen institutional and commercial broadcasting stations, besides a large number of community radio stations. In general, the institutional and community radio stations broadcast in Maltese, offering public service and current affairs programmes. A few commercial stations which specialise in music rather than talk programmes broadcast mainly in Maltese and sometimes in English. Music is a dominant genre particularly on commercial radios and songs in English are popular, followed by Maltese and Italian. In 2010, a local commercial station, *Bay Radio*

introduced a non-stop music channel, *Bay Italia*, which is dedicated exclusively to the airing of Italian music.

With regard to newspapers, to and for the whole period of time covered by this study there were fourteen local newspapers, dailies and weeklies. There are eight newspapers published in Maltese, four of which are Sunday papers. The local newspapers are published by the Church, the two main political parties, namely the Nationalist Party, the Labour Party and also the General Workers Union, the leading left-leaning workers' union.

Three commercial enterprises publish six newspapers in English. Some local newspapers include complementary magazines which are generally in English. Magazine publications in Maltese and major global brand magazines in English and other languages are also circulated, often coupled with the main newspapers. These cover a vast range of interests and genres. Foreign newspapers are also available such as *The Times* (United Kingdom), *La Repubblica* (Italian), *Le Monde* (France); *El País* (Spain); *Al-Ahram* (Egypt) amongst others.

1.4.2   Languages within the Maltese media domain

As a result of the historical events outlined in Section 1.2, 'societal bilingualism' (Maltese and English) is prevalent in Malta since 'two or more languages are spoken' by most of the population (Camilleri, 1995: 14). Although Maltese and English are the prominent media languages, they co-exist with other languages, mostly Italian. Maltese individuals differ in the extent and degree of language or languages used in their media preferences and media related activities. For

example, in a sociolinguistic survey Sciriha and Vassallo (2006) found that Maltese was the preferred language when the participants listened or watched the news on TV and radio. However, Maltese was less popular with respect to non-news programmes, especially on TV.

In a study with 195 Maltese youths aged between 14 and 25, Grixti (2006) found that socio-economic and educational backgrounds determined television viewing preferences in terms of language and content. In a study on second language acquisition through the media, Caruana (2007) found evidence that in Malta, exposure to Italian programmes on television facilitates second language acquisition. This was also evidenced in countries, such as Albania, Greece and Slovenia, where Italian channels are widely received (Giordano, 1997).

A study carried out by Sciriha (2001) who investigated the reasons behind Maltese students' selection of optional foreign languages at secondary level, showed that 42% opted for Italian, followed by 33% who preferred French. The least chosen languages were Spanish and Arabic, which are chosen by only 1% of the students. Factors contributing to the popularity of the Italian language were; exposure to several Italian television channels, familiarity with the Italian culture and the historical ties between the two countries. These results imply that by watching programmes in Italian, Maltese children are likely to be adding this language as another potential one in their repertoire of languages.

With respect to internet use, a survey (Euro Barometer, 2011) with 500 respondents from each member state in the European Union (EU) found that 97% of the Maltese

were most willing to use an English language website if this website was not available in their language. With regard to other foreign languages only 20% of the Maltese respondents used Italian and 3.4% used French to read or watch content on the internet.

Such research aptly highlights ways in which the historical and socio-linguistic context bears, directly or indirectly, upon which languages, media text and practices the Maltese tend to choose, engage with and understand. However, one needs to remember that technology advances and globalisation also play a significant role in shaping the contemporary socio-historical conditions we live in. When children engage in media practices in their everyday life they do so from within local contexts which are tied to global contexts (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005).

At the most rudimentary level, this means that the local-global relationship has important implications for understanding children's use of media and communication technologies and the associated literacy practices necessitated by today's global interdependence (Anstey and Bull, 2006). At a more sophisticated level, the local-global relationship has important implications when attempting to understand how children actively appropriate and utilise media and communication technologies to make sense of their time and culture-bound knowledge of the world (Burr, 2003).

1.5   Research questions

Prompted by these insights, the intention of this study was to explore how Maltese children construct identities through their engagement with the media and likewise

how this is shaped by their identities. Through continuous reflections derived from relevant literature and observations made through the researcher's work as a pedagogue, the various aspects that need to be considered are as presented in the following research questions:

1. *What strategies do Maltese children use in order to derive meaning and actively engage with different forms of media?*

2. *What discourses do Maltese children come in contact with, in their engagement with local and global media?*

These two focused research questions will be tackled in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. The findings from these two chapters will lead to Chapter 6 in which the final research question will be tackled namely:

3. *How does Maltese children's engagement with the media contribute towards the construction of their identities and how is it shaped by these identities?*

The rationale behind the first research question is that if there were to be no media, children cannot engage with it, nor could they appropriate the meanings and messages in the way they habitually do. Through the first question, the researcher determines which media the children are inclined to use and the particular strategies they resort to during their active engagement with the media.

The second research question is linked to the first one in the sense that without language, children are unable to communicate effectively, nor share their understanding of the world and of themselves. This also allows them to represent their experiences to themselves and others. This research question allows for the

exploration of the discourses the children draw upon and the extent to which such discourses shape how they come to understand the world, themselves and others and more specifically how they make sense of their experiences with and through the media.

The third research question builds on the previous two research questions and is directed towards understanding how, through their engagement with the media, the children construct identities for themselves as individuals and through their interactions with others. This question seeks to examine the processes by which they engage with the media through their strategies and skills. The ways in which the children draw upon discourses, their accumulated knowledge and experiences in the construction of their identities is also considered in this context. This question also studies the ways in which children combine and re-combine these resources depending on where they are, who they are with and the purposes they want to achieve. Through the analysis of the data, the researcher will explore how engagement with the media and construction of their identities are, to some extent, determined and achieved through a dynamic, complementary, two-way process in which one influences and shapes the other.

1.6   An overview of this study

This introduction has outlined the Maltese socio-historical context and the contemporary media landscape within which this study is set (Chapter 1). This will now be followed by a review of literature on key concepts pertinent to this study namely: *identity, the different roles of the media user, the interplay between local and global media, space as a social construct* and *new literacies*. These concepts

are framed within a social constructionist perspective to establish the theoretical lens used in this study (Chapter 2). The methodological approach and details about the process of data collection follow (Chapter 3).

In the second part of the thesis, the data is presented and discussed around three central foci: strategies in deriving meaning and actively engaging with the media (Chapter 4), social and cultural discourses of the media (Chapter 5), the rhetorical function of children's talk about what media they engage with, how media engagment contributes towards the construction of their identities and likewise how their identities are reflected in their media practices (Chapter 6). The concluding chapter brings together the main threads and arguments presented in this study, in an attempt to answer the research questions and to present the researcher's recommendations (Chapter 7).

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to this study and presents the theoretical background for the research questions the focus of which is to explore how Maltese children construct their identities through their engagement with the media and likewise how it is shaped by their identities. Three key concepts that are relevant for this study, and which will be discussed in detail in this chapter are, the notion of the *active media user* (Bolin, 2011), the *social construct of space* (Giddens, 1979) and *literacy as a social practice* (Gee, 2012).

In contemporary Western societies 'a textually mediated social world' prevails (Barton, 2001: 92) and it is common to find that media and communication technologies are used for social interaction and practices (Rasmussen, 2003). In engaging with the media, children often actively draw on literacy practices. For example 'a young child can observe a sister talking with a friend, texting (writing) the friend, and then reading the text' (Blanchard and Moore, 2010: 2). Being able to access and use media and communication technologies allows for the transfer of ideas, images and social relations which are no longer conditioned by spatial and temporal constraints (Anstey and Bull, 2006). As media users, children and young people 'have a much wider scope of relationships and spaces in which to interact' (Barker, 1999: 30). However, since this study focuses on identity, it seems pertinent to set it within a theoretical orientation which foregrounds the social element of identity, in particular, one that admits the centrality of construction within the social realm.

Hence, this study will be approached from a social constructionist perspective. From this perspective, identity is taken to be an ongoing sociocultural process rather than an internal, fixed possession (Hall, 1996). The notion of construction offers a useful way of conceptualising the link between the child's ongoing process of building identity through practices involving the media and interactions with others within the social contexts in which they occur. For this reason, in the next section the basic tenets of social constructionism will be outlined. This study has adopted this approach since it is the researcher's belief that it effectively presents a working framework within which to consider the various concepts relevant to this study.

2.2   Social constructionism

Social constructionism emerged and developed during the 1970s and 1980s. A group of scholars from North America, Britain and Continental Europe were dissatisfied with the approaches to the study of human beings as social animals which were prevalent at the time (Burr, 2003). They claimed that such approaches failed to take account of social phenomena. Social constructionism drew upon a number of intellectual disciplines all of which emphasised the 'bottom up' relativist stance (Berger and Luckman, 1966), in sharp contrast with the 'top down' stance upheld by positivism (Friedman, 1999) which viewed reality as an ontological 'given'.

As noted by Burr (2003: 2-4), social constructionism is based on these four basic assumptions:

1. The ways that people understand concepts and categories do not come from an independent object 'reality' but from interactions between people (previous and current generations) through language.

2. Interactions between people through language are a form of social action which brings about consequences.

3. Certain concepts, categories and methods have dominated and subsequently taken for granted because they were assumed to be uncontestable, such as dogmatic belief in the past and relevant to a particular culture.

4. Concepts and categories are historically and culturally bound. For example, the concept of 'self' had different conceptualisations across different eras and different cultures.

The concepts most relevant to this particular study can therefore be summarised as follows: language as a signifying system, macro/micro social constructionism, and finally the New Literacy Studies' views on language.

2.2.1 Language as a signifying system

The notion that language does not represent a pre-existing social reality but constitutes it is associated with the French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) who was crucial in the development of structuralism. According to Saussurean linguistics, language is a signifying system made up of signs which generate meaning by reference to each other.

In the case of the linguistic sign it is made up of two constituent parts. For example, the word, 'bird' or 'beauty', termed as *signifier,* is the material representation of the linguistic sign. The mental construct, termed *signified* is the actual object or idea associated with the signifier. The *signifier* and the *signified*

together make up the linguistic sign. Saussure's point was that the relation between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, in the sense that what people perceive to be a 'bird' is only by association and social agreement.

Moreover, each arbitrary categorisation comes into being through the underlying relations of the difference between the signs making up the signifying system. For example, the meaning given to the concept 'bird' only has meaning in its relationship to other concepts such as 'cat' or 'computer'. However, Saussure's argument further implied that notwithstanding the link between signifier and signified as being arbitrary it then becomes fixed and established in a community.

As Littlejohn (2002) pointed out, Saussure's ideas were later adopted and extended by poststructuralists because they were partly dissatisfied with the notion of stable linguistic structures of language. The poststructuralists' central premise is that meaning through language is dynamic (Burr, 2003). They acknowledged that change in the meaning of words may occur over time. For example, the word 'black' was originally used to refer to a particular colour and still can, but in contemporary times it has also taken meanings of race (CERES, 2005).

Examples of words taken from the conversations of the children who participated in this study which have come to carry different meanings over time include 'soap', 'dish', 'reception', 'mouse', 'icon', 'web' and 'window' amongst others. This suggests that words can be used to mean *different* things at *different* times in history, depending upon who the speakers are with, the setting they are in, to include their cultural setting and for which purpose the speakers use the specific

words. This is the point at which the social constructionist view of reality becomes very important. Social constructionism holds that individuals are socialised into discourse communities in which context and historically bound concepts and categories prevail. It is through such specific meanings that individuals engage with the world and build different views of it (Burr, 2003).

2.2.2 Macro and micro social constructionism

Danziger (1997) suggested that there are two broad forms of social constructionist theory and research, the 'macro' and the 'micro' versions constitute separate levels of analysis and tend towards one or the other depending on the specific problems being investigated. The two approaches most significant to 'macro' and 'micro' social constructionism are those which draw on post-structuralism in the case of the former (Boreham et al. 2008) and the other which draws on social psychology in the latter case (Burr, 2003).

The emphasis on 'discourse constructs' has led to the creation of different fields of enquiry. 'Macro' research is concerned with institutional practices and social structures, for example, looking into forms of social inequality. Foucauldian discourse analysis has been highly influential in 'macro' research (Foucault, 1972; 1978, 1979).

Foucault argued that discourses are 'practices which form the objects of which they speak' (1972: 49). Implicit in Foucauldian discourse analysis is the idea that certain social and historical specific forms of discourse become established and subsequently come to determine what speakers say and/or do. Examples of such

forms of discourse are those established through traditional social institutions which provide individuals with membership in groups, such as the family, the school, the church and the government amongst others. More recently, other forms of discourse have come to include those established through non traditional social institutions, such as the media (Silverbatt, 2004).

Drawing on Foucault, Willig (1999) suggested that 'individuals are constrained by available discourses because discursive positions pre-exist the individual whose sense of 'self' (subjectivity) and range of experience are circumscribed by available discourse' (p. 114). Implicit in this is the idea that language becomes a site of struggle in which individuals claim or resist discursive positions made culturally available to them.

'Micro' social constuctionism emphasises what goes on between people in everyday life and utilises the notion of constructions through talk and interactions (Darity, 2007). Theorists taking a 'micro' social constructionist approach include Shotter (1993a, 1993b), and Gergen (2009) from the USA, and in the UK key thinkers in the fields of enquiry such as discourse analysis (e.g. Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Parker, 1992) and the related area of discursive psychology (e.g. Edwards and Potter, 1992; Harré and Gillett, 1994).

For example, Shotter (1993a) drew upon the notion of 'joint action' from social interactionism and recognised the usefulness of conversation in generating participatory knowledge. Like Shotter, Harré (1983: 65), argued that 'conversation is to be thought of as creating a social world just as causality generates a physical

one'. Gergen (1994, 2001) again like Shotter, acknowledged that the individual is a 'relational being' and not an isolated one. That is, people are beings embedded in relations with others. His focus upon the constructive potential of interaction has roots in the Russian philosopher of language Bakhtin's (1981) central concept of 'dialogue'.

> The word in language is always half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention (p. 293).

Similarly, each new relationship is not a phenomenon which can be isolated but 'bears the mark' of previous relationships that has been formed before (Gergen, 1994).

With regard to the 'micro' level, researchers have reflected on the functional aspect of what people say in their interactions with each other. Generally, talk has specific purposes in relation to whom individuals are speaking to, where they are and the particular setting they are in. This form of 'discourse' refers to 'the situated use of language in social interaction' (Burr, 2003: 62). As Potter and Wetherell (1987) pointed out:

> Much of social interaction is based around dealings with events and people which are experienced *only* in terms of specific linguistic versions. In a profound sense, accounts 'construct' reality (p. 34).

As noted by Billing (2009) discursive psychologists have studied the linguistic resources, such as discursive devices and rhetorical skills, that people draw upon in the constructed accounts they give on different occasions and in different

interactional contexts. Discursive psychologists are primarily concerned with the things people say and do. Thus they 'bracket' ontological questions on the nature of things.

Edwards and Potter (1992) applied this understanding to the study of psychological phenomena such as memory and emotion. They examined how certain politicians gave accounts of their actions. The authors noted that in these accounts the politicians avoided blame or made claims for certain entitlements. Edwards and Potter suggested that through such constructions the politicians gave credible accounts of their actions and subsequently came out as credible individuals.

In Chapter 6, findings from the data gathered for the current study will be presented and discussed further to show how the children drew upon similar discursive practices when they gave accounts of their actions, events and practices involving the media. For example, the children justified the extensive amount of time they spent playing on the computer by saying that during weekends and holidays they had more time at their disposal for their leisure activities.

In a similar vein, Potter and Wetherell (1987), drawing on the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), put forward the concept of 'interpretative repertoires' which are conceptualised as social resources and which exist on a small scale from which people can create accounts deemed appropriate to the situation. According to the authors, these are 'recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena' (p. 149). For example, Wetherell

and Potter (1992) used the notion of 'interpretative repertoires' in their analysis of racist talk and concluded that people cannot be described as racist or not racist since people can say quite contradictory things depending on the situation they are in and the interactants they are with. For example, people would say one thing if they are talking with the neighbours and another thing at a job interview.

Hermes (1995) and Barton and Hamilton (1998) used the idea of interpretative repertoires to study how readers use magazines and books. They concluded that readers draw on different approaches in their act of reading so that a particular book can have multiple readings, that is, it can be read in different ways on different occasions. For example a cookery book may be used as a reference book, or as a pastime, on occasions read alone, at others shared with other 'gourmet' friends. The reader may just skim through or spend hours engaged in reading. Again the crucial point here is not whether one version of 'reading' is more accurate than another but rather what particular goals the repertoires that individuals draw upon enable them to achieve. In the context of this study, children might bring their own interpretative repertoires such that a given media text may be used in a variety of ways.

Drawing on Barton and Hamilton's examples of multiple readings, the following suggestions show different ways in which a TV programme may be viewed on different occasions. Children may use a TV programme to participate in phone-in TV competitions, for information, to talk about it with other TV enthusiasts, for multitasking, to keep up to date, to extend a media engagement, to admire a TV

host/hostess and to fill time. As suggested by Barton and Hamilton 'meaning does not reside in the text alone but in the associated practices' (1998: 282). This leads the research to refer to the New Literacy Studies which present language as not just limited to specific words and their meanings, but also in the context of its use, to include 'ways with things' (Gee, 1999: 7).

2.2.3 New Literacy Studies (NLS)

Gee (2005, 2011, 2012), who worked within the New Literacy Studies (*vide* Section 2.7) developed theories of language as 'socially situated'. He extended the notion that language is performative and action-oriented by identifying seven building tasks of language - 'to build things in the world and to engage in world building' (Gee, 2011: 16). These are *significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics* (as in the distribution of social goods), *connections*, and *sign systems of knowledge* (2011: 88-92). Gee's influential notion of 'd/Discourse' distinguishes between (small d) 'discourse' and (capital D) 'Discourse'.

According to Gee 'discourse' (small d) or 'language-in-use' refers to the words used as individuals interact with one another as they move between discourse communities in everyday life and use stretches of language like conversations. 'Discourse' (big D) or 'language-in-use plus other "stuff"' (Gee, 2005: 7) encompasses 'ways of behaving, interacting, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as 'instantiations' of particular roles (or 'types of people' by *specific groups of people*' (Gee's emphasis) (Gee, 2005: viii).

For example, a rapper speaks *and* dresses, walks, dances and writes lyrics; in other words acts the 'right' way and at the 'right' place and time. Moreover, Gee suggested that 'd/Discourse' gets expressed in relationship with other d/Discourses.

The d/Discourse on misogyny, for example, makes meaning in its relationship to other d/Discourse, such as those on the female as a lover (Sayre and King, 2003) or the figure of the 'good mother' (McFarland, 2003). Implicit in this dynamic view of d/Discourse is a broadly post-structuralist notion of 'subjectivity' as individuals try to, as in the case of the rapper in the example above, 'be in' d/Discourse or 'not be in' d/Discourse and to get recognised by others as being or not being so. Gee's d/Discourse theory was highly applicable to this study in three ways.

First of all, it was applicable since it conceives individuals as capable of occupying multiple 'subject positions', in relation to the different discourse communities they encounter in everyday life. Given the pervasiveness of the media in contemporary western societies, one might assume that the children come in contact with, and therefore draw upon, discourses made available by popular media. The notion of d/Discourse offered a way in which to identify discourses emanating from 'lived' and 'mediated' experiences reflected in the data collected during this study. This provides a relevant framework for one of the foci of this study on how Maltese children construct identities through their active engagement with the media.

Secondly, it was applicable since the d/Discourse concept as espoused by Gee takes into consideration 'the reflexive property of the context' (2011: 84), which suggests

that individuals are not only shaped by context but also shape it in turn. For example, a school teacher in a classroom giving a lesson creates the context of a class session by the way she speaks and interacts with her students. Likewise, if classrooms did not exist as an institutional context, she could not speak and interact in that way. In using this idea, Gee attempted to link the micro (language use in interaction) with the macro (linguistic and social structures).

Gee's view of context has the following implications. Context is dynamic and not static. According to Gee, context includes the physical setting in which the communication takes place, as well as the verbal and body language of those present and even 'any shared knowledge those involved have, including cultural knowledge, that is, knowledge of their own shared culture and any other cultures that may be relevant in the context' (p. 84). Context enables change and transformation to take place. For example, in a schooling context, console games and other television narratives become new sources of narrative which are embedded in a particular form of school literacy, such as creative writing.

Thirdly, Gee's concept of d/Discourse is helpful to this study since the media can be considered as points in which a multitude of contexts intersect. Building on this, the media is regarded as providing children with the means by which to move actively between and among these contexts in everyday life. This key insight is useful when considering the media as an added resource in identity construction. This concept is of particular significance in the light of non-essentialist conceptualisations of identity which is discussed further in the next section.

2.3   The construction of identity

The concept of identity is very broad and has been used in various contexts and for various purposes. Mutanen (2010) noted that notions of identity include *national, regional, professional* or *vocational*, and *social identity*. This study's main focus is on how children construct identities through their active engagement with the media. In this section, the social and cultural dimensions of children's social identities in ways which are particularly relevant to their engagement with the media will be considered.

Over the past thirty five years or so, within the social sciences, a range of disciplinary specialisms influenced by a social constructionist orientation have focused on identity as their central concern (Buckingham, 2008). Within this perspective, the concept 'identity' is underpinned by supplementary assumptions concerning language.

In the research reviewed in the preceding section, it was argued that the central premise of social constructionism is that 'language does not simply point to pre-existing things and ideas, but rather helps to construct them and by extension, the world as we know it' (Adams St Pierre, 2000: 483). With reference to 'identity', social constructionism proposes that language is the 'means and medium' (Barker, 1999: 11) through which social beings construct identities.

According to this anti-essentialist view of identity, which is the perspective from which this study has been written, there is no essence of identity to be discovered. Identity is constructed as individuals develop an understanding of themselves and

how they are understood by others through joint-action (Shotter, 1993a). This captures both the agency of speakers and the performative and action oriented nature of language (Kroskity, 2000).

Various sociologists and researchers espousing this conceptualisation of identity have used 'construction' metaphors such as 'identity equipment' (Goffman, 1969); 'reflexive project' (Giddens, 1991) and 'tool kits' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005). These metaphors will now be explained in more detail. Goffman (1969), by using theatre as an analogy, saw identity as a constant trajectory between the 'front stage' and the 'back stage' of the social worlds one inhabits. The 'front stage' is where interactions through public social events and situations occur. In this arena, individuals seek to create impressions on others which will enable them to accomplish their goals.

The 'back stage' is that area where individuals can revert into less formal modes of behaviour and where they keep their 'identity equipment' or *props*, so to speak which are used for public performances in the 'front stage'. Following Goffman, Bauman (1991, 2000) suggested that the whole of society – liquid modern society - is on a stage. He argued that as a result of contemporary developments, which he attributed mainly to the phenomenon of globalisation, identity is an ongoing transformation rather than a performance. Identity is transient and deeply elusive, "momentary' identities, identities 'for today', 'until-further-notice identities" (Bauman, 1992: 167).

In the same vein, Giddens (1991) suggested that identity is a 'reflexive project'. He argued that language and the understanding of the social relationships one comes to live by, become positional devices or 'subject positions' by which one builds his/her project. For example, what it means to be a Maltese individual, a woman, an academic, a daughter, a Catholic and so forth. In this sense, identity is a lifelong, ongoing process which individuals, whether consciously or inadvertently, constantly strive to perfect. This conceptualisation of identity rests upon the understanding that individuals have multiple identities which are used contingently depending on what they are doing, who they are with and the setting in which they find themselves (Hall, 1992, 1996, 1997).

Pahl and Rowsell (2005) suggested that individuals construct identities through tool kits and they noted that the way individuals construct identity is partly through language. As illustrated earlier in the example about the rapper, he uses dress, gestures, artefacts, symbols, media, social practices and others, or a combination of these, as additional resources to language in identity construction. This links closely with Gee's concept of d/Discourse, referred to above, where he suggests that ...,

> ... it is not enough to get just the words "right", though it is crucial. It is necessary, as well, to get one's body, clothes, gestures, actions, interactions, ways with things, symbols, tools, technologies, ..., values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions "right" as well, and all at the 'right' places and times (Gee, 2005: 7).

Implicit in this, is the idea that media and communication technologies do not construct identity but they provide us with more symbolic resources 'to construct

an identity for ourselves within the different speech communities that we enter and we exit' (2005: 98).

In contrast to 'essentialist' explanations of identity from humanist thought, as being a unified, fully centred and stable phenomenon (Barker, 1999), poststructuralists and post modernists view identity (or subjectivity) as being 'constantly achieved through relations with others (both real and imagined) which are made possible through discourse' (Davies, 1993: 10). This draws on the Derridean (1976) sense of 'différance', where meaning is assumed to be present as a 'trace' in the meaning of other words. The notion of 'différance' helps one to view identity not as 'a set of attributes which a unified self possesses' (Barker, 1999: 8) but as part of particular discourses. In this sense, identity is formed and defined in relation to other identities (Hall, 1990).

One notes an important similarity among the various positions reviewed in that each views identity as malleable. The concept of 'malleabilty' is an important one, since it implies that by drawing on a range of linguistic and symbolic resources, individuals are 'active' agents who make use of the constructive force of language in their construction of identities. However, this view of identity put forward so far, reflects a very complex phenomenon. Individuals may indeed be active, but they are active under conditions already existing and options which are not entirely of their own choosing (Buckingham, 1993).

Hall (1997), building on Foucault (1978), argued that since identity is primarily discursive, it is formed and informed by other broader discursive practices.

Discursive practices are:

> a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide
> ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with,
> a particular topic, social activity or institution site in society (Hall, 1997:
> 6).

The notion of identity as discursively and socially constructed is significant for the current study since children and young people are likely to make use of discourses and representations derived from popular media in the constructions of their identities. As an example of distinct discursive practices in the media, Hamely (2001), Ballantine and Olge (2005) and Armet and Rosenberg (2008) analysed the discourse and imagery made available by two popular English and American teen girls' magazines, *Mizz* and *Seventeen*. They reported that 'body discourse' which over emphasized a slender body shape was highly prevalent in the content of these magazines. The authors noted that other featured content on fashion, fitness, nutrition and beauty reinforced the cultural emphasis on body image and the thin ideal. In this way, discourse and imagery varied between content that 'made body problems' and content that 'unmade body problems'.

The former discourse and imagery portrayed the slender body shape as ideal and problematised body shapes which did not conform to this standard. The latter discourse and imagery suggested ways, by which readers, especially those whose body did not conform to that ideal body type, could address their body problems. The authors concluded that in privileging this particular cultural construction of femininity, these magazines emphasised the importance of physical appearance as a defining feature of a woman's worth.

Extending on this, Gauntlett (2008) noted that discourses of 'girl power' also became prevalent in contemporary mainstream media. According to Gauntlett, these discourses and representations portray the intelligent, self-confident, independent, as well as attractive woman as the ideal and in so doing, convey a broader representation of femininity than 'body discourse'.

From a social constructionist perspective, the categories and concepts with which individuals come to understand the world can never be fixed as they are constructed within specific historical and cultural contexts and therefore change across time, space and cultures. Indeed, the social constructionist argument is that once what is taken to be 'real' is found to be constructed, it follows that other reconstructions are possible. In this sense, individuals are viewed as being both constrained by common sense ways of understanding the world, as well as being active social agents who construct the social world (Burr, 2003). Viewing individuals as active social agents implies that they draw upon all the available resources to construct the social world. Given the pervasiveness of the media in contemporary Western societies, it inevitably represents a major resource to be drawn upon. However, by drawing upon media resources, individuals need to consider the unique demands of the contexts in which they find themselves and the particular goals they want to achieve. Understanding the significance of this, has led to a shift from viewing media users as 'passive' to 'active' ones (Lemish, 2007). The concept of active media users is applicable to this study since it is believed that if there were to be no media, individuals cannot engage with them, nor could they appropriate their messages and meanings in the way they habitually do.

2.4   Passive and active roles of media users

Following the spread of television in the 1950s, research on children's relationship with the medium in general employed a behaviouristic model in which children and young people were perceived as powerless 'dupes' upon which television left its direct, often negative effects (Pecora et al., 2007).

Children's relationship with television was viewed in a variety of ways by different authors. For example, according to Singer and Singer (1981), violent television content induced impulsivity and aggression in young children. From a study of available literature, Grossman (1987) noted that the major concern was about television causing adverse health conditions, such as children getting a 'TV bottom', having bad dreams, damaging eyes and so on. Van Evra (2004) noted that large-scale research projects, presumably part of a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972) carried out in the 1980s in the USA provided evidence that heavy television viewing was associated with lower scores in basic literacy skills, among other things. This gave way to a developmentalist approach employed by cognitive researchers, who mostly drew on Piaget's seminal work of 'stage theory' (1969).

In relation to this 'stage theory', viewers became perceived as active processors who construct meaning by using a variety of cognitive strategies related to thought and perception. According to Piaget's theory, as viewers grow, they go through four major developmental stages: *the sensory motor, the pre-operational, the concrete operational* and the *formal operations* stages. In the process, they develop different 'schemas,' resulting from the development stages. This refers to the

cognitive skills which shape the meanings they make from lived and mediated experiences (Wartella, 1979; Singer and Singer, 2002).

For example, children and young people are thought to develop race schema through accumulated real life encounters with people of colour, from different discourses of a class of persons that surround them and from the mediated experiences through television, music, magazines and so on. Similarly, studies in social psychology based on 'social learning theory' (Bandura and Walters, 1963) presumed that children are in a process of 'becoming' fully grown adults (James and Prout, 1997), implying that through external models (including those made available by television) they ultimately 'become' conformed to adult norms.

Studies grounded in social learning theory, when applied to children's media use and preferences were mostly concerned with violence and anti-social behaviour (van Evra, 2004 and Pecora et al., 2007). As noted by Durham and Kellner (2001) research in the fields of media and cultural studies on young people and children's relationship with the medium emerged out of dissatisfaction with the prevalent conceptions that young viewers are 'passive-victims' and 'deficient' in comparison to adults.

Television was presumed to have an unidirectional effect on mass audiences by 'shooting' or injecting them with messages designed to stimulate an intended response (DeFleur and Bale-Rokeach, 1989; Berger, 1995). This was referred to as the 'hypodermic needle' or 'magic bullet' theory. This view did not account for

differences in the audiences' particular personal, social and historical circumstances.

Researchers in the fields of media and cultural studies sought to give a more sociological 'complex account of children's lives' (Jenkins, 1998: 2) in which the relationship with the medium was embedded. In this perspective, media consumers and producers are considered to make sense of television (and more recently other media) not in a social vacuum, but rather that they actively construct meaning generated out of a complicated process of negotiations connected to their diverse socio-cultural experience.

This perspective removed the emphasis on effects and placed it on children's and young people's competence as media consumers and producers and the meanings they draw upon from this practice in the context of everyday life. For example, data from a study on preschoolers in New Zealand (Lealand 1998) revealed that cultural background, social influences, parenting and personality factors contributed towards making the viewing of local and American-produced children's programmes (e.g. *Sesame Street)* a unique experience.

Writing within the Australian context, Roberts and Howard (2005) recognised that the preschoolers in their study used the television text of a popular British television series for children *(Teletubbies)* both for pleasure and for making sense of the world. Examples in the former case included responding to tunes and to principal characters, while examples in the latter case included recognising familiar objects, situations and routines. Hodge and Tripp (1986) and Buckingham (1993)

studied the television viewing responses of older children and pointed out that the participants were active interpreters of 'narrative devices' (p. 46). For example, they were aware that the protagonists were bound to rise and then suffer their eventual downfall. Moreover, they claimed that the children were also aware of modality that is the extent to which TV genres such as adverts and sitcoms, could be regarded as realistic or fictional.

As more recent media forms emerged and became well established in young people's lives, studies carried out mostly in Europe and the United States have covered a wide range of practices including instant messaging, emailing, online shopping, use of web cams, virtual social networking, use of avatars in online gaming and so forth.

Writing within the Maltese context, Sciriha (2004) reported on adolescent use of the mobile phone. She stated that mobile telephony gave adolescents privacy and independence from parents. Sciriha pointed out that the participants kept contact details of friends who were not approved of by their parents and communicated with them via instant messaging. She also noted that young people occasionally lied about their whereabouts when they were contacted by family members on their mobile phones. Holloway and Valentine (2003) studied how British children employed ICT in an everyday context and concluded that the children's offline worlds and online worlds, rather than being two separate worlds are mutually constituted.

Lemmens and Bushman (2006) explored the attraction that young Belgian and Dutch boys had for violent video games. They reported that this attraction was influenced by individual and cultural differences. One such cultural difference was the level of education as findings indicated that the less able students showed a greater preference for games and spent more time playing them than more able students. Lemmens and Bushman suggested that once students reached higher education they needed to invest more in study time and less in play time.

More recently, Calvert et al. (2009) studied preadolescent American girls' and boys' virtual Multi-User Domain (MUD) play. They noted that during 'gender bending', that is when the participants created an avatar of a different sex than their own, they still acted much the same way as when they self-represented themselves as an avatar of the same sex. However, the authors suggested that virtual play space extends interaction as it occurs and is understood within the physical realm by making multiple self-representations possible.

Media and cultural studies have an explicit connection with the domain of education. The hallmark of much of this research has been to get children's and young people's out-of-school experiences and practices of current media forms and popular culture recognised within formal pedagogical practices in schools. For example, Richards (1998) and Bennett (2000) discussed how popular music was appropriated as a cultural resource by young people in social spaces, including classrooms and schools.

Sefton-Green (1998), Livingstone (2002) and Buckingham and Willett (2006) acknowledged children's and young people's use of the new communications media as a means for imaginative and empowering learning experiences. Alvermann (2002), Marsh (2005), Marsh and Millard (2000), Lankshear and Knobel, (2003) have all argued for a revaluing of children's and young people's innovative literacy practices provided by technology and popular culture.

Likewise, Selwyn (2003) considered the relatively restricted nature of children's use of information and communication technologies in primary school settings and suggested that the latter could be transformed into sites which allow for creativity and self-determination. Dowdall (2009) focused more on the social network site *Bebo* as a platform to consider ways in which children produce creative text. Gee's (2003) work on video games and Burnett and Wilkinson's (2005) study on children's uses of the internet in out-of-school context suggested that media practices provide children with intricate and innovative learning and literacy experiences.

The various strands of the literature reviewed above, seem to suggest that the researchers share the belief that media and communication technologies play an important role in supporting the process of self-definition of children and young people. While these researchers are not denying that children and young people as media users are completely free, one finds an important similarity among them; in that they all seek to emphasise the element of creativity in media practices. Media and communication technologies are thus implicated in the provision of enhanced opportunities for participation in the process of self-definition. In this respect, this

study relates to this view in that it assumes that how children choose to engage with the media contributes to their construction of identity. In turn, media practices such as viewing; chatting; browsing; instant messaging; shopping online; creating avatars and so forth are also shaped and reshaped by identity.

When children engage in media practices in their everyday life, they do so from within local contexts that in turn form part of global contexts. This local-global relationship has important implications for the understanding of children's uses of media and communication technologies. Another body of literature relevant to this study concerns the complex interplay between the media, contexts and practices in an increasingly global setting.

2.5   The interplay between local and global media

When children and young people in most industrialised countries, engage with the media in their everyday life, they will access both locally and globally produced media material. It follows that one way in which young people may come in contact with a variety of languages is through media and information/communication technology use. Indeed, choices of language determine young people's dealings with the media living in different linguistic cultures around the world. For example, drawing upon contemporary migration movements, Lemish (2007) noted that in the case of immigrant children from the former Soviet Union to Germany and Israel, the host media seemed to help them to integrate into the new society. Similarly, viewing and using the media in the immigrants' language (via satellite and/or media and communication technologies) seemed to enable them to preserve their cultural heritage and ethnic solidarity.

Since this study seeks to explore Maltese children's construction of identities through discourses made available through the media, it recognises the profound role language plays. In many parts of the world, people use two or more languages. As described in Chapter 1, Maltese children live in a bilingual country where English and Maltese are both official languages. However, whilst the former is an international language, the latter is only spoken by about half a million people, including those native speakers who now form the Maltese diasporas (Sciriha and Vassallo, 2006).

As a result of many years of British occupation, Maltese people are more likely to use English (although other international languages should not be excluded) to gain wider communication in many important domains in contemporary life. One such important domain is the media and communication technologies. In the current era, Maltese children form part of a global audience through their engagement with global television and global networks available at home, at school and in places of leisure. The researcher considers that this is a critical role that language plays in the configuration of relations between the local and the global. This will now be elaborated upon further.

According to Jan (2009), when people look for television programmes, music and internet sites which are not locally produced, they select those which are culturally proximate, having at least one or more cultural specific elements similar to their own. These might be language/s, values, norms, settings and socio-cultural affinities such as historical connections. Jan noted that the thriving trade and popularity in television programmes and films between countries, such as the

United States, New Zealand, Australia and Great Britain is due to the fact that they are English speaking countries. The same trend was evidenced between Spanish speaking countries in Latin America where the Brazilian UOL (Universo Online), TV Globo, as well as Televisa operate in Mexico and which have developed into large economic enterprises over recent decades (Salwen, 1991).

As Appadurai (1996) noted, 'the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex trans-national construction of imaginary landscape' (p.31). However, the multinational media conglomerates which command the global mass media seem to be providing a context which implicitly reinforces the status of prestigious languages, most notably English.

Similarly, in the case of online content and service, Cunliffe and Herring (2005) noted that there is a divide between 'information rich languages' and 'information poor languages'. 'Information rich languages,' such as English are rendered visible through extensive and varied online material while 'information poor languages,' such as Maltese and Welsh are not. Even when online material and services are available in minority languages, the software to create and access them is often in English. Holmes (2004) studied the internet practices of students from eight different countries. She concluded that those bilingual students whose repertoire included English and a minority or national language which is not promoted on websites seemed to shift markedly towards using English on the internet. This argument also holds for Maltese children who have to draw on their repertoire of languages to adapt to the available media. As previously explained, the two official languages in Malta are Maltese and English. However, there is also the prevalence

of the third language - Italian - as a result of the geographical proximity and the historical/cultural ties the Island had and still has with the country. In the case of Maltese children, when they engage with the media which is not locally produced, they are most likely to engage with media which is in English and/or Italian.

Various small scale local studies with different orientations evidence this. For example, a European Union Malta Language Survey involving 500 Maltese carried out by Sciriha and Vassallo (2006) found that 16% of males and 13% of females watched non-news programmes in English. Another small study involving 195 youths carried out by Grixti (2006) showed that Maltese working class interviewees tended to opt for local programmes primarily since they were in the native language. Those interviewees who used English as their first language at home and who tended to come from a middle class background opted for foreign productions, mainly American, British and Western European. The author also found that this group of youths avoided local productions, since they regarded them to be inferior in quality. Studies in the field of second language acquisition through television (Camilleri and Caruana, 1991 and Caruana, 2007) revealed that television has a great influence in language learning. The results of these studies indicated that programmes in Italian were also popular with Maltese students.

Referring once again to Jan (2009) who also mentioned that viewers related more to programmes having certain linguistic elements such as the use of jokes, the use of slang and/or the use of references to personalities or topical events which they were familiar with. The author noted that in Latin America, viewers related more to

television programmes and films imported from other Latin American countries than from those imported from Hollywood.

Similarly Khan (2011) reported that the adapted U.K. teen drama *Skins* was not well received by American viewers since they did not connect with the Bristolian lifestyle and issues depicted in the series. Since it was aired on MTV, the channel's ratings dropped whilst those of other series on other channels rose because the American viewers found the latter more culturally proximate. As a result, the *Skins* series had to be terminated (Khan, 2011). Inevitably, the media is culturally situated and young people's dealings with it are always framed by the dynamics of the particular local culture and the socio-linguistic context in which they are located.

For the purpose of this research and in light of the studies mentioned above, the researcher might tentatively say that Maltese children are more likely to watch programmes, search online content and listen to music in Maltese and English and to a lesser degree, in Italian. Whilst English is an international language which is extensively used in the global media, by contrast, Italian is a regional language and its use by the global media is therefore not as extensive.

That could be explained by the fact that Maltese children are generally brought up in an environment of Maltese-English bi-lingualism (Camilleri, 1995). It is important to note that the level of language competence varies significantly, while in certain cases the Maltese language is given priority, in others it is the English language. In other cases still, children have a high level of competency in both

languages. This suggests that Maltese children have 'green light access,' so to speak, to the predominant American and British global media. Thus, they are more likely to be 'global media natives,' to borrow Premsky's (2001) metaphors of *digital natives* and *digital immigrants*. According to Premsky, digital natives are those people who were born into and grew up with digital technology, whilst digital immigrants are those people who were born and grew up before digital technology became part of everyday life and therefore had to adapt to it at a later stage.

In many countries such as Israel, exposure to American, British or Western European productions is a phenomenon which has emerged in the last twenty years (Lemish 1999). This phenomenon came about with the spread of technology, deregulation in broadcasting and the rise of a small network of multinational media conglomerates. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, this is not the case for Malta. From the time of early broadcasting in Malta, transmissions in the majority, consisted of imported English and American films, serials, comedies and documentaries (Grixti, 2006), which were kept in the original language since there is no dubbing tradition in Malta. Although in recent years, 85% of local productions on TV stations are in Maltese (Borg, 2007), Maltese as an indigenous language does not penetrate beyond the local media domain.

The introduction and availability of digital media, cable television and satellite in Malta have contributed to a significant increase in global media which is heavily influenced by American media industries. British and American media offerings are likely to remain highly represented and to dominate the Maltese media domain for years to come. This reinforces the reference made earlier that Maltese children

are regarded as being 'global media natives'. However, sharing global media is not a phenomenon that is unique to Malta. Young people in various parts of the world share the same programmes, music, branded merchandise, fan sites, information and games made available by contemporary media and communication technologies (Lemish, 2007). This practice has become part of the worldwide socio-economic processes known as globalisation, which continues to accelerate and bring greater levels of global interdependence.

One leading argument on globalisation is the 'monoculturalist' stand which treats it as 'the extension outward of a particular culture to the limits, the globe' (Featherstone, 1995: 6). Albrow (1990) stated that advocates of the 'monocultralist' view championed the notion 'that the whole world is the physical environment' (p. 5). However, implicit in this point of view is the idea that globalisation brings about a form of 'cultural imperialism' (Salwen, 1991: 31). This is seen to invade local cultures and historical traditions through the processes characterised as 'Disneyfication' or 'Macdonalisation' (Herman and McChesney, 1997; Ritzer, 2007).

As noted by Lemish (2007), from this perspective, the media is blamed for being the central mobiliser of Western economic and political interests and hence, cultural homogenisation. All too frequently the United States, although just one part of a network of conglomerates, are perceived as leading corporate media hegemony not through physical occupation but rather through the connectivity made possible by satellite television and computer networks (Artz and Kamalipour, 2003). However, over the past thirty years or so, several scholars from the field of sociology and

cultural studies (Said, 1978, 1993, Featherstone, 1995; and Siochru` and Girard, 2002) opposed the 'monoculturalist' stand for not taking account of social phenomena. They advocated for a 'multiculturalist' stand which treats globalisation as a 'compression of cultures' (Featherstone, 1995). According to Siochru` and Girard:

> the local and the distant, the periphery and the centre do not exist in isolation of one another, as the reality of one is inextricably intertwined with, for example the poverty of the other, the environment, and indeed the media of the other (2002: xii).

Implicit in the 'multiculturalist' stand is the idea that globalisation does not lead to homogeneity but rather it increases heterogeneity (Buckingham, 2007). From this perspective, 'media globalisation' is not unidirectional but rather multidirectional (Kramer et al., 2006). Moreover, this perspective recognised that media users/audiences are 'active', and acknowledged the different ways of how they appropriated 'global media' within their local contexts and within their relationships of everyday life.

Hall (1980) stated that whereas media producers strive to encode a single meaning - a 'preferred reading'- media users are likely to decode it differently by choosing to accept, negotiate or reject the intended meaning. Audiences often demonstrate political and cultural resistance. For example, although CNN International, an American 24-hour English-language news and current affairs channel, is available in over 150 countries, its audiences account for a small percentage of a nation's population (Wang et al, 2000).

Furthermore, variations of the 'compression of cultures' thesis associate the idea of the global spread of media with the process of 'glocalisation' (Robertson, 1995), a composite word of 'globalisation' and 'localisation'. As noted by Said (1993) and el-Ojeili and Hayden (2006) 'hybridity' is not a phenomenon ascribed only to contemporary times. Said contended that identities, culture, histories and literature are all hybrid:

> ... partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic (Said 1993: xxix).

There are various complex combinations of the global and the local. For example, Bennett (2000) looked at hip-hop as an emergent global media form that draws on local idioms and usages.

It is common to find that in most industrialised countries, the programmes to which children have access on television are likely to consist of a mix of local and foreign productions. Studies (Lemish, et al. 1998; Livingstone and Bovill, 2001; Hemelryk, 2005) showed that children used a variety of criteria to distinguish between local and foreign programmes. For example, Hemelryk (2005) reported that Chinese children noted differences in programme orientations. They pointed out that the foreign programmes had a high level of entertainment content whilst the local programmes had a high level of educational content. Lemish et al. (1998) reported that the children in their study, noted markers to distinguish between local and foreign productions, such as physical features of the characters, cultural characteristics, such as landscapes and type of architecture and technical styles, such as type of editing.

In an effort to minimise these differences so that foreign programmes can span major markets and reach more audiences, the multinational media conglomerates induce the process of 'glocalisation', that is, they combine the global with the local. Buckingham (2007) identified two levels where this process occurred with regard to the Japanese cartoon production *Pokémon*. These two levels are at the production and the distribution levels. At the production level, the process of 'deodorising' - removing the 'odour of Japan' (Buckingham, 2007: 50), is carried out by Japanese producers by removing or toning down all references to cultural specific characteristics - language, religion, facial features, settings and so on, in the series.

Whilst on the distribution level the process of 'localising' is carried out by American editors by editing out material from the series – such as brutal fighting scenes – which are not compatible with US culture. As Buckingham explained, another form of glocalisation is typified in the *Sesame Street* and *Teletubbies* series in which local producers and broadcasters are allowed to insert local content featuring children and issues pertaining to the country in which it is screened.

Similarly, Gillespie (1995) studied young Indians in London and found that the locally-produced (Indian) programmes they watched paradoxically intertwined with the British and transnational ones to the extent that aspects from the traditional Indian way of life were retained whilst others were challenged and transformed in order to meet the demands for integration into British culture. However, the relationship between the global and the local can never be a one way process. One

presumes that both the media producers and the audiences combine the global with the local, albeit in very different ways.

In Malta, children and young people are also provided with a context which allows for a unique combination of the local with the global. Grixti (2006) considered the viewing of foreign and home-grown media products by a group of Maltese youths aged between 14 and 25 years. He noted that the way these youths received and used global media products within the Maltese context 'retained idiosyncratic characteristics which marked them out as distinctively Maltese' (p. 105). For example, Maltese participants felt nostalgic about the past because they believed it was more secure; however, technological advancement and global entertainment have helped them overcome the insularity of the Island where they live. At the same time, the Maltese participants felt partially dissatisfied with contemporary life because it is ever changing and very demanding as a result of such global spread of the media. This reflects Giddens' concept, which describes 'time-space compression' (Giddens, 1990), a terminology to describe the immediacy of everyday life. The fast pace in which transmission of information has taken place has, in itself, changed youngsters' approach to fashion, entertainment and life style among others.

Various scholars (Giddens 1990; Morley 2000 and Couldry and McCarthy, 2004) have argued that an inescapable fact of contemporary life is that an individual's local everyday communal experiences face intrusions from distant global community life. In the same vein, Mittleman (1997) argued that the global spread of media inevitably 'touches down in particular places and in local lives' (1996:

229). He stressed that the media and communication technologies allow us to keep up with the U.S. President, as much as with the Joneses next door. However, in a more optimistic rendering, Mittleman further pointed out that although globalisation in general and media connectivity in particular, serve to compress time and space, they do not eliminate them.

As globalisation takes a stronger hold and daily life becomes reconstituted in terms of 'a stage of global differences' (Featherstone, 1995: 6), individuals as social actors have wider possibilities towards self-definition or 'subject positions' – which is akin to putting on 'images or masks' (Sennett, 2000: 175).

According to Mrkich (2006), the current array of potential 'subject positions' available to individuals is more extensive than when globalisation did not exist and the media were less ubiquitous. As noted by Tomlinson (1994) 'the extension of individual life worlds offered by television screen [mediated] is categorically different from the extension provided by direct social interaction [immediate]' (Tomlinson 1994: 6). Indeed, this constant tension between immediate and mediated experience make demands on people to negotiate their 'subject positions'. Such negotiations derive from what commentators such as Said, (1993), and Bhabha (1994) called 'liminal', 'third space', 'in-betweeness'. This is a space which lies where they meet and co-exist. This, by definition, can have both an enriching effect but also a challenging one.

According to Thornton, '[the] 'third space' is a hybrid space that brings together the sometimes competing and contradictory knowledges and discourses encountered in

the physical and social environments between which people move' (2006: 507). Thornton's notion of 'third space' is significant for the current study since it provides us with an understanding of identity constructions which are linked to spaces. For example, the researcher has observed during teaching practice that children merge experiences and practices derived from the different social spaces they inhabit, be it their home, school, community and venues for leisure activities. This process of hybridisation is therefore key in the children's learning experience and enriches the quality of their social interactions. This also extends to their friends and family.

The key point here is that discourse, identities and social practices form a 'mutually constituting set' (Barker, 1999: 30). Identity is best understood as symbiotic and unpredictable, emerging from the interplay between the local and the global. That is:

> ...the process through which the consumption of global cultural products by local audiences that are embedded in specific cultural contexts creates the meanings that serve their needs (Lemish, 2007: 214).

Media and communication technologies are thus implicated, not only in providing users with enhanced opportunities for participation in the process of self-definition but also with a vast array of potential relationships and spaces to shift across 'subject positions' more than ever before. The researcher considers the interplay between contemporary space arrangements, social relationships and literate practices associated with the media as being relevant to this study. The next section will consider the social construction of space as presented by various authors and the subsequent section will extend this to encompass literate practices.

2.6   The social construction of space

In the past thirty years, there has been a shift in the way researchers have conceptualised space, moving from the physical construct of space to the social construct of space to take into account the spatial organisation and the social relations that occur within it (Scott, 2006). Researchers working in this area, such as Giddens (1984), Derek and Urry (1985), Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994), Skelton and Valentine (1997) conceptualised space as fluid – a socially produced phenomenon which comes into existence and is maintained through the socio-temporal-spatial.

Given that social space is constructed through social relations it therefore implies 'the ever shifting geometry of social/power relations' (Massey, 1994: 4). This perspective acknowledges the blurring of the boundaries between the private and the public and in so doing, moves away from the rigid private/public dichotomy as conceptualised by earlier researchers (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Corrigan 1976 and Duncan, 1996) in which the private was associated with the familial and the public with the civic realm.

The 'home' space is of particular relevance to this study since children's use of the media tends to take place mainly at home. Moreover, in contemporary Western societies, it is common to find that the space utilised for the convergence of the media in the home is the 'bedroom space'. Given the lifestyle and urbanised environments typical of contemporary post industrial societies, most children and young people, unlike their parents, spend their childhood off the streets and more within the confines of the private space where 'they are most likely to spend time

playing at home and possibly exploiting the entertainment potential of new technology' (Browne, 1999: 4). For example, early research by Robinson and Godbey (1999) on how Americans spend their time, revealed a dramatic increase in TV viewing when data between 1965 and 1975 was compared to the 1990's. They linked the rise in TV viewing to the arrival of colour television. More recently, a study with 2,000 young people aged eight to 18 by Rideout, Foehr and Roberts (2010) for the Kaiser Family Foundation, found that young people spend an average of seven and a half hours on media use daily.

Massa (2011) interviewed Hillman, who had undertaken a preliminary nationwide research with 744 Maltese children aged between 12 and 16. The findings in Hillman's study showed that they spend between two and 13 hours engaging with some form of media during a typical day. There are three types of users: *heavy media users* spend three hours or more, *moderate media users* spend thirty minutes to one hour and *light media users* spend about thirty minutes a day.

This study has a particular interest in the relationship between space and social relations and how alternative discourse becomes culturally available and/or some discourses become more dominant than others (Hare-Mustin, 1994). For example, Casciato, (2010) reported that British parents of the present generation are nostalgic about their own outdoor childhoods and perceive the public space outside as risky and one which poses a threat to their children's safety. Similarly, other researchers have documented that prevalent discourses around private/public spaces affect how the forms of leisure activities made available to children and young people are regarded within specific cultural contexts and specific times (Beck, 1992; Jackson

and Scott, 1999; Pain, 2003). As Clements (2004) suggested, while the change in patterns and location of play keep children/young people increasingly within the private space of the home, television, personal computers and the internet, increasingly draw them beyond the 'here' and 'now' and into the public space - 'the sitting room is a place where, in a variety of mediated forms, the global meets the local' (Morley, 2000: 2).

It is pertinent to note that further to the redefinition of the private-local and the public-global space, the media as household fixtures have also made an impact on the private space of the home by bringing about a transformation of its spatial arrangements (Livingstone, 2007). In contemporary times, 'media saturated' homes (Kaiser Family Foundation Study, 2005) in developed parts of the world, which can afford various kinds and multiple media hardware are on the increase.

Such types of homes are stocked with an array of media and communication technologies such as:

> personal computers, internet, telephone, VCR, teletext, cable or satellite television, a TV-linked games machine, hi-fi system, camcorder, mobile phone, Game Boy, walkman and so forth (Livingstone, 2002: 41).

As a result, the living room 'front' space, to borrow Goffman's (1969) front/back stage metaphor, has not remained the exclusive space in which media hardware (particularly the television set) is located and where 'living room wars' over viewing and media use between family members occur (Ang, 1996; Morley, 1986, 2003).

This aspect of space transformation within the home, is deemed relevant to the current study about Maltese children, since in 'media saturated' homes, children's bedroom 'back' space in the home is increasingly emerging as 'the space' where personalised media ownership and use is located, in addition to the living room space. The reseacher is of the opinion that this trend is also relevant for homes in Malta, especially those which are financially able to invest in an array of up-to-date technology. This is further supported by the data collected for the Household Budgetary Survey of 2008 and presented by NSO Malta in 2010.

The above mentioned studies by Livingstone (2007) and the Kaiser Foundation (2005) found that children's bedrooms are increasingly becoming the space where old media, such as television, print and music are present and/or converge with new media, such as computers, the internet and video games. A survey with 3,500 Maltese students between seven to 16 years found that 68% had their computer placed in their bedroom or study room (NSO, 2005). A small-scale qualitative study with 40 Maltese students aged between nine and 12 by Dingli and Casingena Harper (2007) found that 27% had their own television set in their bedroom. Writing within the U.K. context, Livingstone (2007) noted that working class families and parents of boys are more likely to place the television set and/or the computer in the child's bedroom, or to have the second computer and/or TV in the child's bedroom.

In media rich bedroom/home space, media multitasking is a growing phenomenon. Rideout, Foehr and Roberts (2010) for the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that on average, the seven and a half hours a day children and young people spend using

the media extend to 10 hours and 45 minutes a day when taking into account that they often engage with one form of media in conjunction with another as they view, listen, message, read, chat, shop online, play and so forth.

Children and young people's media practices and mastery of technology are more than just a set of mechanical and cognitive skills and competencies when viewed from the active media user perspective (Anstey and Bull, 2006). This perspective does not deny that understanding ICT and mastering its basic skills and concepts are essential for both economic and social engagement in today's globalised and technologised society (Nejdl and Tochtermann, 2006). Indeed, many countries now regard being able to access and use media and communication technologies as the third basic skill along with reading/writing and numeracy (The Department for Education and Skills, UK, 2005, Department for Education, UK, 2011).

In Malta, attempts are constantly being made by the authorities to ensure that the educational systems are kept up to date with all the relevant advances in technology. At the time this study was published, preparations were underway to address this issue once again through the new draft of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). This new draft has two overall objecties. First of all, the document evaluates what has been achieved over the past decade since the national curriculum (NMC); *Creating the Future Together* (1999) was published. Secondly, it reviews the NMC's aims and objectives in the light of policy-related documents issued by the European Commission, as well as the broader social, technological and economic influences on education and society at large. The vision of the new draft NCF is to ensure that children and young people acquire the relevant key

skills and competences required for employability in an everchanging world, where standards and the level of competition are high and pose a great challenge. This should subsequently lead to a better quality of life and it is hoped, a disposition for life long learning.

The researcher believes that children and young people's media engagements occur in social contexts which indeed, would be meaningless if they were separated from the purposes and interactions through which they are achieved. Here is where a sociocultural view of literacy comes into play. Relevant literature on the subject of literacy within the context of it being a social practice will be considered next.

2.7   Literacy as a social practice

Over the past three decades, there has been a shift in the way researchers have conceptualised literacy, moving from viewing literacy as a set of skills to an understanding of literacy as a social practice. According to Nunan (1991), the traditional view perceived the reader/writer as passive and literacy as a set of mechanical skills to decode text having alphabetic script.

To counteract over-reliance on form, the cognitive view was introduced which perceived the reader as an active processor of meaning by using specific cognitive abilities (Smith, 1978). This view assumed literacy to be as a separate 'thing' or a set of skills which 'fit' all contexts and purposes, termed the 'autonomous model of literacy' by Street (1984), however, this view failed to take into account social phenomena. As a result of this, a field of literacy studies with a strong cultural emphasis emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Scholars within the literacy studies

field, such as Barton, (1994, 2001), Street (1995, 1999) Gee (1996; 2000), replaced the emphasis on cognition and the individual, with one on the social, interpersonal realm. The most distinctive characteristic of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (as the field later came to be known) is that it considered what people 'do' with literacy and since people are social beings, 'doing' literacy is inseparable from social practices.

Scholars who follow this sociocultural orientation, view literacy as a set of practices which are identifiable in regular forms of practice and associated with particular aspects of cultural life (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). From this perspective, social practices around literacy vary *across* and *within* cultures and activities. Barton (2001) offered a comprehensive compilation of the multi-focal approach adopted by NLS research covering studies within and beyond education. For example, studies within education addressed issues related directly to curricula and alternative pedagogical practices. Studies beyond education focused on issues related to historical periods, institutions, multilingual contexts, situated action and more recently, technology.

Over the past fifteen years, researchers have placed increased focus on the role technology plays in human communication. According to Kress (2003, 2010), screen based media (television, video and the varieties of new media) are increasingly becoming the central vehicle of communication in contemporary societies. This change has important implications for our understanding of language use within this electronic medium. To this effect, a group of scholars working within the NLS framework took a second standpoint and considered how

the nature of literacy is changing due to digitisation and increasing cultural/linguistic diversity (Unsworth, 2002, Healey, 2007). They replaced the conventional view of literacy as a set of skills which relies heavily on the linguistic semiotic system (oral and written language) with one which accessed and built on all the five semiotic systems - *linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural* and *spatial* (Anstey and Bull, 2006) to account for new forms of text students commonly encounter in every day life. New forms of text or 'multimodal text' may have all or a combination of the following features: moving and still images, sound, music, words, colour and animation (Selfe, 2007) as commonly found in websites and videos. According to Luke (1998):

> print literacy is not obsolete, but [is] certainly and substantially transformed ... to include [a] study of the intertextuality of imageries, text, icons and artefacts of new economies, of media and of popular culture (p. 27).

From this perspective, students are considered as active multiliterate persons who understand the verbal, visual, auditory, spatial and gestural semiotic systems and likewise produce representations/knowledge in an equally multimodal format to suit the purposes and contexts in which they find themselves (Anstey and Bull, 2006: 26).

The current study's main interest is not about literacy *per se* but about how a group of Maltese children constructed identities through their active engagement with the media. In this respect, this study relates to the broad conceptualisation of literacy, as espoused by the NLS in that, by delving into the social realm, all the potential

contexts and related resources upon which children and young people may draw in everyday life are acknowledged.

Understanding the significance of fusion between local everyday and globalised literacy practices the children bring through the media, termed g/localised literacy practices (Luke and Carrington, 2002, Woodward, 2008), requires one to theorise and account for the complex inteplay between media, context and literacy.

If children and young people's viewing, listening, reading, messaging, chatting, shopping online, playing and so forth are understood as 'global and social practices' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005: 10) this helps us understand why identity plays a key role in the types of texts and practices they choose to engage in and understand.

Media and communication technologies do not construct identities in a deterministic manner but provide ways of talking and writing about, as well as acting with and toward people and things (Gee, 2012). Here is where the possibilities and limitations of options for constructing identity under such conditions come into play.

2.8   Conclusion

This chapter has drawn upon relevant elements of literature and has highlighted a number of concepts as being crucial to this study on how Maltese children construct identities through their active engagement with the media and how it is shaped by their identities. These concepts are: an anti-essentialist view of identity, active and

passive media users, the interplay between local and global media, the social construction of space and literacy as a social practice.

Throughout this Chapter, these key concepts have been framed within a social constructionist perspective to establish a theoretical lens relevant to the present study. Since it has adopted a social constructionist orientation, it is argued that individuals do not have a singular identity but a repertoire of different identities that are 'constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (Hall, 1996: 4). In this sense, identity is not a fixed given but rather a constitutive description of the self in language (Shotter, 1993a). However, although individuals construct their identities according to the literature referred to above, this takes place under the socio-historical conditions that are available to them (Giddens, 1991).

Different societies change over time. Technology advances and globalisation play a significant role in shaping the contemporary socio-historical conditions individuals live in. Given these conditions, it is hardly surprising that discourse about the media is regarded as a crucial element of everyday life, as it captures a common way of understanding ourselves and the world. This illustrates that the challenging aspect of having extensive access to the media, while providing users with more social spaces within which to interact and subsequently construct identities, is also rendering this process more complex.

If engaging with the media is understood as a social activity, this helps us to see it as connected to other broader practices in everyday life. For the scope of this

study, what is relevant with this concept is literacy as a social practice. Since people actively use various forms of media in their interactions with each other, inevitably the media becomes intimately connected to literacy practices. Contemporary perspectives of literacy suggest that literacy is 'essentially social and is located in the interaction between people' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 3). This means that our understanding of the term 'literacy' has expanded to take account of sociocultural influences. This conceptualisation holds that being literate today requires having a broader knowledge of text, multi and mono-modal (print-based) text and their associated literacy practices, than has been necessary in the past. With regard to literacy and, with relevance to this particular study, it was noted that a proficiency in technology has become a basic prerequisite to match the demands of today's society and is given priority in curricula across the globe.

Official departments of education across the world, to include Malta through the Education Act 1988, the NMC (1999) and the NCF (2011), are constantly changing and adapting current practices within the educational system to reflect the advances in technology and with more relevance to this study, the media.

Through the literature review, the researcher has observed that the media provides children with broader and more complex opportunities for relationship choices and spaces in which to interact. Recent conceptualisations of space suggest that social spaces, such as local and global spaces, often lie in between where they meet and co-exist in a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) rather than in opposition of each other. In this view, the media is perceived as establishing and challenging 'glocalisation' a

combination of the global and the local (Woodward, 2008). The revolutionary space and time spanning capabilities of the media assume significant importance.

Through the literature review the researcher has observed that children as media users are not a homogenous group. Besides, the level of usage of each individual, she believes that they draw upon different resources, referred to as a 'tool kit' by Pahl and Rowsell (2005). For example, two children from a similar background, exposed to a similar media experience are likely to derive different meanings from this experience and the resultant construction of identities is likely to also be varied. Thus, contemporary changes in the formation of social relationships within an increasingly global media dominated context are regarded as having a strong bearing on how children construct their identities. It is this complex making and remaking of identity through interactions within intersecting social spaces that this study explores.

In the next chapter, the researcher explains how these key concepts, utilised within a social constructionist orientation, led towards a suitable research design for the study.

CHAPTER THREE   METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher traces the various stages of fieldwork undertaken during the data collection process and she explains the research design used to capture such data. She first explains how her view of identity as *constructed*, *maintained* and *negotiated* primarily through language guided her to conduct a qualitative case study. This is followed by the rationale behind the research design of this study which employed observations and interviews. The methodology which was used for collecting the data is subsequently explained. The details about the practical implementation of the data collection plan are presented at the end of this chapter.

This study arose from an interest about how Maltese children's media use contributes towards the construction of their identities and how their media practices are shaped by their identities. The researcher's work as a pedagogue has made her aware that not only do children talk regularly about their media practices; they also put language and literacy at the heart of such practices. For example, children retell episodes from popular TV series, discuss football results, compare levels in computer games, read about celebrities, analyse advertisements, learn and remake lyrics and so forth. However, how children talk about the media will depend on the way in which they would like to be understood by others. In other words, it depends on whom they are with, on how well they know their listeners and on the social setting in which they find themselves.

If how individuals use the media and how they talk about it is understood as a social process, we can then acknowledge the variety of 'subject positions' it invokes. Not only is talk instrumental for developing and maintaining social relationships, it also provides us with material 'to construct our own sense of social identity' (Buckingham, 1993:39).

Just as the researcher, as a pedagogue, identifies with a socio-cultural perspective of language and literacy (as presented in Chapter 1), likewise, she turned to qualitative methods to consider the story behind the children's experiences and to explore 'how' and 'why', Maltese children construct identities and how their media engagement is shaped by their identities.

3.2   Justification for selecting the methodological approach

Mertens (1998) suggests that there are three broad categories of research, namely: *positivism/postpositivism, interpretive/constructivist* and *emancipatory*. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), the assumptions of each category of research have direct implications for the methodological concerns of research, since contrasting ontologies and epistemologies will, in turn, demand different research methods. According to Wildemuth (1993), the difference between the aforementioned approaches is that the first recognises an objective reality which is not dependent on the researcher, while the last two view reality as subjective and socially constructed. She further stated that the positivist approach 'is oriented toward counting the occurrences and measuring the extent of the behaviours being studied'. By contrast 'the interpretive approach ... is oriented toward detailed description of the actor's cognitive and symbolic actions' (1993: 451).

As Burton (2000) suggests, it is important that research methods are justified by the researcher's values, beliefs and attitudes. The researcher chose to carry out an 'interpretive/constructivist' type of study since just as she assumed that individuals represented how they came to view the world through the language that they shared, she was likewise aware that any 'reality' she observed as a researcher was a context-dependent personal interpretation of events (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Certainly, the researcher could not locate herself within the positivist approach which is based on the premise that there is 'one' external reality driven by immutable laws and mechanisms (Macionis and Gerber, 2005).

As mentioned in Section 2.2, this study is set within a social constructionist perspective which contrasts sharply with this premise (Burr, 2003). In this case, following a social constructionist ontological view of reality implies that the world comes into existence once people begin to *talk*, that is, they represent how they come to view the world through the language that they share (Edwards, 1997). The interpretive/constructivist approach views knowledge and social phenomena as constructed by the individual. Following Geertz (1983), it is believed that the world of social facts is not 'out there' to be discovered but rather, knowledge and truth are created. In this view, knowledge is personal, subjective and unique, not hard, objective and tangible (Schwandt, 1994). As noted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) those favouring the interpretive/constructivist epistemology oppose the idea upheld within the traditional research paradigm that the researcher of science can identify objective facts or make 'truth' claims. They argued that the 'objectivity-talk' of scientists is mediated by a particular conceptual framework and discourses – hence, it is also a construction. Furthermore, they contended that to view the

world from no position at all, as the positivist epistemology would hold, is impossible as it fails to take into account that *all* individuals are unavoidably located within 'nodal points of specific communication circuits' (Lyotard, 1979: 15), and therefore it cannot exist as a depersonalised phenomenon.

Reflecting upon existing beliefs and the aim of this study, a positivist approach was rejected as it was felt that the researcher's position was more aligned to that of Elbaz (1988). Elbaz argued that the positivist approach did not allow for the complexity of sociality since it viewed reality as a homogenous consistent and non-changing phenomenon which could be verified. Since the researcher's interest lay in exploring how 'identity' is constructed, this study is therefore aligned with the interpretive/constructivist view since it is believed that identity is not an essential quality to be found in individuals but rather, it is a process which is actively constructed as it is expressed and vice versa by individuals. However, since the aim of this study is located on the micro level, this implied that an emancipatory position was not assumed.

According to Mertens (1998), the 'emancipatory approach' builds on and extends the interpretive/constructivist approach by linking to the power structure within the social context. Mertens explained that this view is committed to the idea that the fundamental categories of 'truth' and 'knowledge' are not only complex and ambiguous, but are ultimately saturated with politics. Implicit in this ontological position is the idea that 'contextual and historical factors are described especially as they relate to oppression' (p. 8).

It was not the intention of the researcher to assume the role of a change agent who provides opportunities for oppressed voices to be heard, as propagated in an emancipatory approach (Mertens, 1998). The intention was to determine how the Maltese children drew positions from discourses made available through the media and to explore the discursive devices used to have their accounts endorsed by others in the interaction.

Objectivity and subjectivity are major concerns for a researcher (Mertens, 1998). In a positivist approach, the researcher assumes the role of a detached observer and observes facts or information in a dispassionate, objective manner. This certainly could not be applied to this study about individuals. By taking a social constructionist approach, the researcher acknowledged that human beings assume a creative and active role as they take control of the environment and the relationships they forge with others (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Since human beings are both the subject and the object of study, the presence of the subjective self is problematic (Eisner and Peshkin, 1990 and Guba, 1990).

The importance of subjectivity within the research process made the researcher highly aware that the research had to be embodied in 'the intimate relationship between herself and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 8).

The researcher agrees with Krieger (1991), who objected to the idea that subjectivity contaminates the research and needs to be minimised, seeing subjectivity instead as 'reflections of our inner lives' which would, in turn, help

researchers develop their different perspectives more fully by analysing their subjects as interesting, inevitable components of their inquiry process. Lincoln and Guba (2000: 183) refer to this strategy as 'reflexivity' – 'the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument''.

Thus, the epistemological stand that the researcher has taken is that as the researcher, she could not be separated from the research process and the actual data gathered. To this effect, the research which was constructed was a specific one, relating to a particular group of children, in a particular context, at a particular time and given a particular 'interpretation'.

The quantitative approach was rejected, since it did not seem to be sufficiently sensitive and flexible to discover the participants' interpretations of the world around them, nor share their frame of reference. The positivist approach tends to prompt quantitative research, such as questionnaires, surveys, experiments among others (Blaxter et al., 2006).

The present study did not adopt these methods since they do not allow the participants to have an independent voice and to take an active role in expressing their own perspectives and worldview. Furthermore, the positivist approach to enquiry does not account for the specific social contexts and the given social circumstances of the participants.

According to Griffiths (1995), the aim of this type of approach to enquiry is to take away the bias by ascertaining that results are independent of the investigated and

the investigator's value position. Validity in this type of research depends upon maintaining this separation. Within the positivist epistemology, the 'subjective' is thought to make the research unreliable, precisely because of its bias.

In contrast to this, qualitative methodology consists of 'transcripts of interviews, field notes, photographs, documents and other records' (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000: 362). As noted by Lemish (2007) these qualitative methodologies allow studies to be carried out in settings which the participants are familiar with. It is common to find that studies about children are carried out, for example, in classrooms, playgrounds and homes and involve practices which are tied to such environments. For example in her study, Maybin (2006) examined how children constructed knowledge through dialogue which takes place in the classroom, as well as in corridors, the school swimming pool, changing rooms, amongst others.

In his study, Buckingham (1993) employed in-depth group interviews to document how children made sense of what they watched on television. As shall be explained later on in this Chapter, a similar methodological way was adopted in order to study how the use of media by a small group of Maltese children aged between 9 and 10 contributes to the construction of their identities and likewise, how their media practices are shaped by their identities. For example, a study employing telephone interviews by Vijayasarathy and Jones (2000) on customers' shopping orientations reports that in-home shoppers who were used to shopping through mail order catalogues tended to show high intentions towards online shopping. In contrast to this, mall shoppers tended to have low online shopping intentions. In a similar

vein, Gefen and Straub (2004) noted that the higher the degrees of consumers' trust, the higher the degree of consumers' intentions toward online shopping.

Keeping in mind the research questions of this study, the researcher was prompted to conduct a qualitative study since, as Denzin and Lincoln suggest, 'they [qualitative researchers such as the researcher] seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning' (2000: 8, Denzin and Lincoln's emphasis). According to Mertens (1998) qualitative studies may take various forms and she lists seven possible research strategies for qualitative research. However, given the nature of this study the following three strategies were considered most appropriate namely *ethnography*, *case study* and *grounded theory*.

According to Hammersley (1990) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), ethnography as social research allows for the gathering of empirical data from real world natural contexts. This method is used to describe practices and beliefs of cultures and communities. The focus of such research is to understand a situation from an insider and outsider perspective. This study is not, and due to its specified parameters, could not be a traditional full-blown ethnography in the sense implied by its advocates where the researcher spends intensive, long term participant observation (for canonical text *vide* Willis, 1977 and Goffman, 1968). However, an ethnographic perspective was adopted (Green and Bloome, 1995), as the study was based on fieldwork characterised by situational embeddedness. Since the focus of such research is to understand a situation from an insider and outsider perspective,

ethnographers spend time observing and participating in the environments they seek to describe.

Observations and interviews are used as data collection techniques to record what takes place during the fieldwork (Hammersley, 1990). These techniques also seemed appropriate since they could provide 'thick description' (Geertz, 1983), a method that explains in detail not just the reason behind human behaviour, but also its context, so that the situation is understood from an insider and outsider perspective. For this reason, the case study approach was also considered.

Stake (1995) gives three categories of case study research, namely the *intrinsic,* the *instrumental* and the *collective.* Building on Stake's observations, Cousin (2005) noted that case study research aims at exploring a setting, individual, group and/or a phenomenon. He uses the following example from a higher education case study to illustrate the three types. In the *intrinsic case study,* the researcher attempts to understand the case study at hand or make observations regarding a particular person as a case. In this case, the researcher asks, 'What is happening on this geography field trip, at this time and place and in these circumstances?' (p. 422). In the *instrumental case study* the researcher attempts to generalise from the case. Thus the researcher asks 'What is happening in this geography field trip that can tell us something about geography field trips in general?' The *collective case study* builds on this by including more than one case to achieve some kind of representation.

Certainly, the researcher's interest in the complex and idiosyncratic identity construction process and acknowledgement of diversity among students prompted her to carry out an intrinsic case study. She had no intention to find and present generalisations, as it is believed that the context-dependent nature of media use yields different data and issues.

According to Bassey (1999), case study research seeks to capture the 'singularity of the case' and he defined it as the study of a particular set of events bounded by space and time. As with Polkinghorne (1995: 10), the researcher agrees that, as a qualitative researcher, she should 'emphasise the construction or discovery of concepts that give categorical identity to the particulars and items in their [*this*] collection of data.'

The development of the research focus which gave rise to the research questions and referred to in Section 1.5 will now be outlined. The research questions seek to discern what strategies the children used in deriving meaning and actively engaged with the media and the discourses that they encountered through their media engagement. The third and final research question considers how the children's use of media contributed towards the construction of their identities and likewise how their identities were reflected in their media practices.

Since the intention was to carry out a small scale qualitative case study, the issues of *validity* and *reliability* in qualitative research will now be addressed (LeCompte and Preissle Goetz, 1993).

3.3   Issues of validity and reliability

The researcher is of the belief that a small scale study would contribute to her professional development as a teacher trainer since it would provide her with reflections about children and their media engagement.

According to Punch (2009), knowledge in the field of education (usually) does not usually derive from one large scale definite project but from accumulated evidence yielded by many studies. In this sense, it is believed that this study will be one such contribution. The researcher is however, fully aware of the limitations inherent in a small scale qualitative study. According to Bauer and Gaskell (2000), validity is a quality indicator of quantitative social research. For example, in the case of a test that 'claims to measure 'intelligence,' evidence is required showing that it does as it claims' (p. 367).

On the other hand 'reliability' 'refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated' (Merriam et al., 2002: 27). These notions are borrowed from quantitative research; however due to the nature of qualitative methods they may at times become problematic. With regard to 'validity', Porter (2007) explained that the whole point is to convince readers that results are believable and trustworthy.

Quantitative studies must convince the reader that the procedures have been followed faithfully and that results are valid and reliable. In contrast to this, in qualitative studies the reader is provided with portrayals with enough detail to show that the researcher's conclusions are logically sound. Porter noted that 'doing so,

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provides a point of mediation between readers and writers, which enables them to agree on the best interpretive tools to use in making and judging claims' (p. 81).

The researcher has tried to render the research authentic and sound by being as reflexive as possible about her beliefs, values and personal, cultural traditions and by stating clearly the ontological and epistemic stances. Following Pawson and Tilley (1997), the researcher is aware that there can be different interpretations of the same data. However, rather than seeing the existence of multiple voices as a barrier to validity, it is hoped that this study will be making a contribution through 'the researcher's voice' and in so doing, encourage readers to concur that given the data collected, the results are valid.

Reliability is a quality indicator of quantitative research. An instrument, such as a method, tool or test which is used to measure a phenomenon, is expected to give consistent results over time or if used by different researchers (Wellington, 2000). Viewing reality as multi-dimensional and ever-changing (Marshall and Rossman, 2006), the researcher values the different interpretations of reality. In this sense, as a researcher, she will be interpreting someone else's interpretation of reality. Clearly, a replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results since the core parameters will vary.

The variables are likely to include the different experiences of the participants, the type of media, the context used in the research and of course, the eventual interpretation of the researcher, among others. However, it is believed, that if these

variables are generally similar to one another, the resultant outcome of the research is likely to yield similar evidence to the initial study.

3.4   Data collection strategies

The researcher has therefore described how she established the theoretical framework and the general research method appropriate to address the research questions. Following Janesick (1994), the next step was to decide on the best data collection strategies. In the sections that follow, the researcher explains the decisions she took with regard to the data collection and fieldwork and its practical implementation.

Since the research focus was centred on children's engagement with the media, it was necessary to conduct observations within a class in which some form of media engagement occurred. The intention of the researcher was to conduct a series of observation sessions while a group of children engaged in a media activity which consisted of online interactive games. The sessions were intended to serve as a good opportunity for the researcher to observe the children as they interacted with one another as well as with the online interactive games. Moreover, the researcher also had the intention to invite the children to talk about the actual media activity and to explore links to their every day knowledge and the cultural experiences in their lives. The study was to take place in a particular location and within a particular time frame. So as to ensure proper data capture, this whole process was to be filmed and documented. These aspects will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

As noted by Lemish (2007) in ethnographic studies researchers' aspirations are 'not to study 'on' children or 'for' children but to study 'with' children. Given the scope of the study and for logistical purposes, it was felt that it would be appropriate to study a small group of around ten children who attended the same school and who were in the same class. Therefore, the main consideration revolved around selecting a school which could provide the researcher with a group of children that suited the required sample size and which was also equipped with personal computers. In the next sections, a detailed account is given of the research process, commencing with accessing the research site.

3.4.1 Gaining access to the research site

From the visits which were conducted in schools during the researcher's teaching practice, it was evident that in Malta, as in many other countries, teachers in primary schools tend to encourage students to work together at the computer as it supports peer learning and extends inter-personal and communication skills (Crook, 1994). Given the purpose of this study, it was considered relevant to interview children who were already used to working in pairs or groups at the computer in class.

According to Delamont (2002), access negotiations are the first stage of the research journey. Gaining access to the research site took approximately one month due to the bureaucratic structure and reliance on regulatory procedures required by the Department of Education in Malta. Initially, a formal request had to be made to the Director for Planning and Development of the Education Division (Ministry of Education) to conduct the research.

In the application form (*vide* Appendix B) the researcher had to present the requested details and explain that the research was centrally concerned with the ways in which children engage with the media. It was also necessary to request permission to conduct the study in one particular school for reasons which will be elaborated upon further at a later stage. This process-driven way of gaining access (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994), was imperative since the intention was to carry out the data collection in the school/s which were following directives concerning data protection issued by the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT).

3.4.2 The selection of the school

After the formal request to carry out research in state schools was approved, the next step was to contact the Head of the chosen school as the initial formal 'gatekeeper' (Delamont, 2002). The school, which will be referred to as St. Barbara School, was selected for the research. This selection occurred for two reasons, the first being that the intention was to work with the contacts the researcher had made over the years as a teacher trainer. The second was that the researcher was also familiar with the school and the staff since she had conducted several visits whilst her students were on their teaching-practice placements in this particular school. Hence, the choice of school, teacher and students was what Wellington (2000), called opportunistic.

St Barbara is a mixed gender primary school which caters for around 300 students from the age of eight through to 12. The classes ranged from Year 4 to Year 6. The school is situated in a medium sized town in the south of Malta having a population of about 11,000. This old town is rich in history and cultural traditions.

The Good Friday procession and Easter Sunday celebrations are an attraction for locals and it is common to find them included in organised tourist itineraries or tours. The student intake of the school comes mainly from this town and the surrounding area.

During the researcher's first appointment with the Head of School, the research project was discussed in detail. The Head identified the class teacher and the students for the study. The particular class was chosen based on her belief that the teacher would be co-operative since he was a media enthusiast. During the second meeting at the school, the researcher was introduced to the class teacher who also worked as a part-time freelance radio broadcaster in Malta. The class teacher, who will be referred to as Thomas, seemed happy to participate in the research. Indeed, he said that he felt like a collaborator in the research project and access to the school proceeded relatively smoothly.

Mertens (1998) suggested that it is best for the researcher herself to accommodate to the routines of the participants. The researcher invited the class teacher to choose a convenient time and day when she could conduct her sessions and observe the children interact with the various online activities. The class teacher selected Friday afternoons and mentioned that this would be most suitable since he normally dedicated the final couple of hours of the day/week for his students to carry out revision work or leisure reading. Slotting the data collection sessions at this time of day, therefore appeared to involve the least disruption to the class and fitted in well with the class's existing schedule.

3.4.3 The selection of the participants

In St Barbara School, as with all state schools in Malta at the time of the study, the students were divided according to their ability. Class sizes in Maltese primary schools are typically between 25 and 30 students. The selected class comprised of only fourteen students since it was the lowest ability stream of the Year 5 Group in the school.

The number was deemed sufficient for the requirements of this study and offered the possibility of involving all the students in the study. Being such a small class, it was very likely that the children knew each other very well and as a result they would feel comfortable participating in the sessions. The small number of students also made the computer sessions manageable. Moreover, Punch (2009) recommends that research projects for doctoral degrees need to be realistic, especially with regard to sample size.

At the start of the study the students were aged 9 and 10 years old. Following Buckingham (1993) who researched how children aged between 7 and 12 years talked about television, it was anticipated that the children would not find it hard to express themselves and that it was likely that the media would feature significantly in their lives.

The Head of School introduced the researcher to the class as someone from the University who was furthering her studies by carrying out research on children and the media, a subject that appeared to excite the students. During the introductory session, the children spoke about their media experiences and their literacy skills

and attitudes towards literacy in general and reading in particular. The fact that there were only fourteen students in this particular class and that the research involved the media immediately lessened the distance between the participants and the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher presented the children with a media diary and they were encouraged to write entries about their engagement with the media.

Out of the fourteen students who initially formed the study cohort and due to circumstances beyond the researcher's control, only ten students actually participated in the fieldwork. The parents of two students did not give their consent to let their children form part of the cohort. Another student moved house and had to change schools and the final student was absent for most of the time the sessions were conducted. Therefore, ten students, five boys and five girls actually participated in the research.

Once the researcher had been given the names of the participants and had actually met them, she was given authorisation to access the children's school records which gave her details about level of attainment in various subjects. From here, she was able to consider which type of online sessions would be most suitable for the participants in terms of educational level, language proficiency and interests. The names (fictitious ones), gender and age of the ten participants are presented in Table 3.1 and 3.2. These tables also give some salient details about the participants.

Table 3.1   **List of the five girl participants**

Name (Note 1)	Lottie	Randy	Sadie	Angie	Daphne
Gender	Girl	Girl	Girl	Girl	Girl
Age (Note 2)	10 years	9 years	10 years	9 years	9 years
Siblings	Only child	Older brother	Older sister & brother	Older sister & brother	Older brother
Reading level	Average reader in Maltese and English	Weak reader in Maltese and English	Average reader in Maltese and English	Average reader in Maltese, weak reader in English	Average reader in Maltese and English
Father's occupation	Pensioner	Factory worker	Supermarket Assistant	Mechanic	Store Keeper
Mother's occupation	Housewife	Housewife	Part-time maid	Part-time restaurant attendant	Part-time shop assistant

Table 3.2   **List of the five boy participants**

Name (Note 1)	Andy	Frankie	Samuel	Nick	Robbie
Gender	Boy	Boy	Boy	Boy	Boy
Age (Note 2)	10 years	9 years	10 years	9 years	9 years
Siblings	Two younger brothers	Only child	Older sister	Three older sisters	Older sister
Reading Level	Average reader in Maltese and English	Average reader in Maltese and English	Average reader in Maltese and English	Average reader in Maltese and English	Weak reader in Maltese and English
Father's Occupation	Delivery man	Post Office clerk	Catering	Refuse Collector	Factory worker
Mother's Occupation	Old people's home helper	Housewife	Factory worker	Shop assistant	Housewife

Note 1: All names of the children have been changed to protect their identity
Note 2: The age given here is the children's age at the start of the research process

The children came from a working class background and two-parent families whose first language is Maltese. They attended state schools were many teachers utilised the mother tongue as a language of instruction in subjects such as Social Studies, Religion and Maltese as well as for communication purposes in class. Two of the participants were poor readers while the rest were average readers in both Maltese and English. While the children's exposure to English was restricted, they formally learn the language at school from the early years and it is also an integral part of their everyday experiences, whether this involves books, handouts, computer software, online material and television viewing.

3.4.4 The selection of the online activities

The web developer in charge of the official website of the Education Division in the Ministry of Education of Malta was contacted to discuss the intention of this study. It was decided to use this particular website namely, http://skola.gov.mt/primary, since it is officially sanctioned, safe and designed for local students. It is also a very versatile website which provides a database of archives, circulars, syllabi, exam papers and articles, links to educational material related to the different subjects taught at primary and secondary level, supplementary material for parents and events updates.

For the scope of this study, the researcher considered making use of the section within the official website dedicated to 'Links' since it provided a collection of search engines, directories and portals to other educational sites in English for primary children. For this reason, those online activities which drew upon popular culture and which were not too text loaded were selected from this section of links.

These types of educational online activities are not readily available in Maltese, requiring the participants to decode a language, in this case English, in which they were fairly proficient. The selection was wide however, those online activities which did not require sophisticated software programmes were selected in order to avoid access difficulties as the computers in the school had not been upgraded for a while.

Websites mainly include information, resources such as printable free material, games/activities, links to other sites, e-mail clubs, chat rooms and advertising hotspots (Burnett and Wilkinson, 2005). Website material is typically presented in more than one mode, having text (written and/or spoken) combined with music, sound, static and dynamic graphics. This multi-sensory experience generally allows users to interact with both text and animations. The type of presentation these websites promote has been termed 'edutainment' (Okan, 2003), for they seem to motivate and engage the users mostly for the fun appeal.

Another attraction that websites have is flexible content which is up-dated, are easily accessible, quick to be amended and extended. Apart from its flexibility, websites and web content are relatively cheap to access provided that one has the necessary equipment (Hughes, 2002).

According to Johnson and Hegarty (2003), multimedia learning environments motivate students if they satisfy the following core criteria – *immersion, play* and *student choice*. The themes for the online activities used were linked to the participants' interests and/or calendar feasts, school projects, curriculum topics or

media phenomena. The following is an example of a screen shot taken from the online session, 'Mouth Power.'

Figure 3.1   **Screenshot of Online Activity 3 - Mouth Power**

The online activities included simulations, quests, character design, role play and inquiry–oriented tasks. The researcher anticipated that the accessibility, interactivity and usability of these online activities would appeal to the participants since, as suggested by Jayakanthan (2002) they are designed to be accessed by a wide range of audiences from different backgrounds (*vide* Appendix C for a brief description on each of the selected online activities.)

After having gained access to the research site and identified the online activities, the next step was to obtain permission from the children's parents since informed consent is crucial at this stage of the research process (Burgess, 1989).

3.4.5   Ethical considerations

As noted by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), ethical guidelines provide specifications

for researchers on how to conduct research. The British Sociological Association

(BSA) (1996) stipulates that:

> ... as far as possible, sociological research should be based on freely
> given informed consent of those studied. This implies a responsibility on
> the sociologist to explain as fully as possible and in terms meaningful to
> participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing
> it (p. 1).

In order to be able to film and conduct the observation sessions and the invitations

to talk with the children, permission from the parents was therefore required. The

parents of the students who were to participate in the study were contacted and the

research plans were discussed with them. Through the school, an official form to

film the children, was issued by the local education authorities to the parents of

each student and written authorisation was received (*vide* Appendix D).

The researcher then proceeded to meet the parents in person. The meeting was held

on school premises in the presence of the Head of School. During the meeting,

details about the research plans were given to the parents and any queries raised by

the parents were answered. The researcher was careful to show that she would be

respecting anonymity and confidentiality. It was explained that all the recordings

would be viewed exclusively by the researcher and used for research purposes only.

The researcher assured the parents that she would not be disclosing any of the

participants' comments, memories, opinions, anecdotes and reflections (Cohen et

al, 2000) with anyone else, as well as other members of the staff. She also

confirmed that she would replace all the children's real names with fictitious ones when she referred to them in the study. However, as with Parker (2005), the researcher agrees that anonymity may serve as a power technique since in the end it is the researcher, who has mediated and presented the participants' statements in the final report.

3.4.6   The researcher's position

Following Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the researcher was aware that in any write-up of qualitative research, investigators are required to articulate their own positioning vis-à-vis the topic, the participants and the context being studied and the way that it might influence the conduct and the findings of the research. This process is referred to as 'researcher's position' or 'reflexivity' (Steiner, 1991). The researcher found this process helpful in two ways. Firstly, it helped her to reflect critically on her own research activities and to think of 'research as constituted by processes of social reflexivity, and then of self-reflexivity as social process' (Steiner, 1991: 3). Secondly, it gave her the opportunity to explain how her own positionality shaped the study so that the reader understands how she arrived at the particular interpretation of the data presented in the final chapters.

In Section 3.2, the researcher reported how her values, beliefs and theoretical lens prompted her to conduct a qualitative research study which employed observations and interviews as methods of inquiry. In qualitative research, especially within ethnographic approaches (as the one which was undertaken by the researcher), the question of positioning within a research context is a much discussed issue and often revolves around the insider/outsider debate. Winch (1963) recommends that

the most advantageous position to adopt is the 'insider' position because only when such a position is adopted can researchers fully understand how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon. Following Winch, the researcher decided to adopt the 'insider' position for the following two inter-related reasons.

Firstly, the researcher's work, which partly involved teaching practice supervision of undergraduate Bachelor of Education students, permitted access and immersion within 'naturally occurring settings' – Maltese primary schools. Secondly, immersion within the social world of the school, allowed her to attend to the rich generation of meanings by social actors. This was an essential idea since the researcher's main interest was to explore how children produce and construct identity through language.

In Section 3.4, details about the selection of the school, participants and activities on which the observation sessions were based were presented. Certainly, the researcher's interest to undertake fieldwork characterised by 'situational embeddedness' within a well-known context implied that she could gain a deep understanding of the research context. As suggested by Charmaz (1995), when researchers are part of the culture that they describe, then researchers and participants interact together to produce the data. However, this process is never without dilemmas. The researcher was also aware that in order to conduct an objective research study, ethnographers should balance their position and describe the experiences, make the analysis and report the findings as an outsider. Hence, she turned to a different conceptualisation of ethnographic research, one which is concerned with rendering the familiar strange. Whereas traditional ethnography

seeks to make sense of the culture of the 'other', the hallmark of much of the ethnographic research conducted in educational, health and social care settings, has been to turn well-known contexts into research contexts. Taking this ethnographic stance helped the researcher in two ways. It helped her turn a critical eye onto practices and meaning making within a familiar culture. It also helped her find a balance between insiders' and outsiders' points of view. At this stage, it is propitious to consider salient insider-outsider issues relevant when collecting and analysing the data.

In the previous sections, the researcher established that as a general research design she would be conducting a series of observation sessions and interviews with a group of primary school children. The researcher conducted the fieldwork as a middle aged white professional woman who came from a working class background. Her religious, racial and cultural background was similar to that of all the children. Prior to the observations and interviews the researcher did not know the children.

As explained in Section 3.4.2, access to the field depended on the researcher's relationship with the head teachers, who obtained parental permission in the research site schools, the teachers and most importantly, with the children themselves. Although the researcher lived in a different town, due to her work experience in the area, she was familiar with the town the children came from. Both towns are very similar, as are most of the old towns in the small island of Malta. The researcher gathered knowledge about the children's out-of-school lives from what they told her during the interviews and the references within their talk

during the online activities. Through her observations and informal encounters with them within the school, the researcher immersed herself as far as she could in the children's world. While she was conducting the fieldwork, she utilised the mid-day break to set herself up for filming the data collection sessions which took place in the classroom. She would then interact with the children and even had lunch with them on a few occasions. This arrangement was adopted for the first cycle of data collection, the online activities, as well as for the second cycle, the small group interviews.

The researcher's relationship with the children evolved during the one and half year period of the fieldwork. At the start of the fieldwork, the children perceived her as the researcher from university. However, as the months went by, they came to view her as the 'peripatetic' teacher who allowed them to 'play on the computer' and talk about their out-of-school engagement with the media. The children called the researcher 'Ms Tania'. They seemed to accept the researcher's right to ask questions. Many of them expressed the wish to have a copy of the filmed sessions on CD.

This anomalous position, as neither superior nor senior schoolmate allowed the researcher to bypass potentially restrictive identity positionings and to find opportunities to enable the children to talk openly about their lives. The researcher found that during the research process, she often had to manage a continual double positioning between the categories of 'insider' and 'outsider' because these are not fixed or static (Herod, 1999). On one hand, she felt she was an integral part of the research context as she worked collaboratively with the participants to produce the

data. On the other hand, the researcher was aware that just as she might have wished to be perceived as an 'insider', the children might have, in fact, positioned her as an 'outsider'. She suspects that if she had been more of a media enthusiast as they were, the conversations would have been quite different, as they would have spoken to her as more of an insider.

This is a perennial difficulty for ethnographers researching children and the media as the latter are highly experienced and informed on the subject. Despite seeking to conduct research '*with* children' and '*for* children' as it is '*on* children', the researcher was aware that she might have unconsciously projected her autobiographical-epistemic perspective onto their stories and experiences. In order to avoid the possibility of misinterpretation, the researcher adopted the multiple-interview approach (*vide* Section 3.5.3) which allowed for triangulation through member checks. In the next sections, the practical implementation of the research design will be presented.

3.5   The fieldwork

The researcher's interest was to explore what strategies the children used and the discourses that they encountered through their engagement with the media. The researcher also considered how the children's use of media contributed towards the construction of their identities and likewise, how it was shaped by their identities. The researcher had selected a number of online interactive games for the sessions. These sessions were intended to serve as a good opportunity for the researcher to observe the children as they interacted simultaneously with each other and with the online interactive games. The researcher also had the intention to invite the

children to talk about the actual media activity and to explore links to their everyday knowledge and the cultural experiences in their lives.

3.5.1   The pilot study

The pilot study consisted of two 'trial' sessions (*vide* Table 3.3) in which the children had to read and follow online instructions in order to score points. This occurred between November and December 2004 at a time when the children were at the end of the first scholastic term and were preparing for their Christmas school activities and holidays.

Table 3.3   **List of online activities chosen for pilot study**

Date	Website / Activity	Student Pairs	Themes and Links to interests/Calendar events
Session 1 26/11/2004	Discovery Kids Mummy Maker	Robbie & Lottie Angie & Andy Sadie & Frankie	TV channels (History and Culture)
Session 2 10/12/2004	PBS Kids Sagwa the Chinese Cat	Daphne & Nick	Christmas Activities (History and Culture)

On the day the activity were carried out and during the mid-day break, the researcher set up the camera and ensured that all was in place, including internet access for the online session in order to have everything set before the arrival of the children for the activity. This pilot study took place at the back of the children's class. The children who were not participating in the particular data collection session continued with their school craft projects, library reading and homework since the teacher dedicated the Friday afternoon to such activities. The researcher started with an ice-breaking activity. She intentionally did not choose to elaborate

on the game itself so as to ensure that the children were not prompted in any way and that their comments and negotiations between themselves were spontaneous. The sessions were filmed with one professional camera focused on the computer screen. The researcher operated the camera herself.

The first session consisted of one main activity in which the participants were asked to embalm Ramose's body, an officer of the King Tutankhamun. This activity was carried out with three separate pairs of children. It was interesting to note that they made relevant links to what they had learnt at school. One participant made reference to a documentary seen on the Discovery Channel. Another linked the mummification process to his grandfather's culture as a taxidermist. The children were very excited and motivated by the visuals and often the written word was overlooked. In addition to this, it was noted that the children took a while to solve the challenge at hand simply since they had failed to read the instructions which were presented. In general, the children kept their conversation to a minimum and their answers were very brief, as illustrated in the following extract taken from a post-session invitation to talk with Robbie and Lottie about the Tutankhamun online interactive game:

Table 3.4   Extract from transcript of Online Activity 1

Speaker	Dialogue
Researcher:	In the website activity you've just played I saw you sorting some things out. Why were you doing that?
Robbie:	Because I read a bit here and there.
Researcher:	What did you read?
Robbie:	Boqq! [a Maltese expression to mean 'I don't know']
Researcher:	Tell me more about the task you had to do.
	[boy remains silent]
Researcher:	What did you do in order to embalm the body? [main objective of the activity]
Lottie:	We kept clicking on NEXT [button]
Researcher:	Do you think you managed to do it?
Robbie:	I suppose so.
Researcher:	How do you know?
Lottie:	Because there were a lot of things we had to place …you know…
Robbie:	We did it!
Researcher:	So did you manage to do the embalming after all?
Robbie:	Mmmmm…I'm not sure. [children giggle]

The second online interactive session consisted of a series of ten mini activities which were very score oriented, based on the adventures of Sagwa the Chinese cat. The activities presented the children with various Chinese themes which included food, festivals, clothes and traditions. This activity was carried out with only one pair of children (*vide* Appendix E for the full translation of the transcript of Online Activity 2). The children generally worked well as a team except towards the end,

when they became a bit restless. One of them took a leadership role. Reference was made between the visual and the cultural differences presented in the game. Nick was embarrassed when he saw the Chinese girl in her underwear. As with the previous session, the children did not converse much, and their talk consisted primarily of imperatives intended to lead to action that would help them finish the game.

Upon reflecting on the overall outcome of the pilot study, the researcher realised that the children were not verbally articulating their reactions, comments and experiences enough and she recognised this to be an issue that needed to be addressed. The reason for this was not due to the fact that they were conscious of the camera or as a result of poor pair work dynamics. After the videotapes were viewed and both visual aspects and verbal interactions were transcribed, the researcher confirmed that by taking the role of an observer whilst the children engaged in the online interactive game and then carrying out the invitations to talk towards the end of the sessions, she had instigated an Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) situation (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975).

As Wegerif and Scrimshaw (1997) noted in the IRF pattern of interaction, the researcher was doing all the prompting. She realised that by carrying out the invitations to talk with the children *after* they had completed the interactive sessions was incorrectly timed. By then, the children had forgotten what they had done earlier and they found it difficult to articulate their meaning making processes. They did not make any links to related experiences and perceived the verbal exchanges as a form of comprehension test. Hence, the researcher became

concerned about her involvement in the sessions. She had no intention to assume the role of a teacher. She was keen to minimise the status difference between herself and the participants, however, at the same time she still felt it necessary to keep a professional distance. The insights drawn from the pilot study led to a minor adjustment in the researcher/participant relationship and as a result, she decided to adopt a different role.

As mentioned by Charmaz (2000), the researcher agrees that as data collection and analysis proceed, 'we likely find gaps in our data and holes in our theories. Then we go back to the field and collect delimited data to fill those conceptual gaps and holes – we conduct theoretical sampling' (p. 519). Adler and Adler (1987), identified 'three membership roles' of qualitative researchers as they conduct observations – (a) peripheral member researchers, (b) active member researchers and (c) complete member researchers. It was decided to change the researcher's role from a peripheral member researcher to an active member researcher so that she would have a participative, yet not a controlling role as the complete member researcher's role would have it.

3.5.2   First cycle of data collection – online activities

The ten online interactive activities were conducted between January 2005 and June 2006. The dates of the sessions were determined according to a number of variables, namely school activities, work commitments and the time that was required for film editing and transcription. As with the pilot study, in order to minimise classroom interruptions, the activities were carried out at the back of the class where the computers were located. For practical reasons concerning filming

and working around the computers of the classroom, the children were paired, one boy and one girl, when circumstances permitted, since it was believed that this would add to a variety of ideas and experiences. When the online interactive session was short, the activity was run twice using a different pair of children at a time. In Table 3.5, the details of each online activity and participant pairing is given, along with the subject matter of the activity. Sessions 1 & 2 occurred during the pilot study, as given in the previous section.

Table 3.5   **Details re online activities and participant pairing**

Date (Note 1)	Website / Activity	Student Pairs	Themes and Links to interests/Calendar events
Session 3 14/01/2005	Edu Web Mouthpower	Lottie & Samuel	School campaign on dental hygiene (Healthcare)
Session 4 18/03/2005	Big Idea Junior's Own Adventure	Randy & Robbie Lottie & Andy	The Catholic Church (Morality)
Session 5 13/05/2005	Archibald's Adventure Story	Angie & Andy Daphne & Nick	Green Week at school (Animals and the Environment)
Session 6 10/06/2005	Yahooligans Design and Dino	Randy & Samuel	'Dinosaurs' Topic of the week at school (Animals as Theme Characters)
Session 7 11/11/2005	School Games Machine Thorkel	Sadie & Frankie	Seafarers (History and Culture)
Session 8 16/12/2005	PBS Kids Buster and the Alien	Randy & Nick	Movie: Star Wars Episode III – Revenge of the Sith (Media)
Session 9 03/02/2006	Edu Web Squish the Fish	Daphne & Nick	The Sea (Animals and the Environment)
Session 10 10/03/2006	Edu Web The Ways of Knowing Trail	Angie & Frankie Lottie & Robbie	Africa: a neighbour continent (History and Culture)
Session 11 05/06/2006	School Games Machine Dream of a Druid	Daphne & Samuel	Old Civilisations: Topic of the week at school (History and Culture)
Session 12 15/06/2006	PBS Kids Maya & Miguel	Sadie & Andy	2006 FIFA World Cup (Sports)

Note 1: Sessions 1 & 2 occurred during the pilot study.

As a result of the outcome of the pilot study, the researcher held the above ten interactive online sessions with the participants with certain modifications in the adopted approach. She joined the children as they sat in front of the computer and invited them to talk whenever the opportunity called for it. In each online session, animations, the text, the sound effects and the characters of the online activity were used as prompts for unstructured invitations' to talk. Open ended questions were also used. While the online activities were in English, all the invitations to talk were carried out in Maltese.

By adopting the approach outlined above, it was possible to capture the children's contextualised talk, always keeping in mind what Bloom (1996) pointed out, namely that respondents give certain answers or tell certain stories because of the focus of the research and the inter-subjective dynamics of the specific researcher-researched relationship. Moreover, the researcher believed that in conducting several online interactive sessions spread over a significant amount of time, it was possible to strengthen the relationship with the children and dismantle the initial barriers which existed between them and the researcher.

Another important technical modification which helped the researcher adopt the role of an active member researcher was by filming with two cameras instead of one. This was a further development resulting from observations during the pilot study. The scope behind this modification was intended to enable the researcher concentrate on her interactions with the children and be less preoccupied with the filming. By utilising two professional cameras on tripods, the researcher managed

to accomplish this and also, as outlined by Millerson (1994), poor quality filming with oscillations was avoided.

During this data collection phase, it became evident that when the role of an active member researcher was assumed and the children were given the opportunity to talk *during* and *after* the online activities they were more forthcoming and they did not perceive the researcher as 'the teacher' who was after 'the right answers'. The following is an extract taken from an invitation to talk conducted during the online activity about the adventures of Squish, the Fish. This extract contrasts with the other example presented earlier in Table 3.4 as it shows the children engaging in extended and richer talk about the activity.

Table 3.6   **Extract from transcript of Online Activity 9**

Speaker	Dialogue
Researcher:	What do they remind you of? [referring to the main fish characters].
Daphne:	That one [points at screen] looks like a shark.
Researcher:	Ummmm…true. What about the small one?
Frankie:	It reminds me of Nemo. [laughs]
Daphne:	That's a clown fish.
Researcher:	You seem to know a lot about fish Daphne!
Daphne:	Because clown fish are orange and white. This one is purple and black. I watched a DVD of Nemo.
Frankie	Yeah! Funny fish called Nemo. They swim in deep waters like the sea in Marsaskala [a seaside town in Malta].
Daphne:	Very deep waters.
Frankie:	I have an idea …for the Religion homework; I do the fish of Jonah like this one in orange, white, black and purple. I like it.

As illustrated, the children's contributions were varied in terms of experiences and expressions. Thus, by conducting the online interactive sessions in this way, the participants could talk beyond mere 'decoding' and 'comprehension' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005). Rather, they spoke enthusiastically about themselves and popular cultural sites which they accessed through their media engagements. These included old and new media, toys, games, artefacts, accessories, stationery, food, songs and rhymes. They also made links to school and out-of-school related experiences. It was important that the transcription of the online activity session was compiled a few days after the online session since it was evident that in this phase of data collection the participants engaged in longer, more natural and elaborate stretches of talk.

For practical reasons, one blank tape per camera per session was used and the allocated time was approximately sixty minutes. It was envisaged that this would give the participants and the researcher ample time to work through the sessions. Since twelve interactive online sessions, including those used in the pilot study, were conducted, approximately twelve hours of interaction and conversation were recorded.

Technically, the editing of the films involved editing the two tapes into one to create what is called 'a picture in picture' effect. The objective here was to synch the two separate recordings in one so as to facilitate the transcription of the sessions. A transcription of each filmed session took place as soon after the event as possible so as to capture as much of the salient details as possible. It was envisaged that all transcription work of each session would be completed prior to

the subsequent session to avoid backlog. The development of a transcript by hand can take as much as ten hours for each hour of taped material (Gill, 2000), and transcribing the interactions which involved the verbal and non-verbal communication of the participants during the online sessions was expected to be a lengthy and intensive exercise. Transcriptions involve a transformation of sound/image from recordings to text (Duranti, 1997). The transcriptions of all the online activities, including all the discussions which were carried out in Maltese were to cover student-student and/or researcher-student/s talk as well as non-verbal gestures. Those transcripts which were referred to in this study were translated into English.

Upon reflecting and analysing the overall transcripts of the first cycle of data collection, the researcher realised that various broad themes with regard to the participants' engagement with the media had emerged. These broad themes included: strategies used during consumption and production of media text/practices, discourses prevailing in different social contexts (such as home, school, local, global and virtual space), intergenerational cultures and differences in identities-in-practices. (For an overview of the online sessions, including those used in the pilot study, *vide* Appendix F). It became evident that these themes could be explored in more detail if more data were to be collected.

As with Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher agrees that 'theoretical sampling' helps the researcher (in this case herself) to 'decide what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [her] theory as it emerges' (p.45). Since an interpretive type of study had been chosen, it was decided to conduct a series of

follow up group interviews with the same participants to further build on the data which had been collected during the first cycle of data collection. It was therefore decided that these should be carried out over the subsequent scholastic year. To a certain extent, in choosing to let the rich data guide the analysis, the study was given a 'grounded' orientation and to this effect, as explained by Silverman (2005), the researcher was able to revisit the research context for further data collection.

3.5.3   Second cycle of data collection - small group interviews

Four interviews for each small group of children were held between 2006 and 2007. The intention of this was to elaborate on the four major themes which emerged from the online sessions. In order to do this, it was necessary to get in touch with the children once again. The researcher anticipated that some, if not all the children would have moved from St. Barbara School and would be located in new schools.

A schedule of twelve small group interview sessions was organised as listed in Table 3.7, which gives all the salient details about the participants and the themes chosen for each session. The twelve interviews were carried out with the participants in their respective schools between January and June 2007.

Table 3.7   List of small group interviews

SESSIONS AND THEMES	GROUPS and SCHOOLS	DATE
Interview 1 *Media ownership*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary School – Group 1)	31.01.2007
Interview 2 *Media ownership*	Nick, Samuel, & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	22.02.2007
Interview 3 *Media ownership*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary school – Group 3)	23.02.2007
Interview 4 *Intergenerational attitudes towards the media*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary School – Group 1)	14.03.2007
Interview 5 *Intergenerational attitudes towards the media*	Nick, Samuel & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	26.03.2007
Interview 6 *Intergenerational attitudes towards the media*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary School – Group 3)	30.03.2007
Interview 7 *Media practices*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary School – Group 1)	20.04.2007
Interview 8 *Media practices*	Nick, Samuel & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	26.04.2007
Interview 9 *Media practices*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary school – Group 3)	30.04.2007
Interview 10 *Media preferences*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary school – Group 1)	25.05.2007
Interview 11 *Media preferences*	Nick, Samuel & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	31.05.2007
Interview 12 *Media preferences*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary school- Group 3)	01.06.2007

While the online activities foregrounded the construction of meaning through multiple modes (Kress, 2003) – oral, written and/or pictorial - made available by the selected websites, the interviews were intended to give more opportunity to the children to talk about their media experiences. In so doing, the children would reveal how their engagement with the media contributes to the construction of their identity and likewise, how it is shaped by their identities.

Corbetta (2003) offered four broad categories of interviews. *Unstructured interviews* are similar to a friendly conversation. *Non-directive interviews* do not have a preset topic to pursue and the interviewer follows what the interviewee has to say. In *semi-structured interviews* key themes, issues and open-ended questions are used and the interviewer may probe individual interviewee's replies in more detail. *Structured interviews* have preset and standardised questions.

Given the nature of this study, it was decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. Preset questions were avoided since, as mentioned by Kvale (1996, 2008), it was believed that 'sometimes only a first, topic-introducing question is asked and the remainder of the interview proceeds as a follow up and expansion on the interviewee's answer to the first question' (1996: 127). It was anticipated that the interviews would serve as a useful way to allow the children talk extensively about their media use. Moreover, in so doing, they would reveal their repertoire of identities and the implicit contexts to include the social relations in and through which they were constructed. According to Seidman (1991) the interview is the most commonly used qualitative method with groups. The author explained that 'at

the root of the interviews is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they made of that experience' (p. 3).

The interviews were carried out six months after the online activities. This interval was due to the summer holidays and a few months' settling in time during the first semester, since as anticipated by the researcher, the majority of the participants had moved to secondary schools.

Two boys and two girls out of the ten children who were observed during the online interactive sessions (Frankie, Andy, Daphne and Angie) repeated Year 6 and stayed in St Barbara Primary School. Since secondary schools in Malta are not co-educational, the female participants went to a separate school to that attended by their male counterparts. The interviews were carried out in small groups of about three or four members. In total there were three groups. One mixed gender group was made up of the four children who remained at St Barbara Primary School. The other group, which was made up of three boys, went to a boys' secondary school. This is referred to as St Paul's Boys' Secondary School. Another group, which was made up of three girls, went to a girls' secondary school which is referred to as St Helen's Girls' Secondary School. This meant that the interviews of the second cycle were conducted in three different schools, as opposed to the one school as was the case with the online interactive sessions.

At the time of the fieldwork, St Paul's Secondary School catered for 450 boys from the ages 11 through to 16 years. The classes ranged from Form 1 to Form 5. Samuel, Nick and Reggie were in Form 1. The school was situated in a small town

in central Malta having a population of around 7,000. St Helen's Secondary School catered for about 400 girls from the ages of 11 (through) to 16 years. The classes ranged from Form 1 to Form 5. Sadie, Lottie and Randy attended Form 1. The school was situated in a small village in the south east of Malta with a population of around 8,000.

With the permission of the Head, the researcher had a separate informal meeting with the participants who attended the secondary schools, in order to discuss with them the plans to proceed during this particular phase of data collection. The participants agreed willingly. The parents were informed about the interviews through their children. They all gave their consent. On the Head Teachers' requests the interviews were conducted with the participants during free lessons.

In the case of those participants who continued to attend the original primary school, it was agreed to retain the Friday afternoons which were previously allocated for the online interactive sessions. An appropriate quiet space was allocated in which to conduct the group interviews. As mentioned above, in total twelve group interviews were conducted.

Filming also occurred during the small group interviews. In this particular case, only one professional camera on a tripod was utilised since the participants were not interacting with the computers. Another reason for filming the sessions was to capture body language since it forms an indispensable element in social interaction. Moreover, as noted by Zevenbergen (1998), a camera observes and records more detail than it is humanly possible. Norris (2004) suggested that attention be given

to the non-verbal, as social interactions are not just carried out through talk. She considered non-verbal behaviour, such as body movement and gaze as well as objects, such as furniture and clothes, as shaping everyday interactions.

The researcher's main concern when carrying out the group interviews was to achieve a positive interviewer-participant relationship. According to Adler and Adler (2002), it is through this relationship that all the required data is collected and validity strengthened. Seidman (1991) described a series of three interviews as a *multiple-interview approach*: the first interview gives the participants the opportunity to talk about themselves in terms of the research topic; the second interview allows them to give details about their experiences in the topic area and during the third interview, the participants reflect upon the meaning of their experiences in the chosen area. The researcher adopted and extended Seidman's multiple-interview approach for the following three inter-related reasons.

First of all, multiple interviews could further strengthen the relationship which had already been fostered with the participants during the online interactive sessions. Secondly, another strength of the multiple-interview approach was that if the need arose, clarifications about earlier interviews could be sought from subsequent ones. Thirdly, since 'the interview is a joint-venture, a sharing of and negotiation of realities' (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000: 45), it follows that through multiple interviews there was ample opportunity to achieve this.

As Gaskell (2000), pointed out, that while research group interviews (sometimes known as focus groups) are prevalent as they cut down on time, in this case, the

group interviews were not carried out with that intention in mind. As Lambert and Loiselle (2008), suggested, the intention was to use this type of interview methodology so that the 'group interactions may accentuate members' similarities and differences and give rich information about the range of perspectives and experiences' (p. 229). Similarly, Cohen et al (2000) noted that group interviews are less intimidating and in general, the participants have ample opportunities to voice their opinions, share experiences and build on each others' ideas.

Rather than leading questions, during the interviews prompts were used such as "Tell me more about...", "Do you ever...?" "What about ...?", "Do you find (X) interesting...?" (For an example of the small group interviews *vide* Appendix G). However, one limitation was that occasionally a few participants were not forthcoming and at times were overshadowed by other dominant speakers. During these sessions, the children were encouraged to follow their own paths of discussion and to talk about what they felt was important to them, within the context of the overall theme. (For an overview of the small group interviews *vide* Appendix H)

Following Patton (1990), familiar language was used so that by 'using words that make sense to the interviewee, words that reflect the respondent's world view' (p. 312), the power differential which is automatically balanced in the researcher's favour, was reduced. As noted by Fontana and Frey (1994), the researcher was aware that the interviewing style has a bearing on the results of the study. With this in mind the interviews were conducted in the school library and/or the media room and the children were seated in a circle.

The researcher was against taking notes during the interview sessions so as not to hinder the flow of the interview. As mentioned by Powney and Watts (1987), voice recording the group interviews had the disadvantage that it would be difficult to make a distinction between comments and to identify particular speakers when it came to the transcribing stage. Therefore, the decision was taken to video record all the interviews and in this way it was possible to record their speech, as well as their gestures and body language. The group interviews lasted approximately forty five minutes each and all the interviews were transcribed and a selection which were used in this study, were translated by the researcher from Maltese into English who remained as faithful as possible to the original text.

Once the footage was edited, each participant was given a CD with a compilation of highlights from the online interactive sessions and the group interviews as a memento (*vide* Appendix I).

3.6   Strengths and limitations of the research design

As with most projects involving data collections, a number of challenges had to be overcome during this stage of the study. Research is a great learning opportunity regardless of the obstacles one might experience along the process. One lesson that the researcher learnt from this experience is that data collection is a challenging experience, especially in this case since interactive online sessions were used as a springboard which enabled the researcher to identify the main themes which were later used for the interviews Thus the researcher learnt that in conducting research, it is important to be flexible and to be able to find ways to carry out the study, even if it means that you have to slightly modify the research question/s or methodology.

She acknowledges the importance of personal and professional connections to schools as it would have been challenging to find ten children (including their parents) who would have been willing to commit to this study without the support received from the school and the authorities. Overall, the researcher received sufficient support from the selected schools and she was satisfied with the outcome and the active participation of the children. Both the online sessions, as well as the interviews, resulted in sufficient diversity within the small cohort and in the long run, benefits were gained from focusing on one specific field with a strong researcher-participants relationship (Merriam et al, 2002). However, this said, some aspects of the collection of data could have served as limitations to the present study and need to be acknowledged and addressed.

A possible limitation of this study is the sample selection. This study utilised participants on an availability basis. Although in general, the participants provided valuable data for reflection, some of them were limited in their use of media other than television. Although one may also add that this helped the researcher to make comparisons between the children.

Another possible limitation was the way the children were paired and grouped. During the online sessions the children were paired at random, however during the interviews this was not possible since two thirds of the group had moved on to single sexed secondary schools. Group dynamics may have influenced the communication flow and the way the children presented themselves, particularly when two members had a strong friendship.

While reviewing the data collection process as described above, the researcher observed that the process had given her the opportunity to further develop a number of skills which are essential for her role as a pedagogue. She feels that her interviewing skills have been honed and finely tuned through the experience of this process. This said, the researcher is aware that although the online activities enabled her to identify the main themes, some children may have not found some of the themes appealing or had limited knowledge/experience and consequently did not contribute wholly during the discussions. Similarly, the researcher acknowledges that given the organisation of turn-taking practices in talk interaction the researcher found herself attending more to those children who were more vociferous whilst others may have been left to be 'drowned out' in the discussions. Due to these instances potential data may have been missed.

The researcher believes that by conducting observations and interviews as methods of inquiry, not only did the study take into account the 'voice' of the children in their own familiar setting; it also supported the notion of 'truth ... as a social construction and inextricably linked to the meanings of the study's participants' (Macdonald et al. 2002: 140). It is these two subjectivist elements which emphasise the researcher/participant relationship and how the former sought to understand the situation from the latter's point of view that is crucial here as they marked the study as ontologically and epistemologically different from objective research.

However this said the researcher is also aware of researcher's/participant's bias. Although the participants did not perceive the data collection sessions as a

primarily educational activity, the fact that the data collection sessions were carried out within the school context and knowing that the researcher was a member of the University might have motivated them to give responses which the researcher wanted to hear or which allowed them to present themselves in a good light. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, 'any' identity construction offered a valuable source for reflection.

The researcher also acknowledges that her interpretation of the data is only one out of many other possible interpretations and that the narrative which has been constructed must be in part, a product of her own life history. For example, it is clear that in asking about media practices, the media forms which the researcher engages in and the value they hold for her must have influenced the questions asked and the responses she gave during the sessions. Moreover, the logic and sequence imposed in the writing of the narrative which has been constructed may have not broadly captured the constant flux of identities and their intersections. Some missed temporal and spatial context cues may have been potentially significant in shaping the analysis. Indeed, the notion of identities as being actively constructed and negotiated are always open to question, as one can never be sure about the extent to which the participants' responses and accounts have been influenced by broader influences of social power.

Finally, a common criticism of case studies similar to the one being presented in this study is its lack of generality. Considering that the aim of this study was to investigate a particular cultural context, in which the media plays a major role, one can conservatively presume here that a comparison with other similar studies can

contribute to a more universal theoretical understanding of media and identity construction.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the epistemic and ontological stance on which this study is based has been presented. Social constructionists assume that our understanding of the world in which we live in, is constructed from the social interactions which take place between people in everyday life (Burr, 2003). In reference to identity, social constructionism views individuals as continually producing and constructing identity through language (Shotter and Gergen, 1998). Given that this study is set within a social constructionist perspective, it followed that the qualitative approach, which foregrounds the constructive force of language and views reality as subjective and socially constructed (Wildemuth, 1993), would do justice. The underlying premise of the qualitative approach is that participants actively make and express meaning about their engagement with the social world by drawing upon resources, namely skills, interests and social tools, the foremost one being language (Ravet, 2007). By conducting observations and interviews as methods of inquiry, this small scale case study sought to provide a deeper understanding of identity and its socially constructive nature.

In this study, a 'grounded interpretative approach was taken, in the sense that theory was generated through the research data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Another important underlying epistemic assumption on which this study is based is that by laying emphasis on researcher/participant involvement, bias was recognised and acknowledged (Mellon, 1990). The critical views presented in this study

reflect the researcher's interpretation of the participants' discursive construction of identities which emerged during the online activities and the small group interviews.

The next three chapters present the findings of the study, along with the reflections and discussions supported with examples from the data and specific references to the research questions. These are organised as follows. In Chapter 4, the numerous strategies that the children used in order to derive meaning from their active engagement with different forms of media are discussed.

In Chapter 5, the distinctive discourses which the participants came into contact with in their engagement with the media are identified. These are: the interplay between local and foreign media, parental regulations regarding the media, intergenerational knowledge, skills and attitudes towards the media and perceptions of the 'Other' through the media.

In Chapter 6, the researcher presents her findings relating to the identities constructed by the children of themselves and 'others' and refers to the linguistic and cultural resources which were drawn upon by the children.

CHAPTER FOUR   ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS
Strategies utilised during engagement with the media

4.1   Introduction

This chapter focuses on the first research question which is concerned with the strategies used by the participants to derive meaning through active engagement with popular media forms. This study views the participants as active media users (Bolin, 2011), a concept borrowed from the subject of cultural studies. Within this perspective, media users are not assumed to be passive but rather they bring with them and apply in their engagement with the media their own accumulated knowledge and experience. In this sense, media engagement is viewed as a 'contextualised media experience' which emphasises the context-dependent nature of media usage (Lemish 2007). Earlier in Chapter Two, it was argued that within the multimodal and multiliteracies framework as propagated by the NLS, people are viewed as actively moving between five semiotic systems in every day life – *linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural* and *spatial* (Anstey and Bull, 2006)

In the context of this study, this is important since the media constitute all of the above. The analysis of the data that follows will suggest that in utilising these semiotic systems whilst engaging with the media, the children used various strategies to derive meaning. These strategies were identified from observations of the online interactive sessions with regard to the use of the computer whilst playing games and from data gathered during the follow up group interviews which explored the children's use of other popular forms of media, namely computer, the internet, television, computer games, music and print.

These strategies were collated by the researcher under three broad stages, namely *initiating, sustaining* and *extending* the contextualised media experience. These stages will be defined in greater detail in the subsequent sections.

1. *Initiating the contextualised media experience* involves selecting and shifting between languages to maximise media engagement.

2. *Sustaining the contextualised media experience* consists of drawing upon a broad knowledge base about different semiotic systems (linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial) and knowing how and when to use it.

3. *Extending the contextualised media experience* reflects establishing continuities across and between social spaces, such as the home, school and recreational places through media practices to increase opportunities for identity choices. This allows for bringing over literacy skills associated with school 'space' onto media practices associated with home/bedroom 'space' and *vice versa*. This occurs on an ongoing basis by the children during their media engagement in their every day life.

This chapter begins with a listing of the forms of media used regularly by the children in their daily lives. Following this, the three broad stages of the contextualised media experience will be discussed and presented using examples from the data to illustrate the points.

4.2   The availability of media in the children's households

The children's access to various media differed significantly, as presented in Table 4.1 which lists the different types of media available to the children within their homes.

Table 4.1   **Media available in the children's homes**

	Frankie	Andy	Nick	Robbie	Samuel	Lottie	Randy	Sadie	Daphne	Angie
Computer in child's home	√	√	√	√	×	√	√	√	√	×
Internet access in child's home	×	√	√	√	×	√	√	√	×	×
Computer with internet access in living room	×	×	√	√	×	×	×	×	×	×
Computer without internet access in living room	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	×
Computer with internet in child's bedroom	×	√	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	×
Computer without internet in child's bedroom	√	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Computer with internet access in sibling's bedroom	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	√	×	×

Note: If there was a computer within the child's household, there was only one.

Table 4.1   Media available in the children's homes (cont.)

	Frankie	Andy	Nick	Robbie	Samuel	Lottie	Randy	Sadie	Daphne	Angie
Television in home	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
TV set in bedroom	×	×	√	×	×	√	×	×	×	×
TV in living room	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Satellite	√	×	√	√	×	√	√	×	×	×
Cable	×	√	×	×	×	×	×	√	×	√
Terrestrial stations only	×	×	×	×	√	×	×	×	√	×
DVD player	√	×	√	√	×	√	√	×	√	×
Cell phone	×	×	√	×	×	√	√	×	×	√
Radio	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
iPod/MP3 or MP4	×	×	√	×	√	×	×	√	×	×
CD player	√	√	√	√	×	√	×	×	√	×
Handheld video game player	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	√	×	×
PlayStation	×	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	×
Print material	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

As can be seen from Table 4.1, Angie, who came from a less media rich home had four different types of media whilst Nick, who came from a more media-rich home had ten different types of media. On average, the children had around seven different types of media at home.

Table 4.1 shows that the availability of computers in the participants' homes also varied significantly. Out of the ten participants, only eight had a computer at home, and in each case, this was the only computer within the household. Out of these eight participants only six had internet access. Therefore four out of the ten participants did not have internet access.

With regard to the location of the computer within the household, out of the eight children that had a computer, three of them were in the living room, three of them were in the bedroom and two of them were in the bedrooms of their siblings. As illustrated in the table above, two of the participants who had a computer within their home did not have internet access.

All the participants had at least one television set in a communal space, such as the living room and two had a second TV set in their bedroom/private space. The children's exposure to local and global media through television varied greatly depending on the selection of TV service their parents subscribed to. While a wide variety of channels are available on satellite and cable, the selection is limited when only terrestrial stations are available.

Eight participants said that they played games regularly on the Playstation console. All the children frequently listened to popular music using various types of media to include radio, MP3 players and CD players. They also downloaded music from the internet. As the table above illustrates, all the children made use of print media.

4.3　Initiating the contextualised media experience

Initiating the contextual media experience involves selecting the various elements of the media engagement, be it the medium, the genre, the language, the timing, the setting as well as the purpose. To use an analogy, if a boy has been given a project about the forthcoming local feast in his home town, he may commence this assignment by referring to the pamphlet he received during Sunday Mass. He may then speak to his parents about last year's feast. He may refer to the Church website in Maltese as well as other material, such as tourist brochures in English.

Similarly, it was noted that when the children initiated the contextualised media experience, they were required to make strategic choices in terms of type of media, genre and language/s, among others. These choices are determined by what the individual wishes to achieve, knows how to use and can understand. While the type of media and genre is an individual act of one's choice, the language options are historically and culturally determined, and subsequently are usually context bound. From the findings, it was apparent that language choices played a crucial role in the participants' engagement with local and global media. This is significant since the research focus of this study takes into account socio cultural influences on language and literacy. In the next section, this is further elaborated upon and examples from the data are used to illustrate the various aspects of this issue.

4.3.1　Strategy: Selecting between languages

The data shows that one of the key factors in the use of media was the need to make language choices. The children gave many examples of TV programmes which they chose to watch on terrestrial, global, and niche channels made available in 'the

current phase of plenty' (Ellis, 2000: 39). The children opted for programmes on channels in Maltese, English and Italian. The most popular channels were *TVM* (local), *One* (local), *Disney Channel* (American), *Fox Kids* (American), *Italia Uno* (Italian) and *Rete 4* (Italian). The majority of the children enjoyed watching films or TV series on DVDs. They selected productions which were predominantly American in origin, however some of the children chose to watch local productions on DVDs. During the fieldwork, it was noted that the children showed a preference for popular action/adventure, fantasy and comedy genres. Examples include *Smallville, Home Alone* (action), *Lord of the Rings (fantasy), The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (fantasy), Giselle (local drama), *Is-Sur Gawdenz Bilocca* (*Mr Gawdenz Bilocca* (local comedy), *Mr Bean* and *The Simpsons* (comedy).

With regard to television, the majority of the participants believed that by understanding English they gained access to an extensive range of programmes, information about international celebrities, consumer products, lifestyles and belief systems, which the Maltese language did not allow them to.

They chose programmes in English since, as Andy stated, voicing the majority: 'When they are in English I understand them' (Andy, Interview 1). Their options were made even wider by another possibility as Nicky explained: 'When the film is in French, I can still follow it because they always have subtitles in English, that's why!' (Nicky, Interview 5).

With regard to non-English television channels, the children chose to watch a number of Italian channels. They repeatedly mentioned that they watched programmes on various Italian channels on a regular basis. The following are some examples of Italian channel that the children viewed. For example, Frankie liked to watch *Italia 1* and *RAI 2*, Andy preferred *Canale 5* while Angie opted for *Rete 4*. It was noted that the most popular Italian channel with virtually all the participants was *Italia 1*. Most of the programmes they watched on this channel were TV shows/series and films which appealed to an audience in their pre-teens.

In line with other research, the participants were keen followers of the wrestling series, commercialised by World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and popular with other children in the same age group abroad (Xiaozhang, (2006) and Taborini et al. (2008)). Although these programmes were American productions, the Maltese participants came into contact with them dubbed in Italian when they were transmitted via the Italian channels. To this effect, exposure to Italian in the informal environment often led to spontaneous acquisition of the language. Andy gave the following explanation:

> I learn it [Italian] from TV, when I watch wrestling. After each programme it says '*Ovvero: Non provare questo a casa!*' [Warning: Don't try this at home] (Andy, Interview 1).

Similar findings were reported by Camilleri and Caruana (1991) in their study with a group of primary aged participants who knew simple words and sentences in Italian, as a result of being regularly exposed to Italian through television (*vide* Section 1.4.2).

It was noted that the other non-English television channel mentioned by the children was Middle East Broadcasting Centre, (MBC) and that only two children said that they had occasional contact with it.

> Sometimes when I switch from one channel to the next I come across a guy with a thing on his head (Arab head dress) on it (MBC) talking blah, blah, blah (Samuel, Interview 2).

The majority of the participants enjoyed listening to music, although naturally the level of interest and taste varied from one child to another. They followed mainstream music programmes, while they also shared fan cultures by watching videos, learnt lyrics and how to sing tunes. From the group interviews, it was noted that the children listened to songs which were mainly in English and Maltese. They also updated their knowledge about singers/bands. They did this by engaging in specific media practices such as sharing music links via social network systems (mainly *Youtube*), browsing the internet for official websites/online fan sites and by watching a music channel which shows music videos. The following are some of the children's experiences: 'I watch my favourite songs on MTV (TV channel)' (Lottie, Interview 5). Similarly,

> I download my own music from sites ...we have a wire and I connect it to the computer and then I put the music on my MP4 (Sadie, Interview 5).

Examples of the children's preferred internationally renowned music genres included pop, R'n'B and techno. As Samuel commented, 'I don't like techno much, I like Reggae and R'n'B (Samuel, Interview 5). When asked about the songs/singers they liked to listen/view they gave numerous names of Maltese and

American performers. Randy gave the following examples, 'Maltese ones Joe Demicoli, Fabrizio, Olivia Lewis…and Eminem, Akon, Avril Lavigne…' (Randy, Interview 3).

The children did not make any reference to Italian singers/bands. In contrast with the popularity of Italian television (and language) among the children, they reported that they did not listen to Italian songs but preferred to listen to songs in English and Maltese. This is a very different scenario to the researcher's personal experience where she grew up surrounded by Italian music. As mentioned in Section 1.2, in the 1970s and 1980s, both the English and the Italian languages were very much an integral part of everyday experiences with media, namely television and radio.

If reference is made to Jan's (2009) suggestion, that people choose foreign media which they find culturally proximate, then it is relevant to consider language as a cultural specific element, as having had a strong bearing on the music choices that the children made. As in the example above with regard to foreign music, the children may have found cultural proximity primarily with English songs rather than Italian ones. The result of the official deregulation of local broadcasting, which occurred in the early 1990s, was that English became more prevalent over the Italian language. As explained in Section 1.4, currently within the local media landscape, Italian songs are given less exposure than British/American songs. To this effect, Italian songs remain regional whereas British/American songs reach global audiences, including the Maltese ones.

The predominance of the British/American language continues to be reinforced through the strong promotion it receives via the internet, CD sales and popular music TV channels. As a result of their media practices, the children were familiar with these music providers. Music, unlike films and sometimes computer games, is not dubbed but left in the original linguistic semiotic system. Thus, another possible reason why the children opted to listen to British/American and not to Italian songs is that since English is the more predominant language in Malta, the children readily understood songs in English, but not in Italian.

The researcher's observation here is that how media content is represented in terms of language, mode and medium, is a crucial aspect of how it becomes culturally utilised. This occurs on both a personal level and also on a collective level within the local context. These findings suggest that knowledge of language/s plays a significant role in the type of music the children chose to listen to and more generally, in the type of media practices in which they engaged.

So why did the children watch TV programmes in Italian? This may not be contradictory to what was discussed above, given the programmes the children said they watched which were mainly: cartoons, adventure/drama, films and action series. Producers of such TV genres intentionally make the visual, spatial and gestural semiotic systems central in this type of productions to maximise viewing. This issue will be explored further in Section 4.4. At this point it is suffice to say that by choosing to view certain genres/programmes in Italian the children moved from the stage of initiatiating to sustaining the contextualised media experience.

4.3.2 Strategy: Shifting between Maltese and English

The children used the computer and internet for entertainment and educational purposes. As other research has suggested, the children accessed the *Google* search engine to seek information (De Haan, Kuiper and Pijpers, 2011). Some of the children who were more proficient in English than the others, believed that by having English in their repertoire of languages they could access and choose from a much more extensive choice of educational, entertaining and social networking websites and software than was available in Maltese. Lottie gave her view on the subject:

Table 4.2   Extract from transcript of Interview 12

Speaker	Dialogue
Lottie:	On the computer there's a lot of stuff in English. Almost everything is in English!
Reseacher:	Does it bother you?
Lottie:	Not at all. I have so much choice and once I'm learning the language, I can always learn words I don't know.

It was noted that when the children used the computer for educational purposes, they accessed online material in English and Maltese but not in Italian. At the time the study was conducted, Maltese and English were formally taught subjects whereas Italian was not. The researcher is of the belief that the children had not received adequate formal instruction to acquire sufficient proficiency in this foreign language. The little Italian the children knew did not suffice for proficient and engaged reading. Text based websites place emphasis on the linguistic semiotic system, since they are constructed for a particular purpose – to provide information to readers.

When the children had to look up information for school projects which were related to the local context, personalities and/or events, they mentioned that they chose websites in Maltese. However, when these websites in Maltese were lacking or limited, like their counterparts abroad, (Holmes, 2004) the children shifted substantially towards websites in English when using the internet. Though this shift might be interpreted as a decline in the use of the mother tongue, one should not overlook the broader local socio-linguistic context in which these children are situated. Given the bilingual educational context in Malta, not only is this 'shifting' perceived as commonplace, the children's class teacher approved of this practice. Andy explained how he went about looking up information on the internet for a school project:

Table 4.3   **Extract from transcript of Interview 4**

Speaker	Dialogue
Andy:	Let's take *Google*...I wrote www.recycling.com and found loads of information.
Researcher:	In English or in Maltese?
Andy:	I found much more [information] in English. It's still good because I found that they recycle like we do.
Researcher:	Did you leave it [information] in English or did you translate it into Maltese?
Andy:	No I left it in English. My class teacher lets us. She said that it's good like that.
Daphne:	I did mine [project] in English too!

One reason for this practice may be that within the Maltese primary school culture, students are encouraged to harness their second language as a learning resource (NMC, 1999). Similarly, the official website (http://skola.gov.mt/primary) of the

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Education Division (Ministry of Education), which was used for the online interactive sessions during data collection, encourages students to practice and learn English, (an international language), by providing primary students with a collection of authorised search engines, directories and portals to other 'edutainment' sites in English. At the time the study was conducted, no other foreign languages were promoted in the section called 'Links' within this official website. For this reason, it was not possible to include online interactive games in Italian, the other foreign language the children said they were exposed to, particularly while viewing favourite programmes on Italian TV channels. It was also not possible to use ones in Maltese, since the few websites in existence at the time did not offer a variety of interactive options for children. This is likely to be due to limited economic resources to fund such type of edutainment interactive games in the native language.

One of the aims which is being promoted by the NCF writers (2011), is that of establishing links across subjects to reinforce learning. In order to do this, they are proposing eight learning areas. One learning area is languages, which focuses on the teaching of Maltese, English and foreign languages. The NCF is proposing to introduce a foreign language awareness programme during the second primary cycle (Years 3-6) which will be taught by subject specialist primary school teachers.

The above section refers to the learning experiences of the participants in terms of language. This research has adopted the notion that individuals do not have singular but multiple identities. Given that a child of this age is a student who

spends many hours learning each day, as is evident in these findings, the identity descriptor of a learner is likely to be one of these multiple identities of the participants. The concept of learner identity will be further developed in Chapter 6.

4.3.3 Analysis: Initiating the contextualised media experience

As the data presented so far illustrates, the social context impinges on media practices. One important cultural resource that was identified is the repertoire of languages that children possess and use while engaging with the media. The children drew upon their knowledge and linguistic resources to suit particular purposes and contexts in which they happened to be. The qualitative methods employed in this study were found extremely valuable in capturing and analysing this active negotiation process in which the children engaged. It is not sufficient to think of media engagement in terms of just playing a song, accessing a website or watching a TV programme. The data shows that in engaging with the media, the children not only needed to draw upon resources, strategies, knowledge, attitudes and skills, they also needed to know how and when to use them. Moreover, it was noted that since the media practices they engaged in involved multiple forms of representation, this often required processing different semiotic systems, at times simultaneously, in order to derive meaning. This is elaborated upon further in the next section.

4.4 Sustaining the contextualised media experience

This next stage refers to drawing upon the *linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural* and *spatial* semiotic systems to sustain the ongoing contextualised media experience and progress further from the initiating stage.

Referring once again to the example of the boy with the school project about the local feast in his home town, this stage involves collating the information and images that he gathered and presenting them as a write-up. In this study, this has been termed as sustaining the contextualised media experience.

The subsequent sections refer to the findings in the light of how the children used the semiotic systems in their active engagement with the media.

4.4.1 Strategy: Using auditory cues

The children in this study used aural skills in their engagement with the media. They utilised their listening skills particularly when they were watching foreign programmes. As Andy mentioned:

> I listen very hard and do not talk to others. I do not speak to my mum. I tell her "Don't talk to me" or I put the volume up so that it is not low and I understand better (Andy, Interview 1).

Similarly, auditory cues became particularly important when the participants engaged with music. They engaged in two modes of listening: passive and active. Passive listening occurred in situations, such as when Randy stated that she listened to music concurrently while she did her homework and chatted to friends. Similarly, Nick gave another experience in which passive listening occurred during evening bedroom routines: 'In the evening when I'm in bed I read and listen to music and sleep with it [headphones] on' (Nick, Interview5).

The other mode of listening, which was more prevalent, was active listening. With regard to active listening, the performers' style of music and/or voices were

important cues for the children. 'The words of my favourite songs stick in my head and in my mouth' (Nick, Interview 8). Active listening was carried out both as a solitary and/or shared experience within social spaces, such as the home or recreational places. For example, Robbie commented: 'I have a habit, when I don't have much to do; I put on the headphones, take my MP4 and go off for a walk with my dog' (Robbie, Interview 5). The children gave many examples of active listening as a shared experience carried out in virtual space, drawn from many music videos they passed on to friends through filesharing networks: 'Till now they've sent me ones [music video] of Olivia Lewis and Klinsman' [Maltese singers participating in the Eurovision Song Contest] (Lottie, Interview 3).

Active listening was reinforced by repeated renderings of the songs, a process which is similar to the manner in which people view repeatedly favourite recorded programmes (Robinson, 1997). It was noted that the children listened repeatedly to some songs more than others for one or more of the following reasons. The songs were either catchy, received extensive radio airplay or else they liked the performers and their music styles. As Nick explained:

> My father tells me that his music [DJ Tiesto] sounds as if he is banging
> on pots and pans. I just love his beat because his music ..., it's the kind
> of music I dance to in my dance classes (Nick, Interview 5).

The children projected themselves through music. They gave several examples of music related experiences which were tied to larger practices. For example, they took up dance/voice coaching classes, took part in annual school concerts and in local parish youth club festivals and voted during international music events such as the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). Drawing on Gee's (2005) discussion on

identity, the researcher considers these discursive and social practices as the building blocks through which the children constructed their identities through d/Discourse, that is language plus other "stuff". This concept of construction of identities is further elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

4.4.2 Strategy: Using visual/gestural/spatial cues

The findings showed that the children used other cues besides auditory ones when they engaged with the media. The rich multimodal world which the children inhabit provides them with a vast array of visual text. In the case of music, videos are produced and marketed for commercial and artistic purposes. These generally consist of the song blended with one or more styles of film techniques. The children listened and viewed song videos on television and websites.

Facial expressions and body language, as well as layout and organisation of objects and space (Anstey and Bull, 2006), were important cues identified by the children when they watched music videos. Moreover, they were able to follow the narrative and other animations in song videos. Lottie gave the following example: '*When I'm Gone* is about his daughter, his [Eminen, the singer] life like so ...it's very nice.' (Lottie, Interview 3).

On several occasions, the participants talked enthusiastically about their TV viewing strategies. For example they talked about the various TV genres they watched, such as sports, cartoons, action movies and mainstream comedies. The children appeared to be familiar with the visual, gestural and spatial semiotic systems and they could distinguish real life locations from fictitious settings. As

Frankie described: 'It's [referring to an Italian TV soap opera *Sentieri*] all located abroad...they have beautiful landscapes! You notice at once that it's not set in Malta' (Frankie, Interview 7).

Much of the children's conversation with regard to this issue, focused on the centrality of the image in screen media. Randy explained that visual cues assume significant importance in her engagement with global media because of her limited literacy skills and lack of proficiency in foreign languages (mainly English and Italian): 'I follow the images' (Randy, Interview 6).

Similarly, Lottie stated that before she formally started learning Italian at secondary level, she relied on the visual/gestural/spatial semiotic modes during viewing:

> When I was in Year 6 and I used to watch programmes on the Italian channels, I didn't know Italian then and I didn't have anyone to turn to, to explain to me what they were saying. So I used to follow by looking at their [actors'] gestures, their actions...I managed fairly well. (Lottie, Interview 12).

As discussed earlier in Section 4.3.1 when the children watched TV programmes, such as the wrestling series on Italian channels, they capitalised on their knowledge and understanding of the visual and spatial semiotic systems to actively derive meaning while viewing. The children seem to resort to this strategy when they watched particular TV genres such as action/adventure, fantasy, comedy and sports. It is common to find that, producers of such genres maximise on the visual and the gestural semiotic systems as they have a populist appeal to fulfill formulaic promises.

During computer use, the visual also helped the children to model the task at hand. 'When I play the worm game on the computer, it shows me how to play it and I understand' (Sadie, Interview 9). In line with other research (Johnson and Hegarty (2003), the children said that when they used the computer to carry out searches on the internet, the sites which had high visual content offered a motivating experience. As Nick stated:

> My father and I are keen *Ferrari* fans. For example, I look up *Ferrari* sites... then I click on *Pictures*. We stay looking at the pictures...awesome! (Nick, Interview 5)

Implicit in the issue mentioned above, is the idea that screen media, such as television and the computer, 'offer equality of access to text' (Bromley, 2001: 62) as meaning can be derived across the different semiotic modes. Given the nature of multimodal text, it is not enough to only understand the meaning in each mode and not understand how all the different modes interact with each other to create meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001).

The data shows that, not only did the children know how to combine the different semiotic modes to derive meaning while engaging with different media text; they also established which modes were given prominence in creating different types of meaning. For this reason, the children seemed to show a preference for media text in which the visual mode is given central prominence, such as music videos, websites based on images, computer games and TV programmes.

Kress (2010) suggests that the screen has become our primary vehicle of communication, and more significantly, images have become increasingly

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prominent carriers of meaning. This means that, apart from making sense of pictures, media users also need to understand the use and the application of the different codes and conventions which govern this mode of representation. With regard to computer games, codes and conventions are very salient and although they take many different forms, they are distinguished by basic fundamental characteristics which include: difficulty levels, hidden information and randomness (Malone and Lepper, 1987). The children said that they liked to play games on the computer or on the PlayStation console. Eight of the participants said that they played regularly. Examples of computer games which the children said they played include *Resident Evil, Tomb Raider, RuneScape, Need for Speed, FIFA World Cup, Disney games and Bratz games*, amongst others.

During the online interactive games, the children demonstrated that they understood the use and the application of the different codes and conventions and utilised them to find their way around. The following data extract is taken from one of the online interactive sessions where Andy and Angie had to help *Archibald the Ant* gather food for his ant colony without being eaten up by predators. The children found this game stimulating and it presented the children with a number of cues. Rich data clearly emerged from this online activity. The researcher has therefore made reference to this game with both pairs of children, namely Andie and Angie, as well as Nick and Daphne.

Table 4.4   Extract from transcript of Online Activity 5

(Note: In the following sequences of the transcript a description of the functions is in the left column and the dialogue is in the right column).

Speaker	Description of function	Dialogue
	Screen 1: Background information *Archibald the ant walks near the picnic basket. Andy clicks on the right arrow. Then he clicks on the left arrow so that he makes the ant walk towards the basket. When the ant gets there it eats the biscuit.*	
Angie:		Hurry!
	Screen 2: Animation *The ant moves away from the basket and on its way meets a bug.* *Andy clicks on the right arrow. Then he clicks on the left arrow so that the ant does not get eaten up.*	
Angie:		Take it!
	Andy moves the top arrow so that he makes the ant move upwards.	
Angie:		Come on! Move it upwards!
	Andy manages to make the ant turn upwards to successfully gather the honey.	
Angie:		You did it. You did it!

This sequence consists of a series of functions carried out by Andy and a series of directives given by Angie. Angie does not touch the keyboard, only Andy does this. There is no direct student-student talk as children do for example when they engage in exploratory talk in which they make a series of hypotheses and justifications (Wegerif and Schrimshaw, 1997). This may have occurred since by means of the animation presented on the computer Andy knew exactly what he had to do. He had to help *Archibald the Ant* gather honey without being eaten up by the bug by using the arrow functions.

From the data extract, it would seem right to assume that Andy's perception of the task may have also derived from his knowledge and familiarity with codes and conventions incorporated in computer games since he was one of the participants who engaged in regular computer game playing. The visual cues, namely signs, design and symbolic representations intended for navigation purposes and to progress from one level of the game to the next (Deen and Korsman, 2010) guided Andy's game practice.

Since the focus of this study also aimed at exploring the children's construction of their identities, the strategies the children used during the online activities and which they referred to during the group interviews, revealed the repertoire of the different identities of the participants. It became evident that the identity of a hobbyist came to the fore. This is of particular significance due to its relevance in the light of the third research question which is further considered in Chapter 6.

4.4.3 Strategy: Using spatial cues

Building on the above, it was noted that during playing computer games spatial cues seemed to be an important component. For example, during the online interactive sessions, the children often needed to find their way around settings and use positional play. Yee (2005, 2006) categorised players' behaviour under three primary motives namely *achievement* players who strive for game mastery; *social* players who want to interact; *immersion* players who want to engage in role play and be 'part of the story'. The online interactive sessions focused more on the latter type of games. The participants became 'part of the story' by moving between spaces - the real life space and the 3D space of the game. In the following extract,

Nick explains the challenges he faced as *Archibald the Ant* when looking for food for the ant colony:

Table 4.5   **Extract from transcript of Online Activity 5**

Child	Description of function	Dialogue
	ANIMATION TWO *Archibald the Ant moves along the path looking for food. He meets a bird pecking on a strawberry.*	
Nick	[Clicks on the arrow pointing downwards]	Let me click the one [arrow] showing DOWN.
Daphne	[Girl is excited]	Yes!
Nick:		What's next?
	ANIMATION THREE *Archibald the Ant moves along the path and meets a nature observer with a magnifying glass.*	
Daphne		Watch out! That was scary!
Nick		Gosh! He'll squash me with it [magnifying glass]

During this role play interactive game, the researcher noted that Nick assumed two 'identities.' The first identity was the character's identity. This was linked to virtual space. The second identity was his identity as Nick. This was linked to real life space. As the researcher had noted, the participant's use of language while he talked about his game experience had linguistic features and forms which reflected the speaker's multiple identities. For example, Nick used the 'I/me', first person singular both during the game as he played Archibald: 'Ouch, it [the broom] almost

swept me [as Archibald] to death!' (Nick, Online Session 5). This also occurred during the retelling about his game experience during the invitation to talk:

> I [as Archibald] was near the window pane and then I [as Nick] clicked on two [*points at the arrow on the computer screen*] and the maid with a duster appeared and she almost squashed me' (Nick, Online Session 5).

Nick used the linguistic feature 'I' as he moved between spaces, that is real life space and virtual space as he assumed different identities. Drawing upon Hall's (1992, 1996 and 1997) discussion on identities, the researcher can consider that Nick had a repertoire of identities, rather than one singular identity. In this case, the repertoire included the identities of a boy, a game player (hobbyist) and Archibald, the virtual character protagonist of the game. These identities were expressed in relationship to each other and were brought to the foreground by the particular social setting in which he found himself. In Chapter 6, the participants' construction of identities will be explored further.

4.4.4 Strategy: Using printed words as cues

The participants indicated that they also came into contact with print material, mostly in English and Maltese. The researcher noted that the print material which the children used was particularly linked to other forms of media. Popular films and TV series appeared to motivate a number of the participants to buy and/or read books (Testa, 2010). For example, Nick bought and read short extracts from *Harry Potter* in English after he had watched the film. Andy read *Giselle* in Maltese when the book was published since he was a keen follower of the local TV drama series.

On several occasions, the children used reading skills associated with traditional literacy learning when they engaged with the online interactive games. The online interactive games also included codes and conventions that form the basis of print text. For example, when they engaged with the text, the children read from top to bottom and used left to right directionality. They used reading skills, such as skimming techniques as in reading through for information and scanning techniques as in precise reading (Sutherland-Smith, 2002). During the online interactive games the children skimmed text in order to move quickly from one screen to the next. The children said that the competitive spirit of the game made them want to finish the game quickly and accomplish the tasks. 'I want to get to the end of the game fast, to see if I did well' (Samuel, Online Session 11).

One particular online interactive games session yielded further examples about the children's reading practices. The following extract is taken from the session where the children played *The Adventures of Archibald the Ant* game.

Table 4.6   Extract from transcript of Online Activity 5

Speaker	Dialogue
Researcher:	Does Archibald remind you of other animal characters?
Nick:	I have a book about ants but my younger brother tore it.
Daphne:	I've read quite a few books of the films I've watched which had animal characters... 101 Dalmatians, Nemo, Shrek...and Disney ones too!

The definition of literacy that emerges from this extract aligns with the view of literacy as a culturally and contextually situated set of multimodal practices as discussed in Section 2.7. Reading books, for example, requires Daphne to derive

meaning from printed words and still pictures. While she watches films, she is required to derive meaning from sound, music, words and moving images. Owing to the wide availability of print and electronic media text, Daphne could find the same narratives in different modes, such as oral, written, pictorial and animated. This allowed her to move across modalities with ease, while exploring how different modes convey meaning in different ways (Bearne, 2003). Not only did Daphne inhabit a rich, multimodal world; popular culture played a key role in the kinds of practices and texts that she used and understood.

Moreover, implicit in this is the idea that when Daphne read these types of books, watched Disney videos and played computer games, she embedded her identities into these practices. Since this study has adopted a social constructionist orientation, it regards individuals as having a repertoire of different identities rather than a singular identity. In Daphne's case, her possible identity descriptors could include the following; a Maltese person, a girl, a student, a media user and a Disney fan. The analysis presented in Chapter 6 will focus on the children, their engagement with the media and construction of identities.

With regard to television, one assumes that since the children followed foreign programmes having English subtitles, they had to skim through the text. According to Karamitroglou (1998) a literate person can normally read 150-180 words per minute that is between 2.5 and 3 words per second. What is of relevance to this study is not the rate at which the children read but rather the fact that reading became an integral part of the viewing experience. With regard to viewing dubbed films on TV, it was noted that three children used the scanning technique in a

particular way. They transferred skills and resources which are associated with school literacy onto the informal TV viewing experience. As Daphne explained: 'I used the dictionary when I pick up a new word [while viewing TV]' (Daphne, Interview 1).

The crucial point is that, in this case, the use of the dictionary during TV watching was not inappropriate since one normally associates it with school literacy rather than with entertainment. What is more significant is the purpose it was used for in order to meet contingent needs. Drawing on Barton and Hamilton's (1998) notion of interpretive repertoires and literacy, one can say that the girl used TV programmes in different ways to achieve different purposes. She used TV programmes to entertain herself, as well as to learn new words in a foreign language. Moreover, in so doing, Daphne used another strategy that of transferring skills and resource use which are associated with school literacy onto the informal TV viewing/learning experience. This will be elaborated upon further in Section 4.5.2.

Another girl, Lottie used scanning techniques to look up computers games she wanted to play.

> I'm a horror film fan [hobby] so I look up the section on horror in the catalogue when I rent DVDs. Then I look up say, the series *Resident Evil*
> ...
> (Lottie, Interview 3).

Whilst playing the interactive games the children used scanning techniques to select key words which were associated with the gaming experience such as 'load', 'start',

'next', 'help', and 'try again'. These words were crucial in helping the children interact efficiently with the game's interface and the game's content. They helped them follow instructions to find quests or move from one setting, or level, to the next. Samuel gave the following example from his experience:

Table 4.7   **Extract from transcript of Interview 5**

Speaker	Dialogue
Samuel:	I'd like to go on *RuneScape*. It's a game you play with many players.
Researcher:	Who are these players?
Samuel:	I don't know...from all over the world. There is written, for example 'Dragon fighter'.
Researcher:	A foreigner?
Samuel:	Yes, for example, a player in China...for example, he wants to trade swords.
Researcher:	How do you instruct each other?
Samuel:	Well I select words like 'Friends', 'Team', 'O.K.'
Researcher:	It's not complicated then.
Samuel:	No. but sometimes, for example, they still kill you. You go somewhere, there will be lava and so on, and they select 'Team', you think they are team mates and then they kill you.

In a way, gaming activities inevitably involve reading and occasionally writing associated with them. However, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) suggested, although reading remains a mental activity, the computer interface makes perception and reading 'more physical'. As the data given in Table 4.8 illustrates, during reading and playing, the participants engaged in the 'physical manipulation of objects [such as] the mouse, the joystick, the pressure pen and the touch screen' (2001: 68). The following extract taken from the fourth online interactive session *Junior's own adventure* demonstrates this:

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Table 4.8   Extract from transcript of Online Activity 1

Child	Description of function	Child's discourse
Lottie:	*Screen Information:* *Every hour, Dave climbed up to the top* *of the hill so he could look down and* *count all the sheep. He had to make* *sure they were all still there!* *The sheep wags its tail.* *Boy laughs and clicks on it. Nothing* *happens so he explores further with the* *mouse.* *Andy selects the word NEXT by* *clicking on it.* *The screen changes and they move on* *in the game.*	NEXT [points at the bottom of the screen].

4.4.5   Strategy: Using a combination of cues

Since computer games and online interactive games constitute multimodal forms of representation, the children were required to understand and combine multiple modes to derive meaning. One way of doing this was by using the strategy of reinforcing the visual cues, namely pictures and/or words with auditory cues as the following extract illustrates. In this online interactive game, Frankie and Robbie were on a safari mission to try to find a secret hidden in the Atari forest:

Table 4.9   Extract from transcript of Online Activity 10

Child	Description of function	Child's discourse
	Robbie clicks on one of the characters [Geoff] and gets a speech bubble: "I have some canarium seeds we can snack on. Not many but we can share them".	
Frankie		[Starts reading] I have some can...canr...seeds we can...
	Robbie clicks on the character and the speech bubble disappears and immediately a second speech bubble comes on screen: "Let's eat them" [visually the seeds are shown being munched away and the sound effect of someone munching is heard in the background].	
Frankie		Listen! [pauses and tilts his head] He is munching ...whatever those things are!
Robbie:		Gosh, he's a fast eater!

In this sequence, the boys do not discuss any proposals. Frankie starts to read at his own pace and soon encounters the word 'canarium' which he finds difficult to pronounce and understand. Although the two boys are meant to be working together, Robbie ignores what Frankie is reading and half way through the sentence clicks on the character and gets a second speech bubble. This outcome supports Lee's (1993) finding that boys in same sex groups have lowered level of positive socio-emotional interactions. More notably, Frankie's last utterance indicates that he is combining the different modes by attending to the sound effect, the images and last and possibly least the words to make meaning of that scene in the game.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) suggest that connections across different modes help to play complimentary roles, be hierarchically ordered and reinforce each

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other. It seems likely that Frankie's way of combining the different modes at that point is an example of the latter type. It would be simplistic to say that the boys were just playing a mindless adventure game. As the data suggests, children must master not only the technology but also the associated literacy practices, in this case computer game playing which involved reading, listening and utilising ICT skills, such as clicking. This means that rather than replacing older forms of literacy, the children integrated traditional with newer forms of literacy.

4.4.6 Other strategies

In discussing the various computer applications which users are required to master to be able to use the computer, three children said that they had to learn specific ICT skills. This was possible because when they bought the computer, the outlet provided them with a beginners' crash course. In this case these children used guided instruction as a strategy to acquire the necessary ICT skills.

> I learnt how to write using the keyboard and Microsoft Word, how to play games, how to get pictures, how to use *Encarta* (Frankie, Interview 5).

In contrast to this, the others acquired ICT skills in an unstructured, hands-on way. These children used experimentation as a strategy. 'I mucked up the computer a few times. No one taught me how... I learnt on my own!' (Randy, Interview 6).

Four children reported that they used different forms of media and applied different basic ICT skills concurrently, a finding also reported in Assam's study (2006). The children used the strategy of multitasking as the following extract illustrates:

I do my homework and at the same time I'll be online... if there's nothing going, I watch the DVD, or chat with friends or cousins living abroad, sometimes I look up websites of singers or play online games (Lottie, Interview 6).

4.4.7 Analysis: Sustaining the contextualised media experience

One might describe the participants as 'skilled' users of varied forms of media and conversant with a range of social and literate behaviours. Using the strategies identified above, combined with other appropriate skills, they were able to sustain the contextualised media experience on an ongoing basis in their every day media engagement. The increasing presence of media and technology in their lives in general and within the home/bedroom 'space' more specifically, has had a great effect on the practices associated with the social spaces they inhabited.

As the data shows, the far-reaching technological advances of contemporary times allowed the children to work, entertain, interact with family members, socialise with outsiders and so on, through their engagement with the media. This suggests that by being able to utilise a number of strategies to maximise their media engagement, the children were able to deal with a diverse range of social, cultural, local and international groups, as well as activities. This is contrary to suggestions that, due to technology and spending time engaging with the media at home or in their bedrooms, children have become isolated and introverted (Steyer, 2002).

4.5 Extending the contextualised media experience

This type of media experience can be described as being a progression from or 'an extension of' the initiating and sustaining contextualised media experience stages,

as described above. By taking media engagement to another level, the individual, in this case, the participants, extends his or her media experience.

With reference to the boy with the school project, he could possibly involve other children in his class to further develop his project and take part in an international competition. As a hobby, he could learn an instrument and become a member of his local band club and take an active role in his local feast.

4.5.1   Strategy: Consulting with a more knowledgeable other (MKO)

Most of the children's TV viewing occurred at home or at relatives' homes. It was noted that the majority of the participants used the strategy of consulting with family members, such as older brothers, sisters, parents and/or uncles when they encountered difficult words when they were watching programmes in foreign languages. This strategy was also used by two students who had limited skills in reading and writing when they used the computer. 'My father reads (online material on websites) to me' (Robbie, Interview 11). Furthermore, the findings show that in the absence of more knowledgeable others (MKOs) (Vygotsky, [1934], 1978) at home, one participant consulted the language teacher at school at the first opportunity. Nick shared his experience about his TV viewing:

> At that time [while watching the TV programme] I didn't understand.
> For example, I keep the word '*cioccolateria*' [chocolate shop] in my
> head. Then I ask my teacher (Nick, Interview 2).

This extract shows that the children used more knowledgeable others as a resource in order to maximise their engagement with the media. The concept of 'resource' is of considerable significance here since, as illustrated, the children actively

appropriated the media's messages and meanings to build on their knowledge and enhance their disposition to learn. In other words, the messages and the meanings which the children produced interactively with internet/television text were woven into broader socialisation processes. In this way, not only did the children find the means to extend the contextualised media experience, they also have routinely incorporated it as part of everyday home and school life.

4.5.2 Strategy: Bridging social spaces through practices

On numerous occasions, the children seemed to bridge the social spaces they inhabited. If space is conceptualised as a fluid and socially produced phenomenon (Skelton and Valentine, 1997), this helps us understand how children's meaning making often lies between the social spaces they inhabit (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005). While talking about their media experiences, the children gave various examples of how they bridged home space with school space and vice versa and in so doing they created a 'third space.' They did this by bringing over home-media practices into school space and likewise, school literacy practices into home space. For example, a number of children admired various sports and music personalities. Within the home space, they interacted with media text and drew upon literacy skills they acquired at school. For example: 'I sent one sms (instant messages) "Olivia is the best" during *Lejn il-Eurovision*' (Towards the Eurovision – local TV programme) (Robbie, Interview 10).

Frankie, who had a computer but did not have internet access at home, chose a more traditional approach and wrote a fan letter to the presenters of *Mini BugZ* (local children's programme), his favourite programme (Frankie Interview 1). Paralleling this, when the children were within their school space, they drew upon

experiences and practices related to the media they engaged with at home. For example, Andy wrote short entries about *Rey Mestiero*, his favourite wrestler and drew scenes from the wrestling game on the media diary (Andy, Interview 1). During a lesson on creative writing, he wrote about his favourite wrestler and finished his write up with some drawings. 'I love drawing the tattoos that *Rey Mestiero* has on his arms' (Andy, Interview 1).

Lottie, who was taking part in the performance of the school concert, reported that she was working on the choreography of a song by Michael Jackson with the other members of the cast. 'We do like the ones [performers] we see on music vidoes.' (Lottie, Interview 12).

During the data collection sessions, the researcher noted that on several occasions the children brought in contextualised knowledge acquired within the home space into the classroom space where the online sessions were held. For example, during one of the sessions, Daphne approached an online task by linking it to a traditional card game she knew how to play since it was based on the same game play:

Table 4.10   Extract from transcript of Online Activity 2

Child	Description of function	Child's discourse
	Instructions on screen: *Click on two envelopes with the same decoration, and they'll be filled with coins. Try to find pairs, so you'll have lots of good wishes in the New Year.*	
Nick:		PLAY [Nick reads out key word].
Daphne:		So what am I to do now?
	Music comes on.	
Nick:		Eh ….la la la la la [Nicky sings].
Daphne:		Ah! I know! You have to make them [match the envelopes] like playing cards.

Similarly, in another online session, Nick had to design an avatar as part of the task. He created an avatar based on a popular cartoon character which he had come to know through TV viewing at home, or what Darley terms as the 'sphere of reception' (200:147).

Table 4.11   Extract from transcript of Online Activity 8

Child	Description of function	Discourse
	Nick is creating an Alien (avatar). He is choosing body parts. He is choosing a pair of arms to put on his avatar. He drags the lobster type of arms onto the Alien he is creating.	
Randy:		Oh no don't do it like that!
Nick:		Nah…I won't do the lobster hands. Let me do this one. [He drags the hands of a body builder].
Randy:		Yeah give him body builder arms!
Nick:		I am going to do him up like Fred [clicks on them]. Look he looks like Fred Flintstone now!

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From the interviews, it transpired that Frankie, took lessons in voice-coaching, used the school computer during lunchtime to look up and read/learn the lyrics of the songs which were going to participate in the Eurovision song contest:

> The presenter said if you want more information, log onto the Eurovision website so I looked it up (on the class computer during lunchtime) for songs and updates' (Frankie, Interview 10).

Other children also reported that they used the classroom computers to play online games about their favourite popular culture characters or TV shows/films during lunchtime. As Randy remarked:

> We don't use the computer much with him [the teacher]. We only use the computer to play during break and with you [during the data collection sessions] (Randy, Online Session, 8).

This extract illustrates that out-of-school media practice, namely playing games on the computer, was generally marginalised within the traditional culture of the school since the children were only allowed to engage with them during their recreational time at school. This implies that within the school space, online computer games were constructed as a means of entertainment and not as activities which enhance learning and that 'learning' is constructed as not entertaining. However, as Gee (2003) argued, computer games offer children (players) unique opportunities on how to 'connect[s] different sign systems such as words, images, symbols, artefacts and so on' (p.207). Moreover, drawing on Marsh and Millard's (2006) suggestions, if students can be supported to bring their out-of-school (home) media practices into the classroom, a third space (a bridge between home/school can be created). In third space, children's identities as media users could be upheld.

'Third space' allows for the contextualised media experience to be extended. Knowing how to bridge social spaces is not enough for the children. They also need to be given the opportunities in which to use such a strategy.

4.5.3   Strategy: Negotiating temporal & spatial boundaries

As presented in Section 4.2 all the participants had at least one television set in a communal space, such as the living room and two had a second TV set in their bedroom/private space. Most children generally watched television before and after school during the week and in their free time on weekends. With regard to the location of the computer within the household, out of the eight children who had a computer, three of them had the computer in the living room, another three had the computer in the bedroom and two of them had it in the bedrooms of their siblings.

The findings show that two of the participants, namely Samuel and Daphne went to relatives' homes to access internet. Samuel also used an internet café as an alternative location to internet access at his relative's home. These children also accessed the internet at school. This is in line with other research, (Valentine et al. 2005) where children who had no or limited access to ICT at home, accessed it at school and a minority went to an internet café.

With regard to the location of the computer within the household, evidence of the 'bedroom culture' (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001, Selwyn, 2003) was also noted in the current study. Research shows that a shift in location of the computer often occurs from communal spaces such as the living room to the privatised space of the bedroom. In such studies, the 'bedroom culture' usually refers to a shift in location

of both the television and/or the computer. With reference to the findings of this study, evidence of this culture only emerged with reference to computer use.

It was noted that in the case of the two participants, who had the computer located in the individualised space of their siblings' bedroom they still made use of the only computer that was available at home. Sadie's experience highlights this situation:

> We are three [at home] so there are many of us. For example, I use it [the computer] after I come from school, from 2:30 to 4:30p.m, until my brother comes and takes over. Then my eldest sister uses it till late because it's [the computer] in her bedroom (Sadie, Interview 3).

This extract provides us with an opportunity to consider an alternative way of thinking about bedroom space and the implicit 'shifting geometry of social/power relations' that occur within it (Massey, 1994, Skelton and Valentine, 1997). The notion of space as a construct allows us to move away from viewing the bedroom space in terms of rigid personal versus communal spatial and temporal boundaries.

This is significant since one can theorise that, as a result of the time/space allocation with regard to computer use, a 'third' space was created in the bedroom space of Sadie's home. In Sadie's case, 'third' space can be viewed as an in-between space which is neither personal (exclusively belonging to Sadie's sister) nor communal (shared by other family members such as Sadie and her brother). In this sense, one can say that the spatial and temporal boundaries of the bedroom blur significantly.

Sibley (1995) suggested that the home is the 'locus of power relations' (p. 92). He argued that, as a result of the nature of the relationship between parents and their children, home space is always negotiated and in the making. Drawing upon Sibley, when there is only one computer in the house and this is located in the eldest child's bedroom, as in Sadie's case, the bedroom space may emerge as another 'locus of social relations' within the home space. In view of what Sadie said during the discussion, one might reason that her time limit was based on the following considerations: 'I [Sadie] am the first to return home from school at 2.30p.m. Then my brother turns up at 4:30p.m.' (Sadie, Interview 3). During this two hour period before the arrival of her brother and her sister, Sadie was allowed to take a short recreational break and use the computer before starting her homework. This suggests that temporal and spatial boundaries conditioned Sadie's computer use. On the other hand, one can suggest that in Sadie's case, as with other children living in similar circumstances, learning how to negotiate temporal and spatial boundaries at home becomes an important strategy that they are required to use when they engage with the shared used use of the computer.

4.5.4   Analysis: Extending the contextualised media experience

The findings presented in this section show why it is important to take a qualitative approach when it comes to studying children and their engagement with the media, as it is fundamentally a contextualised experience. Research on children and the media conducted through such an approach allow for studies, such as this one, to account for children's experiences, accumulated knowledge, practices, processes, to include strategies and skills. As media users, children are by far not a homogenous group.

The examples from the data have illustrated how the media has become increasingly integrated within the social spaces children inhabit and their daily routines. It is in this sense that media engagement can be viewed as a contextualised experience. If media engagement is understood as a contextualised experience, it is necessary to consider what media users *do* with the media. The strategies they use to deal with the type and availability of media in the home as well as the type of existing social relations which constitute it. Through this section, the researcher has considered the significant strategies used by children in their media engagement with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

4.6   Conclusion

The data shows that despite the fact that these children live on a small island, their lives are being shaped by changes brought about by globalisation and media/technology advances. One such change is reflected in the way they practice literacy. There is evidence here that the children have mastered, albeit to varying degrees, the literacy practices associated with a broader knowledge about text which often required them to process several modes simultaneously and understand 'how the different modalities are combined in complex ways to create meaning' (Snyder, 2001: 3). Another change is reflected in their aptitude to move across borderless social spaces, both in the physical and to a certain extent, in virtual space.

However, the children did not move as much across languages despite the 'increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000)

and as a result, they remained limited to the world view that came in through the media from the United States, Britain and Italy.

This chapter has explored the children's active engagement with different forms of media. It considered the social, cultural and literate knowledge that the children drew upon in deriving meaning during media engagement. The languages associated with the Maltese context and which prevailed within the social spaces the children inhabited, such as the home and the school, were drawn upon as cultural resources. The children also drew upon semiotic systems and meaning-making potentials of modes. They drew upon literacy practices and skills which ranged from traditional to more recent skills associated with communication and information media.

Finally, they also drew on their sense of the local, the regional (Italy) and the global. This meaning deriving process emerged as dynamic, ongoing and dependent on contingent variables arising from the contexts in which the children were in and the purposes they wanted to achieve. This is contrary to previously held views that children are 'deficient' and 'passive' (Winn, 1985), as a result of their engagement with the media.

One cannot deny that if there were to be no media the children could not engage with it, nor could they appropriate the meanings and messages in the way they habitually do. As illustrated in this chapter, just as we need to acknowledge that the children were able to use a number of strategies to successfully engage with the media, so we need also to consider that without language the children would have

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been unable to communicate effectively, nor represent their experiences to themselves and others. A number of underlying themes related to the children's engagement with the media and experiences as they interacted with the world around them are implicated in the findings presented above. These include engagement with local/global media, the social conditions within which engagement with the media takes place as well as, changing literacies. In the next chapter, these broad themes will be narrowed down to more personal and local context specific ones as drawn upon by the children themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE　　　　ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS
Discourses encountered through engagement with the media

5.1　　Introduction

This chapter addresses the second research question:

What discourses do Maltese children come in contact with, in their engagement with local and global media?

The previous chapter identified the forms of media which were mostly utilised by the children, as well as their perceptions of them and the strategies used. Children drew upon the semiotic systems to derive meaning while they actively engaged with the media. As active media users, the children drew upon these in their day-to-day engagement with the media, as well as while they went about constructing their understanding of the world. This implies that, how children make sense of their lives through their everyday engagement with the media cannot be separated from their experiences as they go about interacting with the wider culture and society.

This chapter examines the discourses which the children came in contact with, in their engagement with forms of the media, which were available in the mid late 2000s. Discourses of objects, events, persons and so on are the products of social interaction (Burr, 2003). Four discourses emerged from the interviews with the children: the interplay between local and foreign media; parental regulations regarding media content, 'space' use and time spent engaging with the media; intergenerational knowledge, skills and attitudes towards the media and perceptions of difference. The next section will consider the discourse of the interplay between the local and foreign media.

5.2   Discourse of the interplay between local and foreign media

The children were aware that by engaging with media, they formed part of a global audience which allowed them to share programmes, music, branded merchandise, updates on celebrities, information and games.

5.2.1   Television programmes

In their discussions about TV programmes, the participants noted that some local productions replicated the format and style of foreign ones. This is how Lottie described it:

> We Maltese are copy-cats. We steal ideas from foreign programmes and then just change it a bit here and there; whereas they [foreign media producers] come up with a whole new idea in the first place (Lottie, Interview 12).

The term 'copy-cat' is of great relevance in this context. Implicit in this, is the idea that the children rated local and foreign TV programmes on what they believed were markers of quality in television. The first attribute which was considered as a marker of quality in foreign media was 'originality', as the above quote illustrates. The children appeared to believe that local producers were not innovative. Andy remarked:

> The Maltese do not like to try out new programme ideas. The only types of programmes they like to do are programmes like *Giselle* [drama], *Dejjem tiegħek Becky* [*Forever yours Becky*, a soap opera] and the like (Andy, Interview 7).

This remark suggests that popular local TV productions tended to be based on ongoing, episodic works having a strong emphasis on romance or day-to-day story

lines. Another marker of quality was large production budgets. According to Daphne, 'I think we don't have a lot of money for media' (Daphne, Interview 7). Building on her statement, Frankie made the comparison:

> When I watch TV, they [foreign productions] have studio lights which are stronger than ours. The studio sets are nicer .... We need to fix our studios and get money to buy more cameras (Frankie, Interview 7).

A third attribute pointed out by Andy was audience reach:

> I think in Malta we are not that advanced in media. Our local stations are not transmitted via satellite (Andy, Interview 7).

He appeared to believe that local stations were insular since they transmitted programmes which appealed only to a small audience. The introduction of deregulation (as explained in Section 1.4.1) has not only made Maltese the dominant language on local TV stations but it has also made local productions more popular with Maltese viewers.

For example, a quarterly audience assessment study (2012) based on 1,820 viewers carried out by the Maltese Broadcasting Authority in October – December 2011 reported that the five most popular programmes during this period were as follows: *Deċeduti* (*Deceased* - Drama) 12%, *F'Salib it-Toroq* (*Crossroads* - Drama) 12%, *Xarabank* (*Bus* – Discussion programme) 9%, *Emilia* (*Emily* – Drama) 7% and *News* (on the Public Broadcasting Station) 7%.

All this suggests that, by forming their own perceptions about local and foreign programmes, the children were involved in a process in which they defined

themselves and others (Buckingham, 1993). In this case, it was expressed as an on-going, comparative exercise made possible by easy access to an extensive availability of foreign programmes. From an early age, the participants show that they were already forming their own perceptions, preferences and criteria for media consumption.

Findings from an extensive comparative study on the leisure culture of children and young people in twelve European countries at the turn of the century showed that foreign programmes, particularly those imported from the USA, were perceived by participants as being 'cooler', more professional and of better quality than their own local productions (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). The authors suggested an explanation for this might have been that the children and young people were more critical of their local media because it presented the familiar, whilst they were less critical of foreign media as it presented the unfamiliar.

In the current study, the participants might have perceived foreign productions, particularly those in English, as better due to the fact that they felt a strong affinity towards the English language. Moreover, as suggested by Livingstone and Bovill, the children in this study may also have felt inclined to embrace the familiar concepts and styles of productions in English.

At the time of the study, the phenomenon of imitation was particularly noticeable in the media. One such example which was brought into the discussion by the children was the popular reality TV show *Grande Fratello*, the Italian version of *Big Brother*. This TV production is one of many international television formats

produced under license such as *Who wants to be a Millionaire, The Weakest Link* and *Survivor* (Johnson-Woods, 2002, p. viii). The TV stations of those countries which bought the rights to produce their own version of the programme, had to follow the format in terms of 'logo, backdrops, graphics and information about screening times and so on' (Johnson-Woods, 2002: viii) as part of the license conditions. The reality show *Big Brother* was franchised in 33 countries in different continents (Buddy, 2007). The children were keen viewers of the Italian version *Grande Fratello* and not the other foreign versions. Frankie stated: 'I've been watching *Grande Fratello* on the Italian (Channel). It's the 68th day now' (Frankie, Interview 7).

Many of the children referred to the Italian version of *Grande Fratello*. The findings showed that even those children who actually had satellite TV at home, still watched this Italian programme. This was an interesting outcome since, as mentioned earlier in this study, over the years viewing of Italian channels has decreased due to the greater choice of channels which broadcast in English offered by satellite and cable TV. The children showed a preference for the Italian version, *Grande Fratello* rather than the English version B*ig Brother*. Malta was not one of the numerous countries which paid rights to produce a Maltese version of the series. However a 'copy-cat' series called *L-Ispjun (The Spy)* was produced and broadcast locally. It had the same concept as the original programme but differed sufficiently in the programme image, style of presenting, transmission duration and so on, so as not to breach copyright.

In line with the European comparative study, the participants were critical of local productions. In discussing *L-Ispjun*, the participants were critical of Maltese

housemates/ protagonists of the TV series, and the tasks the housemates had to carry out in each programme. Lottie commented:

> In *l-Ispjun*, I don't like the idea of having a brother and a sister like Danita and Dylon [two of the housemates]... always fighting, they're like cats and dogs, typical Maltese! (Lottie, Interview 12).

On the same lines, Randy remarked:

> The protagonists who take part in it (*L-Ispjun*) make such an effort to look cool like the foreign housemates of *Grande Fratello*. What a put on! (Randy, Interview 12).

Elsewhere in the discussion, Andy claimed that he was not interested in the local production, as according to him there was no comparison between the two. However, he followed the Italian series on several occasions. What is more relevant is that, by accusing the Maltese producers of being 'copy-cats', the participants seemed to be under the illusion that *Grande Fratello* was an original Italian production and not a franchise. Implicit in this, is the idea that the participants' regional viewing, which largely involves Italian TV (as illustrated in Section 4.3.1) channels, became a springboard for the homogenising influence of youth-oriented global media. What seems to be happening here is that by showing a preference for foreign productions, the children were unknowingly supporting multinational media conglomerates so that 'the dominant forms do not go away.' (Lull, 2000: 223).

5.2.2 The Eurovision Song Contest and local music

On further discussing local and foreign media, the participants referred to another TV production which attracts a broad audience - the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). The Maltese contingency is part of this festival's pan-European audience and locally, there is a strong following of this annual event. Malta first participated in the European Song Contest in 1971, but whilst being placed second and third several times, it has never won the contest.

All the children were aware that since Malta is a participating country in the ESC, this programme event linked them to a global audience. The children's level of interest in the contest varied. For example, during the run-up period to the contest they familiarised themselves with the lyrics of all the Maltese finalists which they found in local TV guides, followed local programmes on the subject and listened to the songs. Frankie enthused: 'I'm a big Eurovision fan and my mother has ended up like me because I'm all the time listening to the songs at home' (Frankie, Interview 10). Some children shared music clips via *YouTube*. Sadie talked about her favourite Maltese singers: 'My friends sent me links (music videos) of Claudia Faniello (local ESC participant) song. It's one of my favourites' (Sadie, Interview 3).

Others participated during the live transmission of the contest by taking part in the televoting. Frankie, who was very keen on this festival and who also took voice coaching lessons because he wanted to become a singer, explained, 'I sent five (instant messages). I voted for Belarus, Moldova, Romania, Denmark and Albania ... [laughs]. I couldn't vote for Malta' (Frankie, Interview 10). However, what is

more interesting in these discussions on 'Maltese' music is how the children perceived and related to Maltese music and musicians:

Table 5.1   Extract from transcript of Interview 3

Speaker	Dialogue
Researcher:	Do you listen to Maltese songs?
Lottie	Yeah...they [my friends] sent me [via Internet] Olivia Lewis and Klinsman's songs [ESC contestants]
Researcher:	I see. These are songs for Eurovision right?
Randy:	Oh! I thought when you said Maltese songs you meant songs like *Viva Malta,* not like those!

As the quote illustrates, Randy made a distinction between types of 'Maltese' music. She dichotomised Maltese songs as those which participate in the ESC and those which do not. The song *Viva Malta,* given in the data example above, has the following characteristics: it is in the indigenous language, has patriotic inspirations and is interpreted by veteran singers. In contrast to this, Malta's ESC entries and mainstream songs by local musicians, singers/bands have some or all of the following characteristics: the use of English, they are inspired by universal themes which appeal to young listeners and they are interpreted by younger singers.

Songs having these characteristics are considered by the Maltese contest organisers and the Maltese public as having a better chance to win. For example, Nick stated:

Fabrizio's sister (popular ESC contestant)] put some words in Maltese with English in her song. They (the organisers) say it is a good idea (to use Maltese). I don't like the idea at all! (Nick, Interview 8).

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Samuel remarked:

> I don't like them (traditional songs). The guitars sound like folk music.
> That's not me. I like pop music like Losco and Winter Moods' (popular
> local singer/band) (Samuel, Interview 8).

Frankie added:

> Last time I took part in the competition of *Eurovision Fever* (TV
> programme) I won a CD of *Mary Spiteri* (a veteran Maltese singer). I
> gave it to granddad...he's into oldies [giggles] (Frankie, Interview 10).

As with their counterparts abroad, this excerpt shows that there are generational
gaps in tastes of music (Pew Research Center, 2009). Certain types of Maltese
songs were perceived by the children as being old fashioned and having insular
connotations, such as the traditional *għana* (pronounced as 'aana') which Samuel
refers to above. This genre of Maltese music consists of folk guitar music
accompanied by an interplay of melodic voices reflecting themes about the simple
aspirations and recreation of the common people.

In contrast to this, ESC and mainstream commercial songs by popular Maltese
musicians, singers/bands are largely westernised in style and have English lyrics.
One notes that this phenomenon is not unique to Malta as many other participating
countries such as Belarus, Finland and Russia amongst others, opted for similar
styles for the ESC in 2007 (Moore, 2006).

Given the socio-linguistic context prevailing in Malta, the children are not only
drawn to the 'British/American sound' of the songs but also to the messages in the

songs since they can comprehend the English lyrics and not just follow them in parrot sing-along fashion. The children seem to view contemporary Maltese singers as cool and highly talented. They are proud of them as they are people 'of their times', who find inspiration in international idols and who adopt global trends in the music they produce. As the data illustrates 'foreign' is also something the participants appreciate. Contemporary Maltese music has moved away from the style, themes and patriotic lyrics typical of songs like *Viva Malta* which were popular in the 1970s and 1980s.

The children subcategorised the non-ESC Maltese songs further, according to certain distinctive attributes. During the interviews, the children repeatedly mentioned Joe Demicoli, a Maltese singer and comedian. A notable characteristic of this artist is that he picks the winning Maltese songs for the ESC, translates them from English into Maltese and turns them into parody songs. His versions of such songs are full of cultural and political humour as well as satire. For example Sadie said:

> On www.lyrics.com I find various songs and I download them from there...like Chiara, (ESC contestant) Fabrizio (ESC contestant) and Joe Demicoli. Lately I downloaded '*I Do*' of Joe Demicoli (Sadie, Interview 3).

The example, given by Sadie refers to the local winning entry song '*I Do*' for the 2006 Eurovision edition interpreted by Fabrizio Faniello. Although these songs are in Maltese, they are better received by the children as they are given a humoristic interpretation. What seems to be happening is that in utilising their repertoire of languages (consisting mainly of Maltese and English) in this manner, the

participants negotiated the interplay between the local and the foreign to 'create meanings that serve their needs' (Lemish, 2007: 214). In line with other research (Jan, 2009), the children, as active media users, chose music which used cultural humour they could understand and appreciate since it was directly related to the cultural context they lived in.

5.2.3   Analysis: The interplay between local and foreign media

This section has shown how children perceived and related to local and foreign media. They perceived some TV programmes made in Western Europe as being innovative and technologically advanced. In contrast to this, they were critical of local imitations of popular imported TV series. During the discussions the children appeared to be skilled 'readers' of television by bringing their knowledge about the medium into play. However, it was noted they were not always able to infer the complex and subtle homogenising influences which are intented to reach extensive audiences behind popular global TV series. The children showed a strong preference for music, including locally produced, which is westernised in origin and/or orientation. This section has focused in a general way on music preferences and TV viewing in which the children engaged. The following section will focus on specific issues with reference to the social conditions in which media is used.

5.3   Discourse of regulating media at home

The social constructionist view holds that the concepts we operate with are structured by the kind of society we live in (Hacking, 1999). Two such examples are the concepts of work and of leisure (Guest, 2001). In discussing their media engagements, the participants repeatedly drew on a discourse which will be termed

here as the *study-work/play balance*. The participants reported that they worked at trying to balance school duties (study/homework) and leisure practices involving media and ICT such as chatting, listening/viewing music videos, shopping online and playing computer games.

5.3.1   Study-work/play balance

As already observed, the majority of the children were keen computer game players. Popular computer games they enjoyed playing included *Runescape, Crash Bandicoot, Tomb Raider, GTA Tokyo Drift,* amongst others. The children played at home, and shared the gaming experience with their friends at school during lunchtime. They knew many game characters, compared scores and traded insider tips. On days when they had less pressure to do their homework/study they invested more time in playing as Robbie explained, 'Over Friday, Saturday and Sunday I spend over 15 hours playing on the Play Station'(Robbie, Interview 5).

In contrast to this, Andy drew upon a discourse which constructed practices such as playing on the computer and chatting as not having career investment potential.

> During exams I don't play on the Play Station (PS). My mother tells me computer games and chatting will get you nowhere. So first I study and do my homework and afterwards I watch a little TV or go to football (Andy, Interview 1).

What seems to be happening here is that as a result of their awareness of the work/play balance brought about by the demands of school work and lifestyle choices they have to make, the children show that they are learning the discipline of prioritising tasks and managing time judiciously. Lottie suggested: 'First I do my homework and then I go online [to play]' (Lottie, Interview 3). However, later on

in the discussion Lottie shows that she did not just want to merely spend time 'exploiting the entertainment potential of new technology' (Browne, 1999, p. 4). In discussing the subject further, Lottie, voicing the experience of others, shows that not only was she aware of the rules and the consequences that went with computer game playing, she also looked for opportunities through which she could manipulate the original game play by seeking short cuts. She shared her account as an enthusiastic player:

> In *Crash* I finished levels 1, 2 and 3. I get stuck in level 4 and won't be able to go on to level 5 and 6...there are some buttons for cheats which my friends gave me some tips about. I tried different ways but still didn't manage. Need to get my hands on this! (Lottie, Interview 3).

The above mentioned ability that is, to overcome challenges with perseverance require skills which are promoted within the NLS framework. As Gee (2003) suggested computer games require children to develop creative thinking, cooperative learning skills, as well as a sense of autonomous learning.

The current school curriculum in Malta is geared so that through the curriculum experience, they (as students) develop 'the ability to avail themselves of the tools of information technology to acquire, analyse, classify and communicate information and data' (National Minimum Curriculum, 1999: 66). However, the school did not seem to harness enough the potential of out-of-school literacy practices, particularly those involving the media, to better serve the children's literacy development and educational attainment. The children reported that their teachers and parents (as in the quote earlier) regularly cautioned them to regulate the amount of time they spend engaging with the media. Nick quoted his teachers as saying:

They (the teachers) tell us the same thing over and over again... work hard, study, work hard, study. Don't get carried away when you play on computer games or chat! ... Syllabus this, revision that. It's sickening (Nick, Interview 5).

One way in which the children negotiated the work/play balance with their parents and teachers was by capitalising on particular time slots in their daily routines/timetable. They utilised the extra time available during the weekends and holidays. Samuel drew on his experience: 'Last time I spent the whole day playing (PlayStation) because we had our mid term holidays' (Samuel, Interview 5).

Another option was to utilise the lunch time period during school days. Angie explained: 'During break time, we first eat our lunch and then we go on the computer' (Angie, Interview 1). Building on this, they resorted to multitasking to work around the work/play balance. As described in Chapter Four, many children stated that they enjoyed doing their homework whilst chatting, watching TV and/or listening/viewing music videos.

The majority of the children said that they did not find support from their parents who were cautious of multitasking because it could jeopardise educational attainment. This was echoed by Randy who remarked: 'I make mistakes and homework takes me longer to complete' (Randy, Interview 3).

5.3.2   A culture of values, principles and ideals

The children also considered watching television as a recreational activity. They reported that through their engagement with television they became familiar with

different types of programmes such as action, soap operas, reality TV shows, sports, cartoons amongst others. Many genres made available by different forms of media exhibit and promote what could be seen as harmful scenes and/or encourage inappropriate behaviour (Gentile, 2003). The researcher noted that despite the fact that the children were being brought up in a society which discourages inappropriate behaviour within all social spheres, to include the sport domain (Sprujit-Metz, 1999) their preferred TV genres contained varying amounts of scenes of the type as just described. The children said that they enjoyed watching action and drama productions such as *Smackdown! vs Raw,* (a US TV wrestling series as well as play the accompanying video game (Stratton, 2004), *Qerq* (Deceit – locally produced movie), *Giselle* (local TV production series) Mafia films, Bond films amongst others.

During the discussion on this subject, the children drew upon discourse of violence. The researcher noted that while talking about their viewing encounters, the children revealed varied experiences, knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and skills which made them far from a homogenous group. The following extract is taken from a discussion on the wrestling TV series which was very popular at the time the study was carried out.

Table 5.2   **Extract from transcript of Interview 1**

Speaker	Dialogue
Frankie:	I think wrestling should remain [as a sport] but not in the savage way they do it.
Andy:	Oh come off it! Those are all moves. I like Rey Mestiero's moves. He is such a show man! [nods his head].
Researcher:	So how do you know these things?
Angie & Andy:	You see it! [children laugh together]
Angie:	It's all a show...Miss let's say he smashes the other one's head and funnily enough not even one drop of blood! [girl makes a face]

This extract shows that what is perceived as central in a television programme for adults, (in this case the mother's concern about violence), is not necessarily so for children. Angie and Andy challenged 'adult' discourse on the harmful effects of televised wrestling by drawing upon 'critical' discourse on the constructive nature of the TV series.

The children were aware of the weak realism of televised wrestling and showed that they were aware of the special techniques used by producers such as 'tricks' and mixing sport with show business to generate interest among audiences. Angie and Andy appear to be very skilled readers of the TV series, rather than dupes or victims of the media. Similar 'critical' discourse in relation to adverts, cartoons and soap operas was drawn upon by English children of the same age in a study by Buckingham (1993).

Most of the children in this study said that they watched *Giselle* which was a very popular prime time local TV drama series. The story line was based on two orphaned girls who were separated in their teens and left to their own devices to find their place in the world. Similar to findings on prime time TV reported within the US context (Zwillich, 2005), *Giselle* contained scenes of violence, drug use, and promiscuity. It was rated as requiring parental guidance (PG). It was noted that most of the participants in the present study watched *Giselle* in the company of their parents and other family members as Angie did: 'I watch it with my mum...when there is something rude I turn my face' (Angie, Interview 4).

It is possible to argue that these cultural specific elements enabled the participants in the current study to share knowledge, skills and experiences with family members of different generations during the TV viewing encounters. As one of the participants put it,

> While we are watching TV my mum has a habit of rambling on and brings in so many of her own stories and mess ups [*giggles*]...about Malta, about the Maltese people, about the theme of the movie... I simply love it! (Sadie, Interview 3).

It is possible to argue that such viewing encounters may provide a good opportunity for intergenerational interaction. Since the participants were pre-teenagers and the programmes discussed were in Maltese and related to aspects of the Maltese culture, one can speculate that the informal situation allowed parents to use these viewing encounters as springboards to instil in their children the necessary skills and values for life. The social constructionist view of a 'pro-social' moral system is that it is a system which operates within a culture of values, principles and ideals

that have meaning for the individuals in that same culture and the set of guiding rules for what, locally, can work for them (Burr, 2003). The following example shows that the different ways in understanding moral frameworks may vary over time. They are not fixed and 'a person is primarily located within a moral order within which they have to negotiate a viable position for themselves' (Burr, 2003: 135). Sadie shared her experience:

> I exchange games with my aunt to keep up to date with the latest games. She buys computer games from the market and then we make copies (Sadie, Interview 3).

It appears that the adult members and Sadie do not acknowledge that the practice of selling and marketing illegal copies might have moral and/or legal implications. One explanation of why Sadie may not be aware of discourse of piracy as a form of theft results from the fact that copyright infringement of software is a recent phenomenon and may still be perceived as a 'lesser evil' compared to stealing from the shelf. Another explanation may be that Sadie and her family may believe that the electronic format is free. From the above example it is evident that Sadie embeds her identity, in this case, as a computer game enthusiast in the media practices in which she engages. As a young girl, she appears to be more interested in getting the latest video games cheaply and quickly so that she outdoes her friends. She, as with the other participants, did not seem to be aware that such practices require licensing the software.

5.3.3 Analysis – Discourse of regulating media at home

As a reflection, engagement with the media is to be perceived as providing opportunities which help children develop attitudes and values not strictly tied to

direct media use but which could be applicable to wider aspects of their lives. The presence of the media in family life/context is an important aspect that merits further discussion. In the next section the relational uses of the media between the children and other family members in the home will be presented with examples from the data to illustrate the more salient points.

5.4 Discourse on intergenerational attitudes towards the media

It is common to find that children's use of the media takes place within the home space of the immediate and/or extended family. Children, parents and grandparents relate to the media in different ways. The children attributed this difference to the various media and communication technology which have emerged in recent times and the changes which they brought about within the local and global media landscape. As Daphne remarked: 'Thank God I was born in these times I can do so many things with the media!' (Daphne, Interview 7).

5.4.1 Social and literacy practices among family members

The children believed that the socio-historical conditions in which they are growing up are providing them with opportunities their parents and grandparents did not have at their age. These include a range of social and literacy practices (which will be elaborated upon further in Chapter 6). Examples of these are messaging, making online purchases, playing computer games with multi players from all over the world, downloading personal music or films and so forth (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005). The children believed that since media and technology link all aspects of life, everybody, irrespective of age, is affected with regard to how one educates, informs and entertains oneself.

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According to Ariès (1962) issues about how different generations interact are not unique to contemporary times and to the media. However, Ariès also stated that intergenerational interactions have assumed a certain distinctiveness as a result of the changes brought about by the proliferation of the media and technology. For example, in the Middle Ages, when European societies were largely rural and most people resided in villages, it was necessary that, from a very young age, children learnt manual skills from their parents in order to help out on farms and/or artisan workshops.

In contemporary societies this situation is somewhat different. Children, unlike their parents, are born in the digital age. Whilst parents had to adapt to technology at a later stage in their life, most children are required to interact with digital technology and to develop an understanding of its concepts from an early age: they are what Premsky (2001) calls 'digital natives'. These constructions of the younger and the older generations are the product of social processes and the meanings people create about them which are imbued with values that are culturally and historically specific.

For example, Andy spoke about how he helped his mother look up recipes and find tips on *ganutell* (a Maltese craft form of making artificial flower designs out of wire, embroidery threads and colourful beads) on a website which was twinned to a daily local television magazine type of programme. Lottie talked about her experience with her mother:

> She [mother] didn't know how to use her mobile to phone or send an instant message. She still doesn't know how to [send a text message] but at least she learnt how to use the mobile to phone. So now I manage her text messages...I'm mum's appointed secretary [laughs] (Lottie, Interview 6).

Sadie helped her father look up information on football, fishing and pigeon breeding on websites. Randy helped her grandmother to use a social network:

> When my cousins went abroad my nan [grandmother] stayed next to me on MSN and I showed her how to chat...she stayed doing it [chatting] for quite a while! Now every so often we still do it! (Randy, Interview 6).

This echoes Aarsand's (2007) findings on computer and video gaming among Swedish family members of different generations. He reported that during game interactions the parents and grandparents positioned themselves as less knowledgeable. Conversely, the children positioned themselves as more knowledgeable by being in control of the game activities. Aarsand suggested that these interactions around the media could serve as 'interactional resources' which bridge rather than divide generations.

The notion of 'interactional resources' suggested here goes beyond what members of different generations actually do together with the media. It includes cultural ways of utilising the media, which involve values, attitudes, discourses, that is, how people see and make sense of the world and in so doing people embed their identities into these interactions. The data from this study illustrates how the participants used their repertoire of ICT skills as 'interactional resources' to bridge with the other members of different generations who lacked those skills. What also appears to be happening is that the children are active creators of 'third space' as they moved 'first space' school based literacy practices into 'second space' home media practices.

During the interviews, the participants believed that their media engagement were distinctively different from those of their parents and grandparents. One contrast they highlighted was that older generations have different ways of using the media for communicating and socialising. Most of the participants remarked that the older generations preferred person to person communication and were more inclined to utilise the talk function as their primary mode of communication if given the choice, such as when using the mobile phone. Frankie commented:

> When my father went abroad he phoned us up everyday. He doesn't know how to send an instant message. My dad either talks directly on the phone or nothing at all (Frankie, Interview 1).

5.4.2 Social relationships through the media

In contrast to what was mentioned in the previous section, the participants regarded technology as a tool for multi-tasking through which they could keep social contact locally as well as reach those beyond Maltese shores. Lottie drew on her experience:

> My friends and I text each other any time of the day. Before I sleep I send messages around like gd.n.sw.d. (good night sweet dreams) (Lottie, Interview 6).

Similarly Angie commented:

> My nan sends us birthday and Christmas cards. I'm not like her. I prefer sending an instant message to my friends saying "Happy birthday" with a smiley face and some kisses (Angie, Interview 1).

Nick drew on his social networking experience as follows:

> I logged on MSN and chatted for a while with my auntie who lives in England. In the meantime there were another 30 people online. I am fast

on the keyboard so I go "Hi there lol" [laugh out loud] and then I click on another and so on. My dad says that I amaze him! (Nick, Interview 2)

Similarly, Randy explained: 'I love to talk about everything I do when I chat. My parents call me 'show off' because I tell all!'(Randy, Interview 6).

5.4.3 Analysis: Discourse on intergenerational attitudes

As screen media takes a stronger hold and daily life becomes, in Goffman's (1969) terms a 'stage' the younger generation in particular, actively script their encounters and social relations through the media. The insights drawn from the data presented suggest that literacy and media/communication technology skills could be seen as the 'tool kits' from which media users avail themselves in constructing accounts and identities which mark them as distinctively different from older generations.

5.5 Discourse of difference

In the context of this study, use of the media was construed negatively/positively by the children as the 'Othering' of foreigners whom they perceived as helpless, negative and inferior (Chiang and Duann, 2007) or as superior and advanced. When talking about the various cultures and the languages they came in contact with via the media and communication technologies, the children engaged in a process of defining or positioning themselves and others.

5.5.1 Discourse of difference - The Arab world

During the interviews, it was noted that they perceived people from the Arab world as the 'Other'. In the light of the social and historical background presented in Chapter 1, the children, on one hand felt an affinity with the Arabs due to the

geographical proximity since Malta is located 288 km north of Africa, as well as the cultural ties between the two nations. Andy noted:

> The Maltese language is similar to Arabic. Last time, when we went to the market in Tunisia there was a guy who understood us when we spoke in Maltese' (Andy, Interview 7).

On the other hand, they had negative perceptions about the Arab world which came largely through their perceptions of the media. Frankie commented:

> I saw their stations on satellite…they don't compare with the other ones we get. I think Tunisians and Tunisia are backward. I think they are cut off even though they are between two countries. Listen, compared to Tunisia we [the Maltese] are not backward (Frankie, Interview 7).

In drawing upon discourse of difference (Said, 1978) Frankie appears to be judging Tunisian 'backwardness' on its lack of technical and production media qualities. Frankie alleged that Tunisia is backward as a result of the way he perceived Tunisian TV channels 'I saw their [TV] stations' (Interview, 10). However further in the discussion (*vide* Section 5.2.1) the children also criticised local TV channels for various limitations. During the interviews, it was noted that in relation to the countries which the participants came mostly in contact with via the media, Malta was also perceived as backward as the following extract illustrates:

Table 5.3   Extract from transcript of Interview 7

Speaker	Dialogue
Frankie:	Compared to Tunisia we are not backward.
Andy:	Compared to Italy we are.
Frankie:	Finland, they have loads of programmes.
Andy:	We are mostly behind advanced countries.
Researcher:	Such as?
Andy:	United Kingdom, United States

What seems to be happening here is that the children placed Western European, British and American TV channels on what they perceived as the high achieving and extreme end of a continuum, Maltese TV channels as located somewhere in the middle and Tunisian TV channels at the other lower achieving and extreme end of the continuum. This indicates that in the absence of direct personal experience with the Arab world, the media becomes an important source which contributes to the perception of a country / a nation of people in the participants' mind. One possible explanation of why media coming from the Arab world was perceived in this way by the participants is that it resulted from the patterns of media consumption the children have acquired. Findings in Chapter 4 showed that American, British and Italian channels were their favourites.

Only one child mentioned that he had occasionally viewed an Arab station when he watched television at his grandmother's house. Only two Arabic channels Al Jazeera (English version) and MBC (International) were included in some of the packages.

For example Andy commented:

> I recognise them from their clothes and faces when I see them on Discovery [channel] because they sort of wear like long bed sheets (Andy, Interview 7).

Nick remarked:

> I don't like Arabs. They're old fashioned. They wear like napkins and stuff on their head to cover it like Bin Laden! (Nick, Interview 2).

These perceptions echo the findings of Sciriha (2001) who reported that the participants in her study put forward the following perception: 'to the Maltese way of thinking, Arab nations are backward, unstable, revolutionary and retrograde' (p.7). One notes that the stations, channels and programmes which were identified by the children transmit a Western culture which to them seemed familiar and they could identify with. Ultimately, these programmes and TV channels have become an important source through which viewers make constructions of 'us'/'them' categories (Lee et al., 2002). In appropriating particular discourses and representations made available by these particular channels and programmes, the children have come to perceive the Arab world in a certain light.

Given that the participants tended to watch television with other family members, their perceptions were reinforced by their interactions within the home space. As suggested by Hodge and Tripp (1986): 'discourse about television ... [is] a site where television meanings fuse with other meanings into a new text to form a major interface with the world of action and belief' (p.143). For example, Robbie shared an experience related to a televised fund raising activity in aid of the Mission Fund

which provides financial support to Maltese missionaries in countries around the globe including Tunisia, Algeria and Libya.

> Last time I went with my family...because they [the TV presenters] were taking calls from people who wanted to donate money. My dad said "No matter how much they receive ...these people are always in need!" (Robbie, Interview 11).

Another example of how the children came to perceive the people from the Arab world was put forward by Nick:

> My auntie says, "Look at those Iraqi killers. On the news they are all the time killing people. I can just imagine how busy the doors of hell are kept!" ... Poor souls R.I.P!" [laughs]. (Nick, Interview 11).

The terms 'hell' and 'Rest in Peace', expressions which are commonly found on the graves of Catholics, are particularly interesting in this context. This suggests that a third space was created between the 'lived' and the 'mediated' experiences. This seems to be a telling example of glocalisation (Lemish, 2007) where the local is infused with the global. On the first level, church discourse crossed over to the home space. Thus, Roman Catholic teachings on the commandments and the hereafter which the children and their family customarily receive from their local church were drawn into the sitting/bedroom space to mix with 'the internationalisation of daily life' (Berman, 1992, p.35) made available by television, particularly through news broadcasts. On the second level, the globalised 'mediated' Iraq war experience is localised as it gets embedded within Nick's 'immediate' Roman Catholic influenced cultural context.

Given their young age, with the exception of one participant, (Nick), travel experience abroad was limited. Despite this it was noted that the children, through their lived and mediated experiences and also from what they had learnt at school, were aware that Malta is a small island. In comparing Malta to surrounding and other not so close countries, the children defined Malta as geographically not attached to mainland Europe, physically 'hard to spot' and economically limited. In the course of the conversations, it became apparent that the participants perceived themselves first as 'Maltese children' and secondly as 'children of the world'.

They acknowledged that they were 'born in Malta' and 'speak Maltese' whilst at the same time felt part of a larger community, made possible by the media. This is how the children said the media made them feel as 'children of the world.' Frankie sees '... all that's going on around the world on the TV stations' (Frankie, Interview 7). Samuel '... can buy everything (online foreign products) from here (Malta)'. (Samuel, Interview 8). Lottie considered another aspect: '...I feel one with all, because we (herself and other people in the world) share the same things' (Lottie, Interview 12).

The term 'children of the world' and the data examples given are important in this context, because they show how the local and the global have become fused together (Grixti, 2006). Drawing on third space theory (Said, 1993, Bhaba, 1994) allows one to see that what is happening here is that, rather than dichotomising the local and the global, the children are hybridising them. Although this phenomenon may not be exclusive to Malta, here it assumes significance considering that the

island as a geographical 'first space' is naturally cut off from the 'second space', the world.

Moreover though the phenomenon is not new to Malta, given its history of foreign occupiers, one notes that hybridisation takes on hues which are uniquely linked to the contemporary local cultural climate. The Maltese have come to know this theoretical 'third space' in which greater levels of global interdependence has been achieved through the spread of technology, the deregulation in broadcasting and the rise of global media (Grixti, 2006). In fact, the children appreciated the difference between their media experiences and that of their parents/grandparents:

Table 5.4   Extract of transcript of Interview 7

Speaker	Dialogue
Andy:	Before... even in my mum and dad's time...they're in their thirties...they [media and communication technologies] did not exist. Now they find it a good thing to have them.
Frankie:	My nan tells me 'How times have changed since I was a kid'. I think they are lucky that they have them now ...!

5.5.2. Discourse of Difference – Europe

The fusion between the local and the global is particularly noticeable in football. Football is deeply rooted in Maltese culture (Sant, 2003). Most localities have their own nurseries and football club. Some of the children played football at school during break while some others attended football nurseries. Andy, a football enthusiast, who would like to be a professional footballer when he grows up, shared his football experiences:

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I train on Wednesday and Saturday at my local nursery. We are going on
a training camp to Catania in summer. (Andy, Interview 1).

Support for foreign teams and clubs is also highly visible in Malta. Rivalry
between clubs is very pronounced. As noted by Sant, in Malta 'the English and the
Italian soccer leagues were [are] followed religiously every weekend [on TV]'
(p.14). If one of these teams happens to qualify or to win the World Cup Final, a
typical celebration involves a considerable number of jubilant supporters cheering
through the streets of Malta in carcades, honking, waving the champion's flag and
taunting the English or Italian fans (depending on who wins). Children at this age
often discuss the outcomes of football matches and follow players as role models.

In Malta, children's interest in foreign teams and players largely remains in English
and Italian football teams and players. Robbie enthused: 'I support Manchester
United. We won the league' (Robbie, Interview 8). Similarly, Andy insisted: 'My
favourite player is Del Piero' (Andy, Interview 7).

Lottie remarked:

My father nags at me because there are some websites you can log on to
[and] get information about football...he's crazy about Inter and, bit by
bit, I'm becoming like him (Lottie, Interview 6).

The participants reported being immersed in a football culture, through either
solitary and/or shared media engagements. They watched matches via
satellite/cable and or internet, purchased merchandise of foreign teams, enshrined
their bedroom space with memorabilia of foreign teams/players, played computer
games like *Fifa World Cup Football*, met visiting foreign star players and

accompanied their fathers to play the football pools. All these examples illustrate ways by which they embedded the hobbyist identity – football fan – in their engagement with the media. Football in general and the World Cup, in particular, have become media experiences which draw together global audiences, including the Maltese.

Most of the participants were critical of local football since it is perceived as being limited when compared to the international football with which they came into contact with primarily through the media. Andy stated:

> We only have one big stadium where our national team trains. We can never be a host country for it [World Cup]. Anyway as if we will ever qualify! We will never win! (Andy, Interview 7).

One conjectures that within this third space, the participants try to overcome the dissatisfaction they feel with the sense of local smallness and lack of opportunities concerning professional football by sharing in the global mediated football experience. As Lemish (2007) stated, 'globalisation is integrated within the specific location of the child in the world at large' (p. 216).

Given the contested cultural and historical ties Malta has had with these two nations, another possible explanation could be that football fandom for the English and Italian teams/clubs is a marker of inclusion/exclusion. In his study on football fan identity, Porat (2010) reported that within 'the fan's conception of his position is a map that includes significant and non-significant others... there are only two coloured areas: 'we' and 'they' (p. 281). What might possibly be happening here is that in identifying with the English or Italian teams, the participants are perceiving

the Maltese, in this case the national team and what they represent, as 'the Other' and distancing themselves from 'them'. In this case, the multiple identities of the children: a media user, a Maltese person and an English/Italian football fan are at odds. This is in line with Hall (1992) who suggested that '[identity] composed not of a single , but of several sometimes contradictory or unresolved , identities' (p. 276-7).

5.5.3 Analysis – Discourse of difference

In this section, the researcher has shown how by talking about their engagement with the media, the children revealed varied experiences, knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and skills. They perceived Arab stations as lacking in technology sophistication and innovation. In contrast, Western European, British and American stations were perceived as not being traditional and superior in quality. Local stations were located somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum. In engaging with local and foreign media, the children became active creators of 'third' space in their everyday and media practices. This was particularly evident with regard to football fandom. The data presented illustrated how the children as Maltese persons, media users and football fans fused local sports practices with global practices which they came in contact with through the media into 'glocalised' or hybridised (Said, 1993) ones.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the cultural context in which the children live plays a significant role in how they perceived and relate to local and foreign media. Engagement with the media invokes numerous discourses and in drawing on these

discourses, the children produced their own knowledge of the world. By drawing upon discourses around and through the media, the children raised different issues and brought various aspects into focus. One of the most challenging tasks posed on media users is that of engaging in and maintaining an ongoing process of 'self-definition'. As illustrated in the extracts presented in this Chapter, by talking about their preferred local and foreign media stations, programmes and products, the children inevitably engaged in a process of defining or positioning themselves and others.

Self-definition is a social process which comes into existence and is maintained in relation to 'others' who 'mediate[d] values, belief systems and perceptions of the worlds s/he inhabite[d]' (Hall, 1992, p. 275). What is distinctive in this process of self-definition with relevance to this study is that the children's tastes, patterns of media consumption and the discourses they drew upon became important sources how they defined themselves and others. The children identified with foreign media products, which were namely American in origin or orientation since they perceived them as superior and technologically sophisticated. They disassociated themselves from media productions, including local ones, which they perceived as indigenous and/or lacking superiority. This seems to suggest that the forces of cultural imperialism brought about by the processes of globalisation are taking over local culture. However, of equal significance is the fact that the children were also active creators of hybridity.

The study found examples where the children intertwined local practices and traditions with commercial global media and practices to meet the needs imposed

by the Maltese context. Furthermore, what is significant to note is that social and literate behaviours which the children engaged in to inform, educate and entertain themselves seem to be a central component of the process of hybridising the local with the global.

The study found that the children's media practices were distinctively marked from those of older generations. The children's media practices were characterised by the resources which they drew upon, namely literacy and ICT skills, as well as multimodal meaning-making. Since the home was identified as the main social space in which the children engaged in media practices, they inevitably had to engage in negotiations and social/power relations with other family members who shared the same media and/or environment.

These findings are of significance because they suggest that the children, equipped with what could be considered as a 'tool kit' of cultural resources shaped their own ongoing process of self-definition in unique ways. The next chapter will focus on three specific identity descriptors which, for the purpose of this study, have been grouped as relating to social practices in which media plays a major role. They are considered worth exploring since they seem to emerge at an early age and could potentially be built upon throughout life.

CHAPTER SIX   ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS
Identities constructed through engagement with the media

6.1   Introduction

In an attempt to consider how identities are constructed by the children through their engagement with the media, the researcher first considered the various strategies they utilised as well as the discourses encountered through the media. The findings which emerged from the previous two chapters paved the way for an analysis relevant to the way in which identities were constructed through language. The children adopted an array of strategies in their attempt to initiate, to sustain and to extend their contextualised media experience depending upon their individual requirements, interest and resources.

In the previous chapter, the researcher suggested that by having their lives inscribed within and through media practices, the children in this study moved within and between discourse communities in every day life (Porter, 1992), to include home, relatives' dwellings, school, recreational places, church amongst others. The overarching themes from the interviews about engagement with the media were discussed and a number of discourses were identified; the interplay between local and foreign media, parental regulations regarding time use and content, intergenerational attitudes towards the media and perceptions of difference. In drawing on these discourses, the children engaged in an active process of defining themselves and others and subsequently occupied different 'subject positions'.

By drawing on both sets of data, the researcher now considers the children's construction of identities to address the third and final research question namely:

How does Maltese children's engagement with the media contribute towards the construction of their identities and how is it shaped by these identities?

In this chapter, the children's construction of identities as conceptualised by social constructionism will be explored. As explained in Chapter 2, the social constructionist orientation of this study rejects the idea that identity is essential, and instead considers it as an ongoing process, a constant discursive construction (Hall 1992, 1996, 1997). In constructing discursive identities, the children used *'positioning'* and *'interaction order'* (De Fina, Schriffin and Bamberg, 2006), as well as *'multivocality'* (Maybin, 2006).

In 'subject positioning', the children constructed their identities through their relationship between self and other, that is, between speaker/s and listener/s in the interview context, as well as absent others. With regard to interaction order the data showed how the children utilised this construct to present different constructions of themselves to different people depending on where they were, who they were with and the particular setting in which they found themselves. In multivocality the children used reported speech of others from previously experienced events in their accounts to bring about the desired effect in their listeners.

In this chapter, discursive findings are discussed in relation to the media engagement through which the children were provided with opportunities to construct their identity. Given the type of social interactions and practices drawn upon by the children themselves the researcher has categorised three key identity

descriptors namely *learner, hobbyist* and *consumer*. The first component of identity which will be considered is that of the construction of the *learner* identity.

6.2   Construction of the learner identity

Social constructionists argue that identity is constructed through talk around social practices (Burr, 2003). Implicit in this notion of identity is the idea that individuals negotiate how they see themselves and how others perceive them. It was noted that the children in the current study perceived certain practices as contributing towards constructive use of media. One way of demonstrating this was by linking their media practices to developing literacy and learning skills.

For example, some of the children said that they bought and read books (or parts of them, at least) of films and TV series they watched such as *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Delitti f'Malta* (*Crimes in Malta*) because they were keen followers of the film and the TV series. This suggests that literacy and media practices can serve as extensions of individual's identities and interests (Lull, 1988). As the data presented in Chapter 4 showed, the children enjoyed watching Italian programmes and Sadie, Andy and Daphne said that they used the dictionary to look up difficult words while watching the programmes. Implicit in this is the idea that the children created a third space in which they hybridised at-home media practices with school literacy practices. This suggests that not only did the children resort to using an increasingly broad range of media text made available through foreign media; they were required to find ways how to cope with the demands (in this case understanding foreign language/s) these placed on them. In expressing a willingness to utilise the dictionary during viewing to better inform themselves,

reflects how cultural resources were drawn upon by the children to cope and to extend the contextualised media experience as discussed in Section 4.5.

However, it was noted that the children's media practices were intimately connected to family routines and activities. A typical interactional situation which illustrates this was when the children engaged in viewing television with other family members. Nick, an avid media user, gave an example of such an experience. He spoke about an argument he had had with his sister. His sister had stopped the film they were watching several times to look up difficult foreign words in the dictionary.

Nick, as with most of the other children, was keen to present himself as someone who capitalised on the learning opportunities which the media offered during the small group interviews. For example, at one point in the discussions, Nick talked about a number of sites he searched to extend his knowledge on his major interests, such as ballroom dancing and dog breeding.

However with regard to this particular setting and interaction, Nick chose to foreground his identity as a media user (in this case a viewer) rather than his identity as a learner. He constructed an account in which he argued that during viewing, following the film's story line was deemed more appropriate than looking up difficult words in the dictionary. He stated:

> She stops the film [imitates his sister flicking through the dictionary].
> She looks up the words each time. She really annoys me. She wastes it
> [the movie] by continuously stopping and starting! (Nick, Interview 2).

Nick used blame when he said 'she wastes it (literal translation of the Maltese word) by continuously stopping and starting!' (Nick, Interview 2), as a linguistic resource to win the support of his listeners. One possible intention why Nick might have given this account was due to the fact that he was in the presence of the researcher and the other school friends (co-participants). In this verbal interaction, Nick risked being associated with an anti-learner discourse. However, by constructing this particular account, in which he put the blame on his sister, he justified his position and still managed to avoid being looked upon unfavourably by the others.

During the discussions, the researcher noted that similar justifications were used by other children, such as Samuel, Robbie and Lottie, who presented themselves as computer games enthusiasts, when they talked about their time spent on computer game playing. Aware of the study-play balance discourse (presented in Section 5.3.1), these participants consciously demonstrated that they were constructive users of the media. Robbie justified his extended hours spent playing on the computer by saying that he only did this when he was on holidays or during the weekend. Similarly, Lottie said that first she finishes her homework before she engages with the computer to play or chat.

Given the school environment in which the discussions took place, the children might have perceived that an anti-learner discourse would put them in bad light. They all constructed themselves as responsible media users who 'prioritise' and 'balance' TV viewing and time spent playing/socialising on the computer out of concern that if they do not do so, they would neglect their school duties. For

example, in the following extract, Samuel justified how he coped with the study-play balance when he was working on one of his school projects:

> I spend about half an hour reading in front of the screen and then I start
> to get like cross eyed. They say it's bad to strain your eyes. So what I do
> I just change over and play *Lord of Rings* ... a bit of this and a bit of that!
> (Samuel, Interview. 5).

This seems to suggest that Samuel used the deictic word 'they' to introduce a discourse which circulates amongst those responsible for the well being of children such as doctors, parents and teachers. He then used a discourse of harm to suggest that extensive reading can also have negative effects. To get the approval of his listeners for the way he coped with the study-play balance, Samuel used justification. This echoes Potter and Wetherell (1987) who suggested that discursive practices, such as justification and blame among others are used for the constructions of self and accounts of events.

With regard to engagement with the media involving older family members, the children often talked in terms of mentor-learner interactions. They believed that members of the older generation in their families perceived them as being more proficient users of media and communication technologies and wanted their assistance in carrying out basic computer tasks.

The children considered these encounters as opportunities to bring new literacy practices acquired within school space into home space. Moreover, they also brought over identities they assumed within school space. The learner identity is a central one given that children spend a significant part of their lives learning in

schools. However, this is occasionally supplemented by another identity descriptor, the mentor identity, when children are encouraged by their class teacher to engage in cooperative learning exercises in which less competent children are given help from more skillful peers. Vygotsky termed this zone of proximal development (ZDP). In giving accounts of encounters involving the media and older family members the children constructed themselves as mentors, using verbs which invoked mentoring such as 'show', 'teach', 'explain', 'read out' and 'monitor'.

In the following example, Lottie, an only child, gave an account of the positions assumed by herself and her mother in one such encounter:

Table 6.1   Extract from transcript of Interview 3

Speaker	Dialogue
Lottie:	I look up things on *ganutell* [hand craft] for her [mother]. For a while, she was a keen follower of Ray Calleja's programme [magazine type]. So she'd say "Lottie look up something about *ganutell* or look up this recipe for me". Sometimes I feel like sending her to hell [a common Maltese expression] because I'll be chatting then I say "Oh well they [parents] bought me the computer after all!"
Researcher:	Does your mother log in herself or do you have to log her in?
Lottie:	As if! She depends on me! I have to log her in because she can't make head or tails! Poor thing!

In this example, Lottie presented an account in which her and her mother reversed roles within the conventional mother-daughter relationship. By her comments which she drew from parental responsibility discourse, Lottie positioned herself as the mentor, the one who took responsibility of her mother's learning.

In contrast to this, Lottie positioned her mother as the learner since she sympathised with her and presented her in a weaker position. Since it is argued that identities are not accidental but socially constructed, Lottie resorted to using one of the seven tasks of language - *relationships* - identified by Gee (2005) (*vide* Section 2.2.3) in order to develop a collection of identities through language. Lottie distanced herself from her mother and created binary opposites 'a process inherently related to the construction of the 'Other'' (Aitchison, 2003: 79). In this case, Lottie created the powerful – powerless dichotomy.

However, as her verbal exchange in the transcript above shows, one notes a shift in how Lottie positioned herself and as Davies and Harré (1990) argued individuals are simultaneously produced by and are manipulators of 'subject positions' within discourses culturally available to them. Once again, Lottie drew upon parental responsibility discourse and used the binary opposites of powerful - powerless identities but she reversed the positions at this point. Here she re-positioned herself as the powerless one who depended on the financial support of her parents, whilst they were positioned as the powerful ones who provided the computer.

Implicit in this, is the idea that in this mutual relationship each had something to offer the other and therefore represents an exchange of resources. However, at the end of the interaction, Lottie redefined her position once again to regain the powerful identity of the knowledgeable daughter she wanted to be regarded for by her listeners.

These identities, that is the learner/mentor identities, emerged and were also constructed by those children in the group who had siblings in their mid to late teens. Those children, whose siblings were one to two years older than themselves, as in the case of Sadie, Daphne and Nick, perceived their brothers and sisters on equal footing and as proficient in technology use and as versatile in media practices as they were. They talked about carrying out activities with their siblings involving specialised computer applications which were used to support their interests and practices, mainly in music, sports and computer games. Their talk was particularly marked by a tendency towards using common gamer's jargon like 'Xbox 360' (console), 'Ares' (downloadable music software), 'password', 'icon', and 'avatar'. As expected, the researcher noted that these children made fewer references to the mentor-learner relationship. This might be due to the fact that the children, as digital natives, that is individuals who were born and were being brought up at times where technology formed an integral part of their everyday life (Premsky, 2001), became media literate from an early age.

In the case of those children who had siblings who were three to five years older, as with Randy, Robbie and Angie, the learner/mentor relationship re-emerged. This mentor-learner interaction had a distinctive feature which was typified by the type of questions the children asked. The questions used in these interactions did not follow the three-part model: Initiation-Response-Feedback (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) typical of classrooms. In the classroom, the teacher initiates talk and very often contributions are invited through questioning. On the other hand, during the media interactions at home, the children themselves were the ones who asked questions to knowledgeable others to find out something s/he did not know. Of all

the children, Randy gave the only detailed account in which she constructed herself as a learner whilst engaging with the media at home with her brother:

Table 6.2   **Extract from transcript of Interview 3**

Speaker	Dialogue
Randy	I love playing *Driver 3* because my brother doesn't let me play *Full Speed* as I'll mess things up ...I busted the computer three times. He's so into computers ...fiddles with wires, programmes, this, that and the other!
Researcher:	Do you turn to him for help?
Randy:	We don't get on well much. I used to stay and watch him. When he's in the mood he teaches me things and so on but when he's not...as he's been lately...it is so typical of him!

Utilising *significance,* another building task of language as suggested by Gee (2005), Randy created a contrast between her amateur knowledge and her older brother's expert knowledge (MKO) in media. Similarly, in the second part of her verbal exchange she drew on *relationships* (Gee, 2005) when she created the binary opposites of learner/mentor identities.

She positioned herself as the learner and her brother as the mentor. She did this by constructing herself as the learner who capitalised on incidental learning. In contrast to this, she constructed her brother as the mentor, who could help her move from what she could do with help to what she could do without within the ZPD. However, as indicated in the transcript above, Randy and her brother experienced sibling rivalry. In order to maintain the identity of a 'sensible sister' and 'media user', she goes on to build for herself a defensible persona. Thus, she implicitly

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imposed the identity of an 'undedicated' mentor onto her brother, who taught her how to use the media only "when he's in the mood". She blamed him for her "mess[ing] things up" as according to Randy he ought to have taught her how to use the media with more responsibility. Also, she believed that he should have let her share the media resources available at home. As illustrated above, by using different discursive devices, Randy constructed different versions of family relations involving media practices and subsequently presented different identities of herself and her brother as sister/brother; amateur media user/expert media user and learner/mentor.

It would have been interesting to consider how the children constructed the learner/mentor identities with younger siblings, however Andy was the only participant who had very much younger siblings. They were too young to share his media interests. Having said that, he commented that he accepted that they watch him while he watched television and played computer games. This suggests that Andy served as a role model and mentor to his younger brothers. Examples of negotiations in this type of learner/mentor relationship with younger siblings, as in Andy's case, involved re-playing the game when he happened to play their favourite ones and letting them click/press buttons to start the game. In the case of children without computer, namely Samuel and Angie they still maintained the learner/mentor relationship through relatives or friends. Samuel sought out his uncle for assistance, while Angie turned to her school mates with more knowledge and experience (MKO).

While playing the online interactive activities most of the children appeared to be computer literate and conversant with game tasks. Skills included clicking, dragging, scrolling and moving arrows from left and right directions. They knew how to make sense of various forms of symbol-making such as windows, menus, icons, arrows and emoticons. It was also noted that they also extended on the gaming experience by drawing on related popular cultural media experiences such as films, TV series, books and artefacts.

The online interactive sessions were strongly characterised by exploratory talk (Wegerif and Mercer, 1996) in which 'knowledge is made more publicly accountable and reasoning is more visible in the talk' (p. 54). In the following sequence, Nick and Daphne are about to start playing the activity *Clean Sweep* (Online Session 2). The game required the players to find eight hidden dust balls and remove them by clicking on them.

Table 6.3   **Extract from transcript of Online Activity 2**

Speaker	Dialogue
Nick:	I think this is a bedroom... No, I think it's the kitchen.
Daphne:	A bedroom.
Nick:	Do you think so? I think it's a bedroom.
Daphne:	Nah I think it's a kitchen because there's a broom...look [points at screen].
Nick:	Yeah it's a kitchen though it could be a bedroom. Maybe someone is doing the cleaning [searches with cursor].
Daphne:	Click on something.
Nick:	[reads] Clean...what does 'dust balls' mean?
Daphne:	We need to find dirty fluff [points at the dust balls on the screen]. Now I got it!
	[Boy clicks on various dust balls on the furniture].
Daphne:	We've one here [points at lantern] and we've got another one there [points at cupboard].

This extract shows that the children positioned themselves as co-learners, distinctively marking the learner/learner interaction by exploratory talk. Each child defined him/herself through their collaboration with the other speaker and regarded interaction as an opportunity to produce critically grounded knowledge. Unlike the previously given accounts, in which the children were required to take a specific form of identity commitment, that of a learner or a mentor, exploratory talk around the online activity allowed the children to try out alternative identities and position themselves as learners as well as mentors.

In the first part of the verbal exchange the children put forward hypothesis and counter hypothesis to make 'reasoning more visible' and try out new ideas (Barnes, 2008). The data shows that this exercise of reasoning from shared knowledge involved several challenges and counter challenges. Daphne challenged Nick's 'bedroom' hypothesis by drawing on logic from her daily life experiences. She supported her statement by reasoning out that "it's a kitchen because there's a broom." Nick counter challenged her suggestion by offering an alternative hypothesis "maybe someone is doing the cleaning". What seems to be happening here is that exploratory talk allowed the children to challenge ideas rather than identities within dialogue. In the final part of the verbal exchange, by replacing the 'I' with the 'we' the children used language to position themselves as collaborative learners.

The data presented in this section shows that not only did the children use a broad range of knowledge, information, strategies and skills when they engaged with the media in everyday life; they also used linguistic resources to place themselves in positions depending on what they were talking about, whom they were talking to, and the social setting in which they found themselves. This is important since it shows that the media does not construct identities *per se;* rather it provides the added means with which to construct identities. With reference to identity, social constructionism proposes that individuals as social beings actively construct identities primarily through language and discursive work (Zimmerman and Weider, 1970) as well as through other social tools such as media and technology (Gee, 2005). These extracts show how in talking about the media, the children enacted positions of alignment and disalignment, projected themselves as experts

and collaborators as well as claimed positive social attributes for themselves (interaction order) with people in their vicitinity (De fina, Schriffin and Bamberg, 2006).

In the next section, excerpts from the data will illustrate how the internet and global media gave the children opportunities to develop and/or maintain relations with likeminded individuals (Dyson, 1997) for practising hobbies, acquiring new ideas about personal interests and exchanging cultural objects such as stories and merchandise with people in both their immediate and outside vicinity.

6.3 Construction of the hobbyist identity and the media

Some of the group members enjoyed using use the internet as it allowed them to enjoy, inform and educate themselves about their preferred hobbies such as dancing, football, voice-coaching, cars and animals. The majority of the children were animal lovers and some of them owned pets. The following excerpt illustrates how Nick and Robbie used 'positioning' to construct the identity of a pet owner:

Table 6.4   **Extract from transcript of Interview 2**

Speaker	Dialogue
Nick:	On MSN I chat with an Italian dog judge though he doesn't come on much because he's a busy man. In Italy, there are loads of dog shows. So many breeds, I look up pictures on websites…like Pharoah hounds… the ones with a bulge in their chest...that's how I call them [laughs].
Researcher:	[laughs] You seem so up-to-date!
Nick:	Miss, they [judges] check their [dogs] teeth first, then with their fingers they check if they have arched legs.
Robbie:	Judges don't talk.
Nick:	What have they to say? The legs are short. I'm an expert on dogs. When I'm out and I spot a dog I say that one hasn't got the right posture for dog shows because I see them on Internet. I spend about 3 hours training my dog everyday.
Robbie:	Yesterday I was lucky, it [a dog passing by] didn't kill my €650 dog. I own a pug. I feed it twice daily. It is this big [motions with hand]. Miss, I'm always adding to my terrapins. My sister… she works as a hairdresser is always getting terrapins from her clients at home and I end up looking after them. We took one in. They used to keep it in an aquarium poor thing! That's animal cruelty. It was this big. [shows size of terrapin].

In this example, Nick constructed himself as a knowledgeable hobbyist who engaged in online and offline practices related to dog ownership. His talk was particularly marked by a tendency towards using dog breeders' jargon like 'kennel club', 'breeds', 'de-worming', 'Pharoah' hound', 'arched legs' and 'posture'. Nick knew that the group of listeners had different backgrounds and that they did not share the same cultural knowledge that he possessed on dog breeds and dog shows. In order to impose the identity of an expert, particularly in relation to the

researcher, he addressed her by using the formal term 'Miss' and used procedural speech to tell her and inevitably the other participants how dogs are professionally evaluated in dog shows.

This echoes Bakhtin's (1981) concept of speech genres who argued that 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life' (p. 293). It was noted that till the end of his verbal interaction Nicky continued to reinforce his expert identity construction. On hearing Robbie's comment "judges don't talk", Nick became aware that his friend might after all share at least some of the same cultural knowledge that he possessed. Therefore, he took advantage of the situation to position himself as the expert and Robbie as the *dilettante* with regard to conformation shows. He did this by passing the remark "What have they to say? The legs are short!" while appropriating an authoritative voice in expressing it.

Unlike Nick, Robbie's account is distinctively marked with personal anecdotes. Although in this extract Robbie does not relate his hobby directly to his media practices, elsewhere in the discussion he refers to various TV series and programmes which he enjoyed watching and which were about animals or had animal characters as protagonists. What is of relevance here is that this particular verbal interaction differentiates between the children and their engagement with the media and its associated experiences. In other words, 'what children bring with them to the encounter with television [and the media in general] determines in large degree what they take from the experience' (Lemish, 2007: 70). The media appears to play a major role in how the children extended their sense of the local and the regional/global. While Nick extended is contextualised media experience and

'went' regional, Robbie remained circumscribed within the local. This extract also demonstrates that the children were far from a homogenous group having varied experience and knowledge about the media which resulted in sufficient diversity within a small cohort.

Nick constructed an identity which oriented him as the more knowledgeable other (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978). He projected himself as someone who was very knowledgeable about professional dog training activities. A distinctive feature about Robbie's account is the breathless and disjointed way it was delivered, which shows that he knew how to animate a story. He seemed intent to maximise on his turn to speak and to put in interesting bits to sustain his listeners' attention. His monologue started off with a brief account of an event, however the narrative was not fully developed to incorporate all the building blocks as elaborated upon by Labov (1972).

Robbie just began giving details about the *who*, the *what* and the *where* regarding his experience when he suddenly switched to talking about pet ownership. Towards the end of his verbal exchange he switched to a second narrative. In this narrative, he drew on moralistic animal discourse (Kalof, 2000) to position himself as a responsible person who cared for pets and opposed cruelty towards animals, whilst presenting his sister's clients as irresponsible people who neglected and/or mistreated animals.

One notes a strong element of dramatisation in Robbie's account in the use of words/expressions which he used to evoke emotional reactions in listeners such as

'kill', 'animal cruelty', 'what a pity!' '€650 dog' (exaggerated price) and 'this big' (exaggerated size). The data presented illustrated how Nick and Robbie utilised the constructive power of language to build and maintain their identities as different types of pet owners to meet the contingent needs arising out of the social interactions they were involved in.

Taking a social constructionist approach, Phal and Rowsell (2005) suggest that 'language is used to construct an identity for ourselves within the different speech communities that we enter and exit' (p. 98). In the following examples, more identity construction by the children regarding televised professional wrestling and wrestling fandom will be explored.

In their discussions on their media engagements, the children frequently spoke about various international media idols from the world of entertainment, sports and culture. They said that they watched or listened to them on television and/or the internet, interacted digitally with the animated game version of these idols, knew their idiosyncrasies such as the way they perform or play, followed their fashion trends/image and collected paraphernalia. They were immersed in trivia about idol culture and these idols presided over their social worlds. As stated by Gee (2005) the production of identity is achieved through discourse in conjunction with other *stuff* such as 'one's body, clothes...tools, technologies...attitudes, beliefs and emotions' (p.7). For example, at the time the data was collected, most of the children were keen viewers of televised professional wrestling popularised by World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) *Smackdown! Vs Raw.*

Andy, another of the participants, drew on this culture of icons as follows:

> Me…I exchange trading cards with school mates. I also have one [poster] of wrestling which I stuck together out of parts this size [*points at diary*]. You do them all up…the wrestlers. I stuck Rey Mestiero (wrestler) at the side of the wardrobe in my bedroom. (Andy, Online Session 4).

Similar trends were surveyed in China by Xiaozhong (2006) who found that junior middle school and vocational senior middle schools students ranked as the highest group of people who worshipped sport idols as much as pop singers and actors. The following discussion on wrestling highlights how individuals position themselves in relation to whether they are the same as or different to other/s.

In Chapter 5, an extract from this discussion was used to illustrate how Andy challenged 'adult' discourse on the harmful effects of televised wrestling by drawing upon 'critical' discourse on the constructive nature of the TV series. The discussion was quite intense and provided rich data for an analysis. In this chapter, another extract is presented to illustrate how Andy constructed an orientation as the more knowledgeable other (MKO). During the discussion, Andy had been talking about his major interest, wrestling, and showing some drawings of his favourite wrestlers' tattoos. The other three participants had contributed very little to the subject except for Angie who made a few interventions mostly to show that she was also a wrestling fan. At one point Daphne declared that she was not into wrestling. Frankie had been silent until he interjected:

Table 6.5   **Extract from transcript of Interview 1**

Speaker	Dialogue
Frankie:	Miss, I don't like wrestling that's why I'm not talking because usually I'm a chatterbox. Though I don't like it, I still watch it. Then my mum walks in and says: "No don't watch it! That's torture!"
Researcher:	Your mother says that it is torture.
Andy:	Miss, they would be doing a show for the money. They earn the money together. They don't fight for real.
Angie:	They don't fight for real! What a load of tricks!
Andy:	They do a real show. In the old days they used to fight for real.
Frankie:	For me…
Andy:	[interrupts] And when you see this guy punching the other guy in his back you can see, he stamps his foot first. It's a put on!

In the above extract, Andy and Angie constructed their identities as avid wrestling fans in 'big D' Discourse, as conceptualised by Gee by valuing the athletes' technical skills and physical abilities and by saying (earlier in the discussion) that they watched wrestling programmes regularly on television and bought wrestling paraphernalia such as belts and trading cards. In contrast to this, Frankie positioned himself as an anti–wrestling participant. He did this by drawing on anti-wrestling discourse which portrays wrestling as a violent sport and wrestlers as assailants. However in order to avoid animosity, Frankie quoted and reported his mother's speech "No don't watch it. That's torture!" Similar reported speech was noted by Maybin (2006) in her study on children's construction of identity and knowledge through their use of other people's voices, who found that the words of parents, teachers and friends were among the most quoted.

Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), Maybin (2006) suggested that speakers always rework the reproduced voice/s for specific purposes, mainly to give an explanation, relate an experience and/or argue a point. In the context of this study, reported speech was used by Frankie as an identity construct. In reproducing his mother's voice, Frankie condemned wrestling and also indirectly Andy and Angie for supporting it and reinforced his construction of himself as anti-wrestler fan. In so doing, he also invoked an aspect of his relationship with his mother. Implicit in his reported quote is the idea that Frankie's mother monitored what media content her son was exposed to.

Given the social context of the discussion and the function of the talk within this, one presumes that Andy felt constrained to present himself as a 'responsible media viewer' who does not expose himself to violent content on the media. To this effect, Andy actively constructed his account to try to build a defensible identity. He did this by distancing himself from the wrestlers by using the deictic 'they' to lessen his association with them. He also distanced himself from Frankie by choosing not to address him directly but to address the researcher instead.

In contrast to this, Andy gave a reply in which he constructed himself as an expert fan and skilled media viewer who was aware of wrestlers' stunts and the programme's constructed nature. Similarly, by validating Andy's argument and repeating his formulation "They don't fight for real", Angie, unlike Frankie, also brought elements of her identity as an informed media viewer by showing that she was also aware of production and performance techniques. Furthermore, in aligning with Andy, as the more knowledgeable one on wrestling and distancing

herself from Frankie, the anti-wrestling participant, she also invoked an aspect of her relationship with her male classmates. Maybe her intention was to identify herself with this particular sport as she wanted to be seen as 'tough' or perhaps trendy, given that wrestling was a media phenomenon at the time.

The extract presented so far show that the messages and meanings mediated by global media had a bearing on the children's self-construction process. In the context of this study, this implies that the self-construction process was shaped by the 'real' context in which the children obtained and maintained a sense of self in conversations/interactions, the language devices they drew upon in identity constructs as well as the mediated 'social imaginary' - 'ways of life other than the one into which we [they] are born' (Barker, 1999, p. 3) made available by global media. Drawing on Barker, the researcher considers that the media, particularly television and the Internet, increased the complexity and the level of cultural resources, from which the children drew upon in the process of self-construction and the interactions in which they were involved in everyday life.

6.4   Construction of consumer identities and the media

Increasing technology change means that everyday practices such as shopping have evolved (Anstey and Bull, 2006). Shopping does not only occur through face-to-face exchange relationships at local outlets but also through televised shopping networks, email and the internet technology.

The children constructed their consumer identities through discourses and representations framed by structures and media practices of their community which

were intimately embedded within the global. When the children talked about their experiences as consumers they repeatedly related them to advertising. In talking about these experiences, the children constructed identities through the retellings of anecdotes in which everyday experiences like shopping and TV viewing were inextricably woven together.

Frankie shared his experience:

> I'll be watching TV with my mum and I'd say to her "How lovely they are! Let's buy like them." Then we'll be out at the shops and I'd say to her "Look! Those are like the ones we saw last time." And she'd say "OK let's get them" (Frankie, Interview 10).

Nick gave an elaborated example in which he constructs himself as an informed consumer. This excerpt suggests that engagement with the media is to be considered as opportunities which help children develop attitudes and values not strictly tied to direct media use but which could be applicable to wider aspects of their lives. Nick recounted:

> Yesterday after my dancing classes, I was worn out...I felt like having a packet of *Twistees* [Malta's iconic branded cheese snack in a bag] I saw the advert on TV in the morning and craved for it. Ummm ... And then when I started to eat it I said "Yuck! I think these have gone bad!" The date had expired and then I said "Hey this is going to be bad for whoever is going to buy one." Then I went and gave it back to Freddie at the corner shop. He threw the lot away and gave me another. "They don't mess with me!"(Nick, Interview 11).

Nick positioned himself as an 'informed consumer' who stood up for his consumer rights. Moreover, it is possible to argue that Nick's identity construction in this particular account reflects his dual desire to act for himself and also on behalf of

others. This may have resulted from awareness about 'consumer satisfaction' and 'consumer protection' values transmitted in contemporary society primarily through consumer education (Babaoğul, Sener and Surgit, 2010). Elsewhere in the discussion, the children referred to consumer awareness talks held at their school by visiting speakers. Another intention behind this identity construction may have resulted from the fact that given the context of the interview, Nick wanted to be seen as an 'everyday hero' in the eyes of the researcher and his peers.

By ending his account "They don't mess with me", Nick used warning as a discursive device for the following possible reason. He might have used 'them' and 'me' to create binary opposites in which 'they', presumably the shop owner and/or the entrepreneurs, were constructed as 'baddies' who engaged in unfair practices while he constructed himself as the 'goodie/hero' who stood up for the rights of consumers.

According to Marsh and Millard (2000: 7), 'children are attracted to the binary opposites set out as good versus evil'. In earlier discussions, Nick revealed that his preferred TV/cinema genre was action movies (Chapter 5). Although this study is concerned with the dynamic, interpersonal processes of construction (Shotter, 1993a), following Wetherell (1998), the researcher acknowledges that micro structures of language use in interaction are not independent of social structures and relations operating at the macro level.

Other experiences as consumers involving the media included shopping online. The children's talk about these practices was distinctively marked by words such as

'play.com', 'E-Bay', 'Visa', 'charges', 'shopping cart', 'shipment', 'order', 'free delivery' and so on. Consumption, which essentially involves the buying or the use of goods or services, has become a fundamental practice in modern Western culture. Camilleri (2011) reports that in Malta, shopping online has been on the increase and 90% of the online purchase of goods or services are made from 'foreign' websites or service providers.

During one of the interviews, by drawing upon her aunt's online shopping experience, Randy initiated a discussion to which the other two girls in the group contributed by sharing their beliefs, backgrounds and knowledge about this practice. Randy recounted how her aunt had ordered an MP3 through the internet and when she received it, the item was damaged. Her aunt did not take the initiative to pursue the matter further with the foreign company. Significantly, it was only Lottie who positioned herself as anti-online shopper by stating:

> That's why you shouldn't buy things that way! These foreign websites
> can't be trusted, you don't know who these people are. (Lottie, Interview
> 3).

This is interesting since she had not shown lack of trust in 'foreign websites' in earlier conversations (Chapter 5) when she talked about the foreign websites she accessed to share in a global culture of music and games.

By using 'interaction order' (De Fina, Schriffin and Bamberg, 2006), Lottie presented different constructions of herself depending on where she was, whom she was with and the particular setting in which she found herself. This shows that rather than having one fixed singular identity, Lottie built a constellation of

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identities or as Kroskrity (1993) termed a 'repertoire of identities', often known as multiple identities. Lottie went on to compare online with traditional shopping:

> No way [shakes her head in the negative vigorously]. I am not interested [in online shopping]. It's a jungle out there! I prefer to go myself and buy things from shops I know. I feel safe. I like to touch and feel the things I am going to buy (Lottie, Interview 3).

In her anti-online shopping discourse, she spoke metaphorically to portray the online market as a 'jungle', implying that online marketers are the hunters and online customers are the prey. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) metaphors structure how people perceive, think and act. Following Potter and Wetherell's (1995) conception of interpretative repertoire, as 'broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images,' (p.85), it is possible to argue that Lottie used the metaphor 'jungle' as a linguistic device to consciously achieve a specific purpose in her verbal exchange; that of instilling a sense of insecurity in her listeners. In so doing, she might have wanted to make her listeners aware of the risks that this relatively new practice involves. Another explanation may be that Lottie was not conversant with online shopping and she did not want to be seen as being so by her friends who were in favour of shopping online.

Another possibility could have been that Lottie came from a family who did not like using credit cards and subsequently were restricted from shopping online. In other parts of the discussion, the children identified advantages with regard to shopping online. Through online shopping, the children perceived themselves as 'children of the world'. Samuel reasoned that by shopping online they (as Maltese

people) were able to be part of a global consumer community (Interview, 11). The second advantage was fast service. Nick remarked: 'My mother went online because she needed to get some diet pills she saw on TV. She bought them online because she needed them urgently.' (Nick, Interview 11).

Another advantage was availability. Andy commented: 'Sometimes you can buy stuff from abroad which we don't find in Malta' (Andy, Interview 4). The fourth advantage was convenience. Robbie commented: 'I bought wrestling cards from a site on the computer. No hassle!' (Robbie, Interview 11). Despite all this, the children were under no illusions about the risks involved in online shopping. Amongst the disadvantages they pointed out online shopping fraud. Randy shared her experience:

> We bought a helicopter (toy model). We bought it by Visa. Although they had our telephone number and email address and so on, it never arrived' (Randy, Interview 12).

Another risk which was mentioned was defective products as illustrated in the extract presented above taken from Randy's account. What is significant in these 'new' consumer experiences is that by trying to negotiate local and global forces, these children put forward new identities as global consumers. On the one hand, they see traditional, local, shopping practices as 'safe' yet limited 'you don't find them (products) here' [in Malta] (Samuel, Interview 11). At the same time they see modern, global shopping online practices as 'risky' yet expanding their sense of self-fulfillment.

The media is thus implicated in bringing about the continual push and pull between the local and the global, in other words between change on the one hand and continuity on the other. By questioning, exploring and/or undermining traditional/modern lifestyles and forms of consumption, the children showed that they engaged in an active process of negotiation to suit their needs and to cope with the constraints of their social and cultural context.

6.5   Conclusion

This chapter, building upon the preceding one, has shown how the media provides a social space in which forms of social knowledge are made culturally available through discourse. The children's discussions about their media engagement were distinctively marked by taking up 'subject positions' within these discourses. The children pinpointed a number of particular practices, interactional situations and settings around and through the media, each offering different versions of social knowledge. Thus, the main focus of this chapter was to expand conceptualisations of engagement with media towards a broader 'contextualised media experience' (Lemish, 2007: 66).

If constructing identities is understood as an ongoing life-long process, (Giddens, 1991) one needs to acknowledge that this process is largely embedded in the contextualised media experience. Identity becomes contingent as 'the subject assumes different identities at different times' (Hall, 1992, p. 277). The data revealed that taking up of 'subject positions' in discourse is a defining characteristic of the contextualised media experience, one which has a strong bearing on the process by which the children constructed their discursive identities and knowledge

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about the social world. Through close analysis of the children's positioning, three significant components of identity emerged, namely; the learner, hobbyist and consumer. In his reflections on fan identity Porat (2010) noted that 'the composition of identity and the temporal domination of the particular component are determined by the realm of opportunities external to the subject' (p. 279).

It was argued that the three identities which were identified are critical components of the children's identity process given the prevailing contemporary socio-historical conditions in which they live. Among such conditions of particular relevance to this study is the contextualised media experience, set within the broad cultural experience of globalisation.

The children's ongoing constructive identity work as drawn from the data suggests that the cultural experience of globalisation is not a monolithic force which invades all as proponents taking a monoculturalist stand would argue. However, they *did* encounter a continual strain for example, as they broadened their knowledge base about text and literacy practices and brought global literacy practices made available on the World Wide Web (www) to find new ways how to adopt and adapt them to practices of everyday life within the Maltese context and as forming part of a changing global audience, knowledge society, market community and social network.

Close analysis of the Maltese children's constructive identity work often involved assembling and drawing upon a tool kit of cultural resources. Primarily, this tool kit can involve linguistic resources as well as skills, competences, relationships,

experiences, artefacts, values, attitudes, and beliefs amongst others. The data presented suggests that through language, the children created, negotiated and enacted identities. With regard to positioning, the children used linguistic processes and strategies. This enabled them to take different stances towards speakers/hearers present in the face-to-face group interviews, as well as absent others, relationships, objects, social settings and occasions which were brought into the conversations. Moreover, the children were able to place themselves in positions of alignment or non-alignment *vis-à-vis* prevailing discourses.

Linguistic resources and strategies used in interactional processes allowed the children to bring about desired effects in interactions. For example, the children used stories and anecdotes/narratives to present a positive face to others and to project themselves as more knowledgeable ones. They did this by drawing upon a range of discursive practices, such as justifications, approvals, reprimands, blamings, warnings as well as metaphors, figures of speech and vivid images. (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The children also constructed relational identities through their consideration of 'similarities and differences' to others (Barker, 2003: 231).

As a linguistic strategy, they used binary oppositions when they wanted to identify with or distance themselves from others in their talk. The children also used other people's voices in their speech as another linguistic means to construct identities. They often quoted parents, older siblings and teachers. For example, the children used the 'voices' of these significant others to build defensible identities to fight off

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any negative attributes with which the other participants may associate them during the group interviews.

It could be suggested that this constructive identity work is not exclusive to this group of Maltese children. However, it is how these children drew upon, assembled and reassembled this fund of cultural resources within their constructions which make their identities distinctively unique. The next and final chapter will present conclusions drawn from the analysis discussed in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER SEVEN   CONCLUSION

7.1   Introduction

This chapter will draw the study together by revisiting the research questions. It will outline the efficacy of the methodological approaches that were adopted and review the various analyses of the data, in order to arrive at a clear conclusion about each issue which has been raised by this study. It will also attempt to outline a possible strategy for further research in this area of study.

7.2   The theoretical foundation of the study

This study arose from the fact that, although Maltese children live on a small island, the media provides global connectedness and the provision of a broad range of cultural resources which help to build their identities. It set out to explore Maltese children's construction of identities through their engagement with the media.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a social constructionist perspective takes into account the socio-historical conditions in which identities are constructed. One of the challenges faced in the development of this study was to adopt an approach which valued the uniqueness of Maltese children as media users and the specificity of their local context which is socially shaped by a cultural mix of local / global languages, social spaces, different social groups, age, various types of media, ideological and cultural forces amongst others.

As a result, the study drew upon the notion of identity as an ongoing process in Hall's terms (1996) and emphasis was placed on language as the major site where identities are constructed. Identity construction is primarily a practice (Holland et al., 1998) that is, something that people 'do' as they interact with others. As part of the reflections on identity construction as a social practice, this study considered specific media practices with which the children engaged in their daily life. Depending on the type of media practices they were involve with, required them to utilise a number of strategies to maximise the contextualised media experience. With regard to language as a basis for the construction of identity, this study considered discourses – that is, situated language use - that were culturally available at the time the study was carried out. It also took into consideration the linguistic resources which were drawn upon by the children in the process of constructing their identity.

Any study undertaken comes with limitations. In Chapter 3, the limitations concerning the methodological approaches adopted in this study were acknowledged and addressed at some length. One characteristic that has been associated with limiting a case study similar to the one being presented is its lack of generality. Other restrictions could include the 'authenticity' of the observed situations and the possibility that during the interviews, the children might have given the researcher the responses she wanted to hear. Some other aspects of the collection and analysis of data worth considering as further limitations are: missed opportunities of potential data as a result of ineffective group dynamics, the appropriateness of the online activities/chosen themes for the discussions and the interpretation/logic imposed by the researcher in the writing of the narrative.

7.3 Strategies deriving meaning & actively engaging with media

The first research question considered the strategies young Maltese children use, in order to actively engage with the media. The data showed that engagement with the media is an active process that starts early and does not end until well after children log off the computer or switch off the television. In this study, three important stages which are crucial to active engagement with the media have been identified. These are *initiating, sustaining* and *extending* engagement with the media. The strategies which the children employed during these three stages will be summarised and reviewed to determine the extent to which they were utilised and in which ways they supported the children's practices.

7.3.1 Initiating the contextualised media experience

When employing the first strategy to initiate engagement with the media, the children selected languages they were proficient in or at least, were familiar with. The data suggested that the socio-linguistic context in Malta, set within a wider globalised one, gave the children access to global media which is predominantly (but not exclusively) American or British in origin and orientation. From the interviews, it transpired that the children utilised the English language to engage in a wide range of media practices for educational and entertainment purposes.

Although the English language was not the only cultural resource that the children drew upon, it was noted that it was a major one. In the light of the 'monoculturalist' stand (Salwen, 1991) this could be perceived as a case of cultural imperialism and an erosion of national culture. However, the data also showed that

the children actively engaged with media in other languages, namely Maltese and Italian, albeit to a lesser degree.

The children used a second strategy at this stage of their engagement with the media which consisted of shifting between information media rich languages (such as English) and information media poor languages (such as Maltese), depending on the extent to which the educational or entertainment media material they were interested in was available during engagement with the media. For example, they shifted towards English, mostly when they played computer games, looked up online material or listened/watched popular music videos as they had a wider selection to choose from.

Another strategy which was employed by the children in this stage was that of either consulting with more knowledgeable others (MKO) (Buerkel-Rothfuss and Buerkel, 2001), such as parents and teachers, when they encountered a learning challenge, such as new or foreign words and background information. The latter strategy was mostly used in the case of the Italian language, which they came in contact with mainly during TV viewing. Hence, this study recommends that a repertoire of languages consisting of the national language (Maltese), a world language or a language of wider communication (English) and a foreign language which has socio-cultural affinities with Malta (such as Italian), is a necessary resource which could possibly equip Maltese children, as media users to 'glocalise' their media practices within their specific cultural setting. Indeed, the draft document of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2011) which builds on the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC, 1999) is proposing that a foreign

language awareness programme is introduced and taught by subject specialist teachers during the primary cycle in a child's education.

7.3.2 Sustaining the contextualised media experience

Sustaining engagement with the media necessitated the use of other strategies. The first strategy to sustain engagement with the media used by the children was that of utilising literacy skills associated with school 'space' for media practices which they engaged within the home/bedroom 'space'. For example, the children made extensive use of listening, reading and viewing (the latter is considered as 'the fifth language art' skill, (Teasley and Wilder, 1997: 117) while engaging with television and the computer to watch, play, search websites, shop online, sing and chat. Through their engagement with the media, the children's writing skills are utilised though to a lesser degree, when they instant message and chat online with their friends and family.

The second strategy they used was that of employing their knowledge base of text associated with school 'space,' such as narrative, poetry, instructional and expository writing while viewing films, playing online games, researching school projects and learning songs when at home. By integrating aural (and oral), as well as visual literacies the children expanded the concept of literacy as it is traditionally known to meet the challenges brought about by the ubiquity of media and technology in their lives. These ideals are strongly promoted within the NLS framework. This study therefore demonstrated that through active engagement with the media and other social practices, the children acquire a broad knowledge base about text and gain enhanced literacy skills.

7.3.3 Extending the contextualised media experience

The children also used strategies to extend their engagement with the media. A strategy which they adopted to achieve this was to 'move' practices which they encountered through their engagement with the media within the home/bedroom 'space' onto other social spaces, such as school and leisure club 'spaces'. For example, they 'moved' practices, such as dancing choreography viewed on TV or the internet to the youth club 'space' and adapted it to the performances they organised during social school events.

Another strategy the children employed was that of transferring practices from vicarious experiences encountered through the media to real life ones. For example, the children attended football training and voice coaching lessons after being exposed to international football tournaments and song contests.

Finally, to extend their engagement with the media, the children used the strategy of interconnecting one medium with another, such as the television with the computer. For example, they inscribed the physical characteristics of main characters from popular TV cartoons in the avatars they created during online gaming. This study demonstrated that the active engagement with the media is critical since it is through such a process that children find cultural ways of utilising the media to create continuities between and across different social spaces and everyday practices.

If, as discussed in Chapter 2, space is understood as a fluid and a socially produced phenomenon, this helps us to understand engagement with the media as a 'g/local

social practice', one which is continually being produced within socio-temporal-spatial intersections (Latour, 1993). Hence, if we are to believe in the importance of focusing on media and communication technology and its influence on language, (*vide* NMC (1999) recommendation, Chapter 1), then we have another important aim to attend to. This study indicated that the media and communication technology provide Maltese children with broader resources and opportunities for social relationships and 'spaces' in which to interact and subsequently, with more opportunities to encounter a multitude of discourses and construct identities.

7.4   Discourses encountered during engagement with the media

The second research question aimed at identifying what discourses were encountered by Maltese children in their engagement with the local/global media. This study identified four local discourses which were tied to broader global ones. These are the interplay between local and foreign media, parental regulations, intergenerational attitudes towards the media and perceptions of difference. A summary with reflections on each discourse follows.

7.4.1 Local and foreign media discourse

The first discourse which was identified was that of the interplay between local and foreign media. The children commenced their media practices with pre-conceived ideas, beliefs and prejudices based on discourse of the interplay between local and foreign media. Such discourse shaped their perceptions of local and foreign media and the value they gave them.

The children judged TV productions and music on their popularity, standards and style. For example, some local TV productions were perceived as being inferior and mediocre replicas of foreign ones, particularly those produced by Americans.

Similarly, they perceived certain types of Maltese songs as insular as they are in the indigenous language, have patriotic inspirations and are interpreted by veteran singers. In contrast to this, the children perceived local commercial songs as less insular since they had English lyrics and they were largely westernised in style and themes. Moreover, the data also indicated that the children were relatively skilled readers of the constructive nature, particularly of TV programmes, such as the wrestling TV series which was popular at the time this study was conducted. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that the children have developed informally over time and repeated engagement with the media are ideals so desired by the NMC writers who recommended in Objective 8 (p. 58) on the subject of media education that, 'through the curricular experience in this field, students develop skills in media content 'by sifting through and analysing what appears in the media'.

In this regard, the best attempt at critical analysis could be achieved through more open discussions during language and literacy lessons in the primary years. It is recommended that teachers help children appreciate that global media is a significant source of cultural resources, but at the same time heighten their awareness about their homogenising influence and the interests of multinational conglomerates which produce and market them.

7.4.2 Discourses of intergenerational attitudes

The next two discourses identified by this study are related. These are discourses of parental regulation and intergenerational attitudes towards the media. In engaging with the media within the home 'space', children often had to negotiate with parents and/or siblings. Among the more salient negotiations involved, one finds issues pertaining to the location of media within the home 'space', logistics regarding exclusive or shared use of the media, selection of media content/activity, duration of media use and media users' rights, obligations and possibilities for action. This study highlighted the centrality of 'the ever shifting geometry of social/power relations' (Massey, 1994: 4) brought about by these negotiations involving the media between different family members within the home 'space' which have become more challenging due to the prevalence of more children owning personal media in their bedroom.

From the interviews, it transpired that the complex and dynamic home 'space' seemed to have a bearing on the children's ability to develop additional skills which go beyond specific skills required in engaging with the media and their associated practices. Among these skills, one finds time management, conflict resolution, communication, mentoring and decision making. For example, the children often assumed the identity of expert and taught or assisted older members in the family when they needed to utilise the media/technology. It was noted that in such circumstances, traditional power/knowledge roles were reversed.

This contrasts significantly with conventional parent/children relationships in which the former are considered as the experienced ones and the latter as the less

experienced ones. The implication for teaching here is that if we are to regard the media-equipped home/bedroom space as a primary site of potential social and personal growth, then we need to aim at pedagogical ideals which acknowledge and build on children's everyday media experiences in their broadest sense.

7.4.3 Discourse of difference

In engaging with the media, the children drew upon the fourth and final discourse – that of difference. From the interviews, it transpired that the children's encounters with cultural diversity through cable/satellite TV and the internet did not necessarily imply that they increased their disposition towards cultural inclusion. For example, the children constructed people from the Arab world as 'Others' because they perceived them as being culturally backward, despite the fact that they were aware that Maltese is a Semitic language and that Malta has significant historical and cultural ties with these people.

The children preferred to align themselves with Europeans and Americans since, through the type of media they engaged with, they came to perceive them as technologically and culturally advanced. The children chose to engage with media which was predominantly in English and which promoted the western world view. Such media preferences were infused with meanings rooted in the children's local context immersion experiences.

The historical and cultural ties which Malta had with countries from its colonial past still hold strong. For example, while the children found pleasure in following international football competitions made available through the media, this

experience served to reinforce the long-standing strong allegiances to England and Italy. Some children drew upon discourse of 'sameness' when they talked about their favourite English and Italian football teams. Likewise, they also drew upon discourse of 'sameness' when they talked about the Maltese national team, however, as in the case of some local TV productions referred to earlier, some children who supported European teams perceived them as superior, while they perceived the Maltese national team as inferior. The implication here is that the influential images and discourses circulating within the intersecting social 'spaces' brought about by the interplay between local and global media are contributing to a sense of fragmentation in the children.

However, this also indicates that the children seem to favour the *status quo* and, in a similar fashion to their fathers and grandfathers, they consciously uphold traditions, such as European football fandom (a legacy of Malta's colonial past) and religion. At a rudimentary level the children seem to be perpetuating the long-standing local rivalry between Maltese supporting fans of English and Italian football teams. At a more sophisticated level, the children seem to be perpetuating constructions of 'us'/'them' binaries with other Maltese people with the same allegiances.

From this study, it also became evident that the children's disposition to embrace cultural differences is rather limited. As advances in media and technology are more likely to cultivate cultural pluralism, the requirement to instil a sense of open-mindedness, social awareness and cultural sensitivity through transformative pedagogical ideals in children (as media users) becomes urgent.

7.5   Construction of identities through engagement with the media

The third research question aimed at exploring how the children constructed their identity by drawing upon discourses made available through local and global media. The data showed that the children engaged in an ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing their identity. Three distinctive core identity descriptors which are the *learner*, the *hobbyist* and the *consumer* were identified in this study. These three identity descriptors could be grouped as examples of identities relating to social practices. Without any doubt, there are other sets of examples of children and young people's multiple identities which could be grouped as relating to geographic location, membership of a group and relationships (Ross, 2007). This study suggests that the set of core identities grouped as relating to social practices (learner, hobbyist and consumer) could be seen as a life-long process that begins at an early age and could potentially last till late in life.

Among the children's experiences that shaped their construction of learner, hobbyist and consumer identities, one finds their encounters with out-of-school and school literacy practices. With regard to the learner identity in particular, this study shows that, while the children's engagement with new forms of literacy (e.g. reading the rules and instructions of an online computer game) within the home space was high, these experiences rarely impacted on the classroom's more traditional skills-oriented literacy.

Bridging out-of-school with schooled literacy practices is still to be resolved within the school space. The implication for teaching is that if the wish is to encourage the

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use of different forms of media and the development of new forms of literacy, it is necessary to address the unequal perceived importance between traditional and new forms of literacy by designing literacy activities that encourage the use of out-of-school literacy experiences in which media is central.

In contrast to this, at home, the children were themselves creators of 'third space' as they bridged home with school space. They did this by using their knowledge of text as well as aural (and oral) and visual literacy practices associated with school during their engagement with the media (*vide* Section 4.4). Experimenting in this way allowed the children to adopt different 'subject positions' of the learner identity so that they sometimes constructed themselves as learners who sought the help of older siblings who were more proficient in ICT skills. At other times they constructed themselves as mentors when they helped older family members or younger siblings who were not computer literate. In other situations, they positioned themselves as co-learners during shared media engagement as in the case of multiplayer online role playing computer games.

The first implication of identity is that we need to conceptualise it as being multiple and contingently used, depending on what the children are doing, with whom they are and the particular social setting in which they find themselves. A further implication of the first point is that if we wish to encourage students not to remain within particular 'fixed' identities, then we need to support the students in all literacy practices.

From an analysis of the children's perceptions of the new media era comes a vision of a smarter future as they see themselves as 'children of the world' and part of a global audience / social network, a knowledge society and a world market community. They looked critically upon earlier eras when individuals had to live without the comforts and opportunities provided by the media and technology which they now enjoy. Despite this, they encountered a continuous strain to keep up with the pace of globalisation and the alternative lifestyles / trends set by the media.

The children experienced this sense of tension at different levels and, as a result adopted different 'subject positions' as hobbyists and consumers. For example, a tension the children experienced as consumers was whether to embrace new practices, such as online shopping made possible by a borderless world market community or to demonstrate resistance to what they perceived to be an erosion of traditional customs, such as shopping from local village shops. Likewise, as hobbyists (football supporters) they experienced tension in terms of conflict of loyalties between European versus local football teams and clubs (*vide* Section 6.3). Through another facet of their identity as hobbyists, (TV viewers, computer games players and social net workers), the children also experienced tension with significant others, such as parents and teachers who, by being nostalgic about their own childhoods, looked critically upon the children's current forms of leisure and their associated attitudes/values, such as compulsive consumption and preoccupation with instant gratification. This study suggests that this tension is inherent to identity given that it is composed, not of a single but of multiple identities. All too often, these two components of identity (i.e. consumer and

hobbyist) contested other components in the children's identity: as sons/daughters, boys/girls, students, friends, Maltese and so on.

This study has attempted to clearly demonstrate that language is a major resource through which the children produced and constructed their identities. It also became a site of contestations, potential personal and social growth. As illustrated in Chapter 6, the children drew upon a repertoire of discursive devices and rhetorical skills which they used when deemed appropriate and to achieve the purposes they wanted to achieve.

This study found that engagement with the media meant different things to individual children within the group. However, while the children's experiences and constructive identity work were not all the same, the social, historical and cultural conditions were inevitably significant, since it was largely in terms of this context that their identities were constructed. It likewise shows how the children's engagement with the media was shaped by these identities.

7.6   Recommendations

Having completed this study, it is now opportune to consider the contributions it can make to the field of education in general, and more specifically to the theoretical understanding of identity and literacy. First of all, this study offers an investigation of children's contextualised media experience in one specific community, where the children are from the same school, from a similar family background and live in a similar environment to one another. Secondly, the observations noted through this study will support the researcher in her own

practice as a pedagogue in language and literacy. What has been learnt from researching this subject over the past years is likely to influence her work in terms of what to focus on in the study-units delivered to the undergraduate students under her instruction.

These observations have confirmed that engagement with the media is a social activity and is connected to other broader practices. Since children actively use various forms of media in their interactions with each other, significant others and the community at large, the media inevitably becomes intimately connected to literacy practices. The implication for the researcher as a primary teacher educator of student-teachers is to design study units which demonstrate strategies and techniques focusing on how to integrate more popular media. This would include those used at home and the media resources which are available in classrooms during their language and literacy teaching.

The case for exploring these ways is particularly timely. Since in Malta, interactive whiteboards have recently been introduced in schools, language study units which intergrate this resource, could greatly contribute towards student-teachers' understanding of principles, practices, methods and techniques involved in pedagogies based on wider conceptualisations of literacy and literacy education at primary level.

By being aware of student-teachers' efforts to implement a cross-curricular thematic approach to teaching during their practice, it is recommended that they move this framework forward by adopting a cross-curricular discourse oriented

approach. If this approach is to be adopted, then student-teachers/teachers need to think along Gee's lines to help them see the classroom not merely as a fixed physical setting, but as a dynamic context in which all those involved derive knowledge from the culture that they share and any other culture that may be relevant to the context. On a practical level, within the classroom, it is recommended that student-teachers/teachers devise useful practical activities by which students are encouraged to develop their sense of their individual selves, as well as make connections with those around them.

Findings from this study show that the languages prevailing within the children's homes, school and Maltese context were drawn upon as cultural resources during engagement with the media. However, it also found that the children did not move much across languages. One way in which student-teachers/teachers can make children more conscious of linguistic diversity is to encourage them to collate their own personalised story sacks about their favourite non Maltese/English/Italian media characters/celebrities. Examples could include Dora the Explorer (the Latina cartoon character girl) or a Eurovision contestant's story sack which would incorporate merchandise, photographs, list of website links, print outs of web pages/weblogs, videos, country/person fact files, interview cuttings, printed lyrics, songs, games and others). Teachers should provide children with opportunities to share their story sacks during 'talk about' sessions as a stand alone activity or integrated with language/literacy lessons. It is recommended that student-teachers/teachers extend the oral character/celebrity story sack activity through other activities involving reading and writing skills, as part of the language awareness programme. Children could be encouraged to build foreign

word/expression banks and create handmade or digitally produced dual language books.

Building on this, further findings revealed that the children showed limited capacity to embrace cultural diversity. This is very likely due to the fact that they do not live in an environment which has a range of social, cultural, religious or ethnic groups. It is recommended that student-teachers/teachers conduct exercises which develop empathy in their students during language and art lessons. This is relevant for most children in an educational setting but is of greater significance with children who are not surrounded by diversity. For example, narrative empathy can help children engage in perspective-taking and to share feelings induced by reading, viewing, hearing or imagining narratives of another person's situation or condition. Similarly, role-play in drama teaching can be used to foster intercultural empathy.

Many Maltese primary state schools have recently become more culturally inclusive due to the substantial increase in the number of foreign children, as well as those from immigrant families and from mixed marriages. It is recommended that student-teachers/teachers working in monocultural and multicultural classes collaborate to organise online/penfriend clubs for their students. Students from the respective schools are encouraged to write to each other and exchange friendship messages/school news.

Another interesting finding from this study is that children's media-equipped home/bedroom space is an important site in which children acquire additional skills, such as time management, conflict resolution and decision making, among

others. It is recommended that student-teachers/teachers should find ways to tap these additional skills within the context of the classroom. One way of doing this is by maximising learning time. At the time the thesis was being published, the country was facing an election. Both political parties proposed providing tablets to children. It is hoped that the newly elected government will provide every eight year old child with a personal iPad-style computer as given in its electoral mandate and that the availability of such a resource would enable Maltese students to take advantage of downtime in the classroom and make responsible choices about what to do during that time. When students manage to finish a task ahead of their classmates, student-teachers/teachers could invite them to switch on their individualised iPad-style computer and utilise downtime to continue to be engaged in educational content.

Findings from this study show that three distinctive identity descriptors - *the learner*, *the hobbyist* and *the consumer* - emerged from the type of social interaction and media/literate practices in which the children engaged. It is recommended that student-teachers/teachers encourage students to become more aware of how literate practices, technology and sociocultural factors influence how they form the multiple identities that most of them need to function in contemporary society. This could be achieved through discussions conducted during PSD (Personal and Social Development) lessons. For example, teachers may ask their students to investigate the difference between buying from the local mall and using an online shopping site. They could actually take the students on a shopping trip and then ask them to purchase an item online. The children's

assignment could then be to consider and compare carrying out the same task using two different methods of purchase.

The major focus of the current study was on how children constructed identity through talk about their media engagement. By being aware of how critical teaching practice can be for student-teachers, it is suggested that their reflective writing, consisting of lessons evaluations and students' profiles should become more inclusive. These would include how children construct their identities as learners during classroom/lesson interaction, as well as other identity descriptors that might emerge by documenting the whole range of children's talk in school. Examples can include children's construction of identity through interactions in the playground, whilst participating in extra curricular activities, during school outings, utilising technology available within the classroom and so forth. It is suggested that this personal initiative be institutionalised to become an essential component in their professional portfolio.

Given the findings of this study, it is recommended that projects on the lines of the Comenius projects initiatives to be carried out in this area at primary level. This study demonstrated that engagement with global media provides Maltese children with broader resources and opportunities for social relationships and spaces in which to interact and construct identity. It is hoped that other researchers may borrow from the theoretical framework and design, and compare and contrast their own research interpretations. It is also recommended that further studies would investigate other variables, to include family and cultural background, age and interests. It would be also interesting to compare and contrast insights gained from

contextualised media experiences of other school children growing up in similar geographic circumstances in the Mediterranean, such as Cyprus, Sardinia and Crete, who share historical and cultural similarities. Funding from the European Union could possibly provide the necessary financial resources so that such an initiative could be realised.

Given that a draft document of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2011) is under discussion, it is the researcher's opinion that the time is right to take a fresh look at the issues of literacy and education. It is recommended that this opportunity is utilised to widen the discussion and awareness of these issues with educators and policy makers in public discussions. The intention would be to advocate an orientation toward literacy which is linked to social spaces and to focus on the development of students' construction of identities in relation to literacy.

7.7 Conclusion

The overall objectives addressed in this study were the following. First of all, to conduct a study which contributes to the existing limited body of empirically based research which considers children as a social category distinctively marked by its idiosyncratic characteristics. Secondly, to explore how a group of Maltese children constructed their identities through their engagement with the media. Not only did the study bring together a number of local, global, cultural, social and media/technological elements into a rich mix; as portrayed in the concept of the tool box by Pahl and Rowsell (2005), it also presented this 'rich mix' in a new light. Here, these elements are viewed as social resources from which children can construct their identity. Given that identity is relational and constructed, children

are required to draw upon this social resource by using a range of strategies and to [re]mix the elements to suit their moment-to-moment needs. Thirdly, this study sought to present the children's media experience, particularly their engagement with the computer and the internet, from a perspective which at the time the study was carried out was still largely understudied.

While there is extensive research on talk and computers, this has tended to focus on how children learn through talking when working around the computer. Similarly, there is a growing body of research on identity, computers and the internet, however, this has tended to concentrate on disembodied or alternative identities in virtual space. Thus, this study constructed a different kind of stance through which to examine how the children constructed (embodied) social identities while talking about their engagement with the media. By studying the use of discursive practices and rhetorical skills such as 'subject positioning', distancing, alignments, interactive order, multivocality and so forth, this study captured the unique ways in which a particular group of Maltese children came to understand their social world, themselves and others.

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Extract taken from the National Minimum Curriculum 1999
Objective 8:   Media Education

Knowledge/Information

Through the curricular experience, students should acquire knowledge in the following areas:
- the Media and Society : basic knowledge of the different sectors of the media; knowledge of the media's social function; the media's relations with political and economic situations; the symbiotic relationship between the media and society; how school and the media influence each other ; the Press Act and Censorship; the media and democracy;
- the organization of the media: knowledge of the media's different property structures and of the media as a transnational industry; recognizing the importance of the social impact on the consumption of media products; knowledge of the different roles of people working in the media; knowledge of the different systems concerning the financing of the media;
- media content and language: knowledge of the different genres found within different media systems, their difference and relevance for the audience; knowledge of the media's interpretative aspect (eg. media stereotypes); knowledge of the history of the most important media sectors ; knowledge of the Internet;
- the media as an educative agent: the educational possibilities provided by the media; different modes of participatory and individual learning that have become possible; the media as a catalyst of change and transformation in education
- issues concerning the way the media operates: the invasion of privacy, the distortion of truth, slanted views and propaganda, partisan bias, etc;
- understanding conventions concerning the media.

Skills
Through the curricular experience in this field, the students develop skills in the following areas:

language of the media: basic skills in using equipment, techniques and materials connected with different aspects of the media; the production of simple media items; use of the computer and Internet facilities as (1) a vehicle for using the media, (2) a unique medium in itself

media content: the development of basic skills in writing letters, reports and investigative stories, writing simple TV and radio scripts; expressing oneself through the use of the computer; sifting through and analysing what appears in the media, including advertisements; striking a balance in one's

choice between educational programmes and others which provide entertainment;

society and the media: an analysis of the media's role in society and in our specific culture, working to render information technology accessible to everyone, including children with disabilities or different abilities;

media organisation: analysis of the product bearing in mind the limitations of the organization which produces the product; familiarisation with the process of production by different media , including different forms such as sign language , the Braille method, subtitles, etc.

Attitudes

Through the curricular experience in this field, students develop these attitudes:

language of the media: the development of a critical attitude towards the media; appreciation of the aesthetic value and the cultural impact of the media's different sectors;

media content: development of a critical attitude based on a system of personal values; the development of a selective attitude regarding media consumption ;

society and the media: readiness to defend freedom of speech; a critical attitude towards the media;

media organisation: development of a critical attitude in connection with the organisational need of production.

APPENDIX B   **Request for research in state schools**

Divizjoni ta' l-Edukazzjoni
Dipartiment ta' l-Ippjanar u Zvilupp
Il-Furjana

MALTA

Education Division
Department of Planning & Development
Floriana

Request for Research in State Schools

A. *(Please use BLOCK LETTERS)*

Surname: MUSCAT   Name: GAETANA K/A TANIA

I.D. Card Number: 29 41 64 (M)   Telephone: 21 31 27 23

Address: 'JONICAR' IGNAZIO SAVERIO IFFSUD STR., B'KARA

Post Code BKR 05

Faculty: EDUCATION   Course: PPD   Year: ....

Area/s of research: LANGUAGE/LITERACY + ICT + POPULAR CULTURE
                                                          P.R.D

Aims of research: (Underline as appropriate)   Long Essay   Dissertation   **Thesis**   Publication

Estimated duration of research: 1 yr - 4 yrs   Language used: MALTESE

Description of method to be used: OBSERVATIONS + FILMING + INTERVIEWS

School/s where research is to be carried out: PRIMARY STATE SCHOOL IN THE
SOUTH OF MALTA

Years / Forms: 5 / 6   Age range of students: 8 - 9 yrs

I accept to abide by the rules and regulations re Research in State Schools and to comply with the Data Protection Act 2001.

<u>Warning to applicants</u> – Any false statement, misrepresentation of concealment of material fact on this form or any document presented in support of this application may be grounds for criminal prosecution.

Signature of applicant ....   Date: 5 / 11 / 2004

DPID/2003- Research & Planning

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B.   **Tutor's Approval** *(where applicable)*

The above research work is being carried out under my supervision.

Tutor's Name: A_L_I_S_T_A_I_R_ R_O_S_S   Signature ....   Official Stamp
(In block letters)
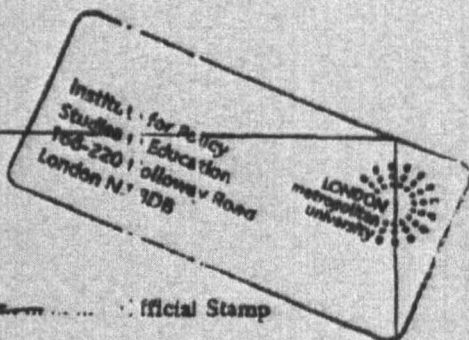
C.   **Education Division – Official Approval**

The above request for permission to carry out research in State Schools is hereby approved according to the official rules and regulations.

_____
Assistant Director
(Planning, Policy, Communication & Research)

Date: 5 /11 / 04   Official Stamp

Joseph Magro B.Sc.(Eng.) Hons.
Director
Planning & Development

Conditions for the approval of a request by a student to carry out research work in State Schools

Permission for research in State Schools is subject to the following conditions:

1. The official request form is to be accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and / or any relevant material intended for use in schools during research work.

2. The original request form, showing the relevant signatures and approval, must be presented to the Head of School.

3. All research work is carried out at the discretion of the relative Head of School and subject to their conditions.

4. Researchers are to observe strict confidentiality at all times.

5. The Education Division reserves the right to withdraw permission to carry out research in State Schools at any time and without prior notice.

6. Students are expected to restrict their research to a minimum of students / teachers / administrators / schools, and to avoid any waste of time during their visits to schools.

7. As soon as the research in question is completed, the Education Division assumes the right to a full copy (in print /on C.D.) of the research work carried out in State Schools. Researchers are to forward the copies to the Assistant Director Research and Planning, Education Division.

8. Researchers are to hand a copy of their Research in print or on C.D. to the relative School/s.

9. In the case of video recordings, researchers have to obtain prior permission from the Head of School and the teacher of the class concerned. Any adults recognisable in the video are to give their explicit consent. Parents of students recognisable in the video are also to be requested to approve that their siblings may be video-recorded. Two copies of the consent forms are necessary, one copy is to be deposited with the Head of school, and the other copy is to accompany the Request Form for Research in State Schools. Once the video recording is completed, one copy of the videotape is to be forwarded to the Head of school. The Education Division reserves the right to request another copy.

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Statement of Consent

I hereby give my consent to the Department of Planning and Development Education Division to process and record personal and sensitive data being given herewith in order to be able to render me with the service I am applying for.
I fully understand that:
- by opting out my application cannot be processed;
- authorised personnel who are processing this information may have access to this data in order to supply me with the service being applied for;
- edited information, that would not identify me, may be included in statistical reports.

I know that I am entitled to see the information related to me, should I ask for it in writing.
I am aware that for the purpose of the Data Protection Act, the Data Controller for this Department is:
      The Director Planning and Development
      Education Division
      Floriana
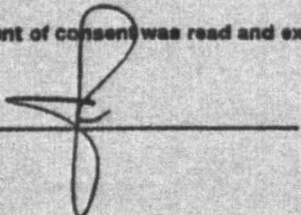
I have read and understood this statement of consent myself

This statement of consent was read and explained to me

Signature: _____   ID number 29 41 6 4 (m)
(Data subject)

Signature: _____   ID number _____
(Reader if applicable)

Date: 5th November 2004

Data Protection Policy

The Data Protection Act, 2001 regulates the processing of personal data held electronically and in manual form. The Department of Planning and Development, Ministry of Education is set to fully comply with the Data Protection Principles as set out in the Act.

- The Department will hold information you supply in accordance to your request to carry out research in State Schools and / or Education Division documents.
- The information you give may be disclosed to other Departments of the Education Division, who may also have access to your data.

Your rights:

You are entitled to know what information the Department holds and processes about you and why; who has access to it; how it is kept up to date; what the Department is doing to comply with its obligations under the Data Protection Act, 2001.

The Data Protection Act, 2001 sets down a formal procedure for dealing with data subject access requests which the Ministry of Education follows.

All data subjects have the right to access any personal information kept about them by the Department either on computer or in manual files. Requests to access to personal information by data subjects must be made in writing and addressed to the Data Controller of the Ministry of Education. An identification document such as a photocopy of the Identity Card, photocopy of passport etc of the data subject making the request must be submitted with the request. Such identification material will be returned to the data subject.

The Department aims to comply as quickly as possible with requests for access to personal information and will ensure that it is provided within reasonable time, the reason will be explained in writing to the data subject making the request.

All data subjects have the right to request that their information be amended, erased or not used in the event the data is incorrect.

Online Activity 1   Mummy Maker - Theme: History/Culture

This activity was available at this website link:

http://www.kids.discovery.com/fansites/tutenstein/mummymaker/mummymaker/html

This game consisted of one main activity in which the participants were asked to embalm Ramose's body, the officer of the king Tutankhamun. The challenge of the activity was for the players to remove the most important organs from the body without them having to ask for more than three clues from the embalmer's cat during the whole procedure.

This activity is based on simulation which according to Gee "situate meaning in multimodal space through embodied experiences to solve problems and reflect...adopt character identities of 'scientist', 'historian', 'architect' etc" (2003: 48).

Screen shot of Online Activity 1 – The Mummy Maker

Online Activity 2   Sagwa, the Chinese Siamese cat, Theme: history/culture

This activity, which is available at http://www.pbskids.org/sagwa/, is based on the book of the acclaimed author Amy Tan. The researcher had found the activity's theme *Countdown to the New Year* very appropriate as the session was conducted in December and the school was preparing for the Christmas festivities. 'Sagwa' consisted of a series of mini activities which were score oriented.

The activities had various themes and involved different ICT skills. Themes included Chinese food, festivals, clothes and traditions. ICT skills that were required, included clicking, dragging, scrolling, moving arrows from left/right directions and using the 'paintbrush' and/or 'crayon' task icons.

Screen shot of Online Activity 2 - 'Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat

Online Activity 3   Mouthpower - Theme: Healthcare

This activity, available at http://www.mouthpower.org/mouthpower.cfm, was a documentary-type of game. The participants were invited by *Mouthie*, to step into his laboratory to carry out a series of experiments related to good oral habits. This activity was selected since the school was concurrently running an oral healthcare awareness campaign. The activity includes some salient details about the history of dentistry. It included the process of the development of teeth from childhood through to adulthood. Information about the effect food can have on the teeth and gums was presented in a child friendly manner through the image of the food pyramid and the medical instruments. It also presented the users with medical terms relevant to the theme. The researcher considered this as an opportunity for the participants to engage in more extended discussions since it proved to be quite a challenging task.

Screenshot of Online Activity 3 - Mouthpower

Online Activity 4   Junior's Own Adventure –Theme: Morality

This activity, was accessed from the following website:

http://www.bigideafun.com/veggietales/stories/jr_adventure/info.htm

It is based on parable of 'The Lost Sheep' in the New Testament of Bible. This story was chosen since as Catholics, the participants would be familiar with the story and would subscribe to its biblical moral teachings. The activity consisted of one main activity and has multi story lines. The participants were invited to help Dave, a shepherd boy look for the lost sheep.

The activity involved decision-making and was visually stimulating with sand storms and the bats in the caves. It involved simple navigational skills with directional instructions and obstacles.

Screenshot of Online Activity 4 - Junior's Own Adventure

Online Activity 5   Archibald's Adventure – Theme: Animals/Environment

This activity, available at http://www.pestworldforkids.org/archiblad/index.html was based on a mission format similar to that found in computer games. It was selected since, by using the directional arrows, the users are required to use dexterity skills such as eye-hand coordination. In this activity the participants were invited to help Archibald, the ant to plunder food for the ant colony whilst staying out of harm's way.

Speed in decision making and movement is essential. It consisted of three levels which were progressive and the participants had to succeed on the first level in order to be able to move on to the second and third level of the activity. As explained by Lim *et al* (2006), referring to the original study by Csikszentmihalyi, 'the point system is a form of feedback and this enhances flow, which is characterised by intense concentration and excitement' (1990: 215).

Screenshot of Online Activity 5 – Archibald's Adventure

Online Activity 6   Design a dino - Theme: Character

This activity, available at http://kids.yahoo.com/directory/Computers--Games--and-Online.World-Wide-Web/Yahoolingans!-Cool-Sites-Archive, consisted of one main activity. The participants were invited to design a dinosaur. The activity involved the use of dragging and clicking skills. This activity was selected since at the time, the researcher conducted the session, the theme for that week was 'Dinosaurs' and they had a large model of the Barney character in class.

The activity included a great deal of information about animals from the prehistoric era, a popular subject for children of that age. The information was given on two levels. The first level was factual and similar to a documentary, such as the images showing the scales on the dinosaur and the body parts. The game also had another level to encourage creativity but introducing a fictional aspect to the activity. For example, the users had the choice to select feathers for the dinosaurs, various beaks or the different types of claws.

This is similar to the concept adopted in children's films such as Dumbo, a Disney character which resembles a real life animal, in this case an elephant. By introducing a fictional physical feature, that is, extra large ears, the character is exposed to marginalisation. The children learn more about the issue of ostracisation and the eventual aspects of inclusion and diversity.

[the website link is no longer available]

Online Activity 7   Thorkel & the trading ship, Theme: history/culture

This activity is available at the following website:

(http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings

It consisted of a main activity in which the participants were instructed to find five Viking objects in order to enable Thorkel to go on his trading voyage.

The activity reflected a crafts village in which a great deal of trading and negotiation took place. The character, Thorkel was given the task to look for artefacts in the trading huts and then purchase them from the villagers. The activity was in the form of a challenging treasure hunt whereby Thorkel had to extract information from the villagers and the location, itself.

Screenshot of Online Activity 7 – Primary History Vikings

Online Activity 8   Alien - Theme: Character

This activity, which is available at http://pbskids.org/arthur/games/alien/ consisted of one main activity. The participants were invited to build their very own alien. The activity involved the use of dragging and clicking skills. This activity was selected since at the time the sessions were conducted, the movie 'Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith' was being shown in local cinema theatres.

This activity is similar in concept to Dino the Dinosaur, whereby users are encouraged to create an alien using different body/animal parts and using different colours.

Screenshot of Online Activity 8 – Alien Assembly Required

Online Activity 9   Squish the Fish - Theme: animals/environment

This activity, available at http://www.seasheddaquarium.org/sea/squish/index.html, was based on inquiry-oriented instructions. The participants were invited to help Squish, the fish travel out across the reef to find its lunch whilst protecting it at the same time from its nemesis, Big Tooth Blob.

The marine environment is promoted, which is very relevant for the Maltese Islands. The text is written in poetic verse, an original approach to such activities. A humouristic slant is included in both the text and the sound effects, which added to the element of entertainment. The game is goal orientated, whereby Squish the fish needs to collect food without becoming a meal itself. In a very playful manner, nature's way of predator against prey is presented to the users.

Screenshot of Online Activity 9 – Squish the Fish

Online Activity 10   Ways of knowing trail – Theme: history/culture

This activity is available at:

http://www.brookfieldzoo.org/pagegen/wok/index_f4.html is based on inquiry-oriented instructions. The users are invited to help Kenge, Terese, Geoff and Tausi on a mission to discover a secret, written in a letter, along the wondrous path through the Ituri Forest in Africa. The activity has an interesting element which assists users with complex terminology. It incorporates a dictionary as a tool whereby certain technical words were defined. The game's characters have to work together as a team to overcome a number of obstacles along trail. The researcher selected this activity for two reasons. While Africa is only a few hundred kilometres away from Malta, the economic and cultural links are not very strong. Maltese children are likely to be unfamiliar with a jungle environment, thus presenting them with a new and more challenging experience.

Screenshot of Online Activity 10 – The secrets of the ways of knowing trail

Online Activity 11   Dream of a Druid - Theme: History/Culture

This activity, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/celts/, was based on adventure and consisted of nine mini activities. The participants were invited to help Dion, a young Celtic boy in succeeding at various quests related to ancient Celtic culture.

The researcher selected this activity since Malta's history is rich and involves a number of ancient civilisations, to include temple builders and fortifications. Maltese users are likely to make relevant links to the culture which surrounds them. The section of the Fact File, which includes encyclopaedic information about this subject, is an informative tool.

Screenshot of Online Activity 11 – Iron Age Celts

Online Activity 12   Maya and Miguel - Theme: Sports

This activity, available at http://pbskids.org/mayaandmiguel/flash.html, consists of a number of activities. The users are invited to 'hang around' with Maya, Miguel and their friends and practise a number of sports, such as soccer, archery, ping pong, as well as others, such as photography and album collecting. This activity was selected since the 2006 FIFA World Cup was underway and the event was receiving a lot of media exposure at the time.

The element of competition is strong and the users are challenged to receive as may points as possible in the many activities. The multi-cultural dimension of the characters is a subtle way in which sports encourages unity between between nationalities and encourages diversity.

Screenshot of Online Activity 12 – Maya & Miguel

<u>**Video Recording Consent Form - Data subjects - minors**</u>

Name of Parent or Guardian _____

Name of child / children _____

Location of video recording(s) _____

Date of recording(s) _____

The Directorate for quality and Standard in Education would like to authorise video recording(s) of your child / children for research purposes by students / researchers.

To comply with the **Data Protection Act, 2001**, your permission is necessary prior to the taking or use of video footage of your child. Please answer question 1, then sign and date the form where shown.

Kindly return the completed form to the Head of School or his / her representative.

To Parent

1. May we use your child's video footage / image in our printed publications or media?   YES   NO

      Please note that websites can be seen throughout the world, and not just in Malta, where the Maltese law applies. Note also the conditions for using these images

I have read and understood the conditions of use at the bottom of this form.

Parent's signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent's Name (in block letters): _____

To the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education

I confirm that the parent / guardian has given consent so that his / her child's / children video recordings may be used in printed publications or the media or both.

Researcher's signature: _____   Date: _____

Researcher's Name (in block letters): _____

Conditions of use

We will not include details or full names and surnames of any child in a recorded footage or in printed publications without consent.

DPID/2003 – Research & Planning

NOTES:

Date:		26.11.2004
Title of Online Activity:		**The Chinese New Year, with Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat**

Participants:	**Initials**	**Child's age at time of session**
Nick	(NC)	9 years' of age
Daphne	(DP)	9 years' of age
Researcher	(RS)	

Translator's Notes:
1. Anything in square brackets either gives more relevant information to support what has been said in the source language or describes the bodily movements of the participants.
2. (...) three dots signify that the speaker did not continue his/her sentence – there is no missing text here.
3. There are certain expressions in Maltese which cannot literally be translated into English – as close a version as possible has been given.
4. This translation was carried out from the filmed recording of the actual session. An attempt was made to keep as faithful as possible to the children's vocabulary and sentence construction while at the same time, reflecting the implied meaning of the text.

PAGE ONE

RED ENVELOPES   [name of first activity]

DP   *Mamma Mia!* [an Italian exclamation – to mean "oh wow!"]
     [the children are in homepage and the click on moon on. 7]
DP   Oh wow, how quickly that happened! [As Sagwa, the character comes on and referring to the loading process]
NC   Loading [Then the Red Envelopes comes on]

[game instructions]
Red Envelopes, for good wishes, we give each other red envelopes. Each has a decoration that stands for a different wish for the New Year. Match the envelopes that have the same decoration, and they'll fill with coins. Try to find all the pairs, so you'll have lots of good wishes in the New Year.

NC   PLAY
DP   So now what are we going to do?

[music comes on]
NC   Ah! ... La la la la [singing]

DP   Ah! ... You have to play the cards like a [card] game.
DP   [clicks on the card – it is a wrong match] No that was wrong. Your turn. Take the mouse, choose a card, you have to choose [one] from them.
NC   [clicks on the card]
DP   Oh wow, what [beautiful] flowers you have! [children click the cards. They remember their selections from memory and match them. They finish the game]

[description of what is showing on the screen]
Sagwa, the characters comes on screen and there are sound effects. "Ahhhhhh" – the children repeat the cry. Daphne is hesitant with the cursor and Nick suggests that she presses the key NEXT. They press it and it LOADS. The write up but they ignore it.

LION DANCES
[game instructions for this activity]
It's time for the Lion Dance! For good luck, the store owners give the lion dancers red envelopes filled with money. Can you put together all three lion puzzles? Choose a lion puzzle. Then click on each square until the lion in the puzzle looks like the lion in the picture on the right. Try to solve all three puzzles, so that we can go to the final New Year's celebrations.

[the loading takes a bit of time]
DP   Why is it taking so long to load?
NC   It is better when it loads slowly [caption shows information. The children ignore it and press PLAY. Dragons come on the screen with sound effects. The boy laughs and starts clicking on the jigsaw parts and they turn showing bits of the picture.
DP   *iii* [a Maltese expression of exclamation] What a lot of things we need to match!
DP   Are they going to do that for the whole time? [Nick continues and then Daphne makes an attempt]
NC   I haven't even understood it! [Daphne continues to click and turn the jigsaw pieces. Some green dragon detail appears.]
DP   Oh wow, there are the legs!
NC   Choose a number [he points to the blue dragon on the right hand margin. Daphne goes on it and then goes back to the jigsaw parts]
DP   no here. [she carries on clicking to find all the blue parts making up the blue dragon]
NC   that's it [confirming what Daphne is doing]
DP   that's it [confirming what she herself is doing – the children manage to match all the parts forming the blue dragon]

NC   You did all yourself.
RS   [researcher asks the children how they are getting on]
NC   Miss [researcher] I have managed to do Number 8.
DP   He matched them.
RS   [researcher encourages them to continue. Children click ON and the image loads]
DP   Uff, we don't have another game ...
NC   I think we do have.

[description of what is showing on the screen]
The dragons are dancing and the fireworks are lighting up the sky. "Hope you have a Happy new year!" A dragon comes on the screen with sound effects and the children giggle.

NC   PLAY [said together] [Nick explores hesitantly with the cursor]
DP   PLAY [said together]
DP   What would you like to do?
NC   To play again [he searches with the cursor]
NC   LAST [icon] – I think – is that right?
DP   No LAST [icon] is back
NC   What do I do? NEW? [Nick explores on LION DANCES and then on MENU. The children end up on the home page – the beginning]
NC   Oh look, we have come back to where we were [at the beginning]
DP   From the start!

[researcher explains what they need to do]

NC   Do we start again from 1?
DP   Can you tell me why aren't they giving us the same number?

[description of what is showing on the screen]
Caption comes on CLEAN SWEEP. "To get ready for the New Year, we've got to sweep out the old and bring in the new. Let's click on all eight dust balls to sweep them away."

[The children click on PLAY and the picture starts loading]
NC   is this a bedroom? No the kitchen?
DP   The bedroom?
NC   The bedroom?
DP   The kitchen? There is a broom.
NC   That is a kitchen! [he searches hesitantly with the cursor but nothing happens]
DP   Press something.

NC   [reading] CLEAN SWEEP – I think this one.

DP   No1 [nothing happens]

RS   What are you doing?

NC   This is a kitchen. We cannot do anything [Nick looks helplessly at the screen]

DP   I don't know what we have to do

          [Daphne points to the screen and explains to the researcher]

RS   Go down a bit with the cursor to see whether there are more details

NC   [Nick uses the cursor to get to the bottom of the screen and spots something] Yes.

RS   No, there is nothing down there for you.

DP   Go back up. [Nick keeps searching with the cursor]

RS   Where are you clicking?

DP   Click – go to the very top. Click on something.

NC   What should be clicked?

NC   Let me click on everything [he clicks repeatedly on the teapot]

DP   You have to click on something for sure.

PAGE 3

RS   [researcher assists them – Nick keeps clicking on things aimlessly. A dialogue box opens at the top and shuts immediately]

DP   What was that which appeared? [a white box appears on the screen]

DP   Menu Number 2 [reading off the screen]

RS   [researcher takes over the mouse and takes them back. The caption CLEAN SWEEP appears]

DP   CLEAN

RS   When you get confused always go back.

NC   Look, it now appeared again [pictures unfold this time showing the dust balls that the players have to sweep]

NC   PLAY ONE [Nick clicks on dustballs on the curtain and it vanishes – there are sound effects too]

DP   Ok!

RS   You have to read [the instructions] first. You have to read the first so that you will know what you have to do.

DP   We have to find that dirt [she points to the dustballs showing on the screen] I have understood it!

NC   [he starts clicking on the various dustballs on the bedroom items]

DP   You have one here [pointing to the lantern]. [There is] another one there. [points to the top wall unit]

NC   [he clicks on the dustballs, they vanish and he gets a point which is shown on the right hand margin – No. 7. Nick continues clicking on the cupboard.

DP   You have nothing there. Open the other cupboard [Nick clicks on cupboard]
        You have nothing there. Oh wow, ... open the curtain
        [Daphne points to the curtain]

NC   No, there is nothing here.

DP   Would you say that there could be something on the other side? [Daphne points
        to the bamboo curtain]

NC   [he ignores her and clicks on the teapot]

DP   No, could it be that there is something on the other side?

NC   [he clicks on everything and Daphne mumbles. She points and the second
        bamboo curtain and he goes over it]

DP   The cupboard has opened.

NC   [he makes another attempt.

DP   I don't think there are any more. We have finished it.
        [points are marking that number six is still missing]

NC   NEXT [he clicks the icon and Sagwa, the cat comes on again]

DP   What a [cool] cat that is! [there are sound effects and the boy laughs and puts
        his hand to his mouth]

[description of what is showing on the screen]
Caption comes on to DECORATE: "To bring happiness into our house, we need to decorate it. But we've broken the statues that stand for luck, wealth and long life. Can you put all three of them back together for the New Year?

[game instructions]
You can glue each statue back together by dragging each piece onto the place where it belongs. Do that again and again until the entire statue is back together. When you finish putting one statue back together, try fixing another one.

DP   Press PLAY as usual.

NC   Wait a second [as Daphne grabs the mouse]

DP   Oh no! puzzle, puzzle, puzzle

RS   What is there now, Nick?

NC   Puzzle.

RS   Is that another game?

PAGE 4

NC   Yes

DP   [Daphne starts trying to work out the puzzle]

NC   [Nick points to the moustache and Daphne drags them]

DP   *iii* [Maltese expression of exclamation] That one is a Chinese man!

NC   That one is a man, he looks like a man!

DP	The Chinese man has to come here
	[she drags the puzzle pieces at the bottom of the figure.]
NC	[Nick points to the top part of the puzzle]
DP	[She goes on it with the cursor]
NC	That is a hat
DP	[She drags the puzzle piece but it slides back]
NC	It got away from you. You did not do it right.
DP	[She gets the piece into place and moves onto another puzzle piece]
DP	Part of his eye.
NC	Part of his ears.
DP	Where does this go? [Is it] part of his eyes?
	[She drags the puzzle piece but it slides back]
DP	Let's leave this one for now.
	[she then drags another piece to the bottom of the figure]
NC	[He points to the puzzle piece at the top.] A piece of his eyes is here.
DP	[She follows his instructions but the piece slides back]
NC	No, it was a piece of his chin!
DP	[She attempts to match the parts.]
DP	Here is something. This will definitely be good. This is another piece.
NC	This is a piece of his hand. How nice it is! We are nearly ready
DP	[She continues to drag the pieces]
DP	How is it coming? Have it [she gives Nick the mouse and the boy continues]
	I don't even like the Chinese.
NC	[he drags a piece towards the lower part of the figure's body]
DP	This is a piece of his hand [she points to the screen]
NC	[he drags a piece towards the arm and it fits. He moves on to another piece]
NC	Oh wow! He is fanning himself
DP	[She points to the upper right arm and the boy takes her suggestion and follows the mouse]
DP	That piece is from there.
NC	[he seems hesitant but then fits it in]
DP	That goes where I told you.
NC	[he drags another piece]
DP	Is this the flag?
NC	[he drags the piece slowly to the upper part]
DP	That's right – that [piece] is his eyes.
NC	As if! That is not his eyes.
DP	That *is* his eyes.
NC	As if! That is not his eyes.
	[he lets the piece go and drags another piece to the upper part of the figure and forms his chin]
NC	I was right.

PAGE 4 (cont.)

DP   Now see if you can with this one [paraphrased]

NC   [he moves onto a small piece]

NC   That [piece] is his eyes.

DP   I was right – the eyes.

NC   [he drags the piece to form the eyes. He then goes back to one of the original pieces and forms the shoulder and arm which is holding a mirror]

DP   Wow!

PAGE 5

NC   This goes there. [he fits in another piece to make up the right side of the bottom of the figure's robe. He then fits the remaining piece to form the left side of the robe]

[description of what is showing on the screen]
The Chinese character laughs 'ha ha ha'

NC   [he imitates the character] Ha ha ha.

NC   We put you together! [makes a funny face at the screen]

DP   [she clicks NEXT and the next games loads]

DP   I wonder what is coming up next.

[description of what is showing on the screen]
Ready for the parade: It is time to paint the signs for the parade. Choose your picture and start your painting. Courage, Protection from bad spirits, Long Life, Wealth.

NC   PLAY

DP   [she reads off the screen] it is time to paint.

NC   We are going to paint.

DP   I don't really know how to paint.

[description of what is showing on the screen]
There is one big picture to colour with four small ones at the side.

NC   Yes, we are going to paint

DP   [she starts clicking with the mouse]

NC   Ok ok – now you can paint.

DP   [she colours the figure's hand black]

NC   [he laughs]

NC   Try the peach

DP   [she clicks on the colour chart]

NC   Paint his hands, his face, ...

DP   [she follows Nick's instructions and moves onto the figure's second hand]
DP   Now here are his hands.
NC   His fingers.
DP   Hurry up fingers [she cannot paint the fingers peach]
NC   Come let me do the fingers [he clicks and colours the fingers]
DP   Now I do one, you do one, I do one, you do one. We have a lot to colour. [she points to the four small pictures on the side and then grabs the mouse. The background turns yellow]
NC   [exclamation of alarm] Look what you did!
DP   We have a lot to colour. [she points to the small pictures on the side]
NC   [he works on the background] Wait a second, shall we do this in purple?
DP   This one me, this one you [as she points to each of the small pictures] this one me, this one you.
NC   Here, the blue [clicking on the palette and the changing the background to light blue]
DP   This one me, this one you [as she points to each of the small pictures again].
NC   I will do this one myself and you can do the other one [he tries to paint the rod of the figure in the picture. He clicks on the mustard colour and colours an area of the drawing]
DP   What a lot of colours we have!
NC   The red no, we have not yet used it.
DP   We used the red.
NC   The shoes [he colours one shoe red and then the second one. He looks at the palette more closely.]
NC   Black
DP   Where goes the black?
NC   [he paints the top black and the trousers lime green.]
NC   Blue [he changes his mind and makes the top blue instead of black]
NC   Now I have got it right. Dress the monkey [referring to the figure and calling him a derogatory name.] Ha ha!
DP   [she mumbles] No, because he will hear you!

PAGE 6

NC   As long as he is on the computer!
DP   [she mumbles] We are not going to be afraid of the computer.
NC   We will drive her crazy.
DP   The hat?
NC   Oh yes, the hat.
DP   Which colours haven't we used? Hmmm, the grey we have not used. We have used the blue.

NC   Grey – how disgusting!

DP   You are not going to stay with just these two colours. There is still the tail.

NC   There is no brown.

DP   The tail.

NC   We can do it orange – why not? [he clicks on the orange colour on the palette]

NC   Isn't it like brown? [he laughs]

DP   Do it grey!

NC   No! That is black [he checks out the hat area with the cursor. The colour is very light]

DP   What colour is that?

NC   How do I know? Let me see which colour?

DP   That is white. That is going to come all white.

NC   I hope not! [he clicks on the character's face and the background turns pastel yellow and the children laugh]

DP   Now you should use the grey or the black.

NC   [he tries to reverse the command to change the background]

NC   Blue. That is how it was. Hmmm [the background is back to blue and he continues to move with the cursor over the figure's body. This time he manages to change the background to lime.]

DP   [she turns to look at her teacher]

NC   Uuf [he manages to change the background to blue again. He colours the hair blue]

DP   Are you ready?

NC   Red ears [he clicks on the ears and the background changes to red too]

DP   [she takes the mouse and hovers the cursor over the small pictures and chooses the one with the Chinese warrior after discussing it with the researcher.]

DP   St. James Cavalier [an arts centre in Valletta which holds exhibitions and has many activities for children] [as she starts to colour the canon ball blue]

NC   Did you go there?

DP   No

NC   I haven't been either.

DP   I am going to move this. [she moves the keyboard for a better position and colours the warriors armour in mustard]

DP   Do you understand?

NC   As if! [he laughs]

NC   How good he is coming! [addressing the warrior and laughing]

DP   It's horrible!

NC   Do his moustache as well [referring to the mustard colour]

DP   [mumbling] his tummy with the sword [colouring it]

NC   that is his moustache. [pointing to the warrior's face]

DP   Ah ha move [pushing the boy away]

NC   He is coming really nice too [said sarcastically]

DP   yes he is coming out nicely! [she experiments with colours and Nick laughs]

DP   That's fine!

NC   Colour his eyes blue.

DP   Now let me do something myself ... Colours! [moaning and getting restless in her seat and showing that she is tired handling the mouse. She colours the warrior's head dress black].

DP   His hair blue ... I am already tired. [children laugh and are absorbed in the task at hand]

RS   What are you doing? [addressed to Nick]

NC   Now I have done one. Now she is doing one.

RS   What are she doing Nick?

NC   She is colouring. I painted something like the king of monkeys and she is painting [demonstrates that the figure is fat] – fat, with a sword, with a beard, with a tingling bell like that [points to the screen]

DP   [moaning] I am already tired, Miss! [researcher]

RS   Is the man Maltese?

NC   No, I think he is Chinese as he has his eyes like this [pulls his eyes sideways]

DP   Let's work on his eyes.

NC   Use the orange.

DP   [she colours his face orange too]

NC   [He laughs as girl clicks and the background changes to red]

DP   That is better – now I can see well. What colour are you going use?

NC   I have not used the black.

DP   Yes you have used the black. You have nearly used them all.

NC   Except for yellow.

DP   Yes you have used the yellow. The blue, the purple, the purple you have used.

NC   I haven't used the orange.

DP   You have used the orange a lot. Are we going to colour the belt as we will soon close.

NC   That is black.

DP   [she concludes the picture and gives the mouse to Nick]

DP   Here.

NC   [he takes the mouse]. Are you ready?

DP   Yes

NC   Now [clicking on FINISH. Daphne gets nervous and attempts to take the mouse from his hand]

DP   No no that is FINISH, I have finished that one.

[description of what is showing on the screen]
NICE WORK

NC   [at a bit of a loss]
DP   Didn't you click on it! [she tried to take the mouse from him]
NC   [he ignores her as he clicks on NEXT]
NC   OK Miss, [researcher] we have arranged [it], I think.

[description of what is showing on the screen]
Sagwa the cat comes with caption showing that it is loading. DRESS UP – its time to get dressed up for the New Year. We need to put on new clothes and get a haircut. Can you help us both get dressed. RED means good luck to us, so dress us in lots of RED.

[game instructions]
Choose which one of us you are going to dress. Then choose what we will wear on our head, top, bottom and feet. Use the arrows to scroll up and down and see all the choices. When you see something you like, click on it to dress us in it. When you are finished dressing one of us, dress the other. Remember that we want to wear as much red as we can for good luck.

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[description of what is showing on the screen]
A Chinese girl in her underwear with a caption next to her comes on screen.

NC   [Nick laughs as girl attempts to read English. He tries to change the Chinese girl into a Chinese boy]
DP   Hmmm, "remember red clothes bring good luck." You need red clothes.
NC   [he clicks on the green arrow and an array of clothes start coming on screen]
DP   [she points on the red top that comes on]
DP   There are red clothes.
RS   What's happening?
DP   There is a Chinese boy.
NC   A Chinese boy [he clicks on the top and it immediately turned the figure's top red]
DP   Now the trousers.
NC   [he hesitates to click on the icons on the side of the screen]
DP   Click on the trousers! [nervously]
NC   [he clicks on the arrow and an array of trousers were shown – there was a red one]
DP   oh oh oh [pointing to the screen]
NC   Come on [singing softly and clicks on the trousers]
DP   Now the shoes, shoes, shoes [pointing to the icons]

NC   Red shoes?

DP   Yes

NC   Then these people are technicolour [he searches for and clicks on the shoes]

DP   Remember, the shoes bring ...

DP   Now a red face, I think. Now I will do one. [takes mouse from Nick]

DP   Let me do one.

NC   Are you going to choose

DP   [the girl clicks on the icon and the Chinese girl comes on the screen]

NC   [he laughs and shows that he was embarrassed]

NC   What a shame! [looking at the screen]

DP   Are you going to use orange for her hair? [they both giggled]

DP   Wow, how lovely the hairstyles are. [she laughs and clicks on the arrow and an array of hairstyles and headresses appear]

NC   The hat maybe – Look!

DP   the hat. That's it [with assertion]

NC   What a lovely hat she has [referring to a typical Chinese red hat]

DP   [she clicks on icons for the Chinese girl's top]

DP   T-shirt of the boys.

DP   Like that [she clicks on her choice with assertion]

NC   Now the trousers. [he reacts as that he is embarrassed again as the Chinese girl in her underwear]

NC   What a shame!

DP   [she clicks on the arrow and the array of trousers come on the screen.]

NC   [mumbles something – inaudible]

NC   You can't imagine how she shouts at us.

DP   Ah! I am hungry.

PAGE 9

DP   [Daphne clicks on the arrow and an array of shoes comes on the screen]

DP   Are there any red shoes?

NC   Oh wow! [surprised]

DP   Look at the socks.

NC   Da da! [showing off the Chinese girl]

DP   This is like a calculator [gives back the mouse to the boy]. Now this is NEXT

NC   [he takes over] NEXT

[description of what is showing on the screen]

Caption comes on LET'S EAT – "Everywhere people are cooking special dishes like dumplings, oysters, shrimp and cakes, can bring us New Year's wishes and good luck. Let's put each special dish in its place on the table so we can eat!

[game instructions]
Put each dish on its place on the table. When each dish appears in the timeframe, click on the black shape on the table where it belongs.

NC   [he pulled a funny face]. We did well.

[description of what is showing on the screen]
The game unfolds on the screen. A table with a lot of silhouettes appears and a small screen with the word FIND appears.

DP   FIND – we have to click FIND.
NC   [he searches with the cursor]
NC   We are going to uncover the dishes. [both children look towards their teacher when they heard a noice. Nick then hovers with the cursor over the central silhouette. He clicks on it three times and Daphne sighs]
NC   Don't keep pressing. Come on we are going to get into it again.
DP   [she took the mouse and a menu box appears]
NC   Be careful! What did you press?
NC   Miss [researcher] [he was perplexed]
DP   [she clicks something and a menu box disappeared]
DP   Nothing is right.
NC   BACK – you have to go [back] [both children ended up back to the caption card LET'S EAT. They try to read it.]
DP   [she clicks on NEXT and the picture of the silhouettes comes on. She hands the mouse to Nick]
DP   You now have to put the food in the middle. The glass [pointing to the screen] place it there. [a cake comes on the small screen with the words FIND]
DP   The cake – look [pointing to the silhouette on the screen]
NC   [he clicks on the figure but to no avail]
DP   Do you think that is a cake? [pointing to another shape]
NC   Yes, … no [when he got no result] Where is the cake? Let's try.
DP   Isn't *that* the cake? [pointing to the silhouette]. Click on it again.
NC   Let's try again [no result] Uuf. [he keeps clicking on the two silhouettes but to no avail]
NC   Where is the cake? [grumbling] We want it! [he then manages to click on the silhouette and it takes the shape of the cake.
NC   Oh yeah! [the mini screen changes the picture – there is now a pot]
DP   These are here [pointing to the silhouette on the table]
NC   [he clicks and it changes] Yes.
DP   That is there [pointing]

NC   Yes [the silhouette doesn't change]
DP   Come on!
NC   No, here [no result]

PAGE 10 (cont.)

DP   Oh dear!
NC   [clicks on icon]
DP   Up here. [points to the screen] It should be this [mumbles something. Now we will see.
NC   [clicks and silhouette turns into picture]
DP   Didn't I tell you?
NC   [clicks and mini screen shows noodles]
DP   Now a plate of pasta
NC   Spaghetti
NC   Here [clicks]
DP   Those blue flowers [referring to a Chinese lettuce on a plate]
NC   Here? Don't keep telling me Daphne please.
DP   ok
NC   [he explores with the cursor]
DP   No somewhere else. I already know where.
NC   Here? [searching]
DP   Shall I tell you?
NC   No.
DP   [she still points to the silhouette]
NC   [he clicks and the silhouette changes to a picture of salt and seasonings.]
DP   [she rubs her tummy to show that she is hungry]
NC   Here?
DP   No, not the same.
NC   [he finds the right silhouette and it changes into the picture]
DP   And now another one. [as the small screen changes and shows a rice bowl]
NC   that is the one you told me [searches with cursor and changes the silhouette into a picture]
NC   Another one came up [small screen shows chopsticks]
NC   Here [searches with cursor]
DP   that's better [mini screen changes to chicken sticks] That is some plate.
NC   How I wish it was in my tummy.
DP   Now we can go and eat, no?
NC   Wait, we did something wrong. [when it did not change Nick tries again]
NC   This here and this there. [looks at camera]
NC   We got it wrong.
DP   NEXT [she takes the mouse] what shall we do now?

[description of what is showing on the screen]
A caption with two Chinese children giving their congratulations comes on screen.

DP   Good job! [said together]
NC   Good job! [said together]

[description of what is showing on the screen]
Sagwa the Cat comes on screen with the icon showing LOADING

GIFTS FOR EVERYONE – On New Year's Day, we visit family and friends and bring special gifts like oranges, flowers, candy, cakes and our good wishes for the New Year. How many of these special gifts can you catch so that you will have good luck in the New Year?

[game instructions]
Help us catch 12 of the special gifts on our baskets. Move the right and left arrow keys on your keyboards to move us and catch the special gifts: rice cakes, oranges, orchids, watermelons and candy in the basket. Try to catch only the special gifts – not the hats, clocks or handkerchiefs. When you catch a special gift, a lantern on a left will light up.

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[the children laugh and sing to the Chinese tune]

NC   Come on, let's go.
NC   A girl [he points to the Chinese figure on the screen]
DP   Do you think that is a girl?
NC   A boy.
RS   What do you have now, Nick?
NC   There is a room and a boy with something in his hand and with many things of food. [motions with his hands]
DP   [she takes over the mouse] I don't even know what I have to do here. I am going to go BACK, maybe I will understand something. [she clicks on BACK and gets the icon GOOD JOB]
DP   Good job! [said together]
NC   Good job! [said together]
NC   So why don't we go onto it?
DP   [she clicks and ends up on the silhouette items on the table again]
DP   No! [clicks again]
NC   NEXT [the loading icon comes up again with Sagwa the Cat. Icon GIFTS FOR EVERYONE appears once again and Daphne tries to read it. There is Chinese background music and after a time it stops.]

DP   Uuf – it has stopped. [she tries to read more]
NC   [he mumbles something as Daphne continues searching]
NC   Click below. [an icon with the gifts and a shrill sound effect comes on]
NC   Ah!
DP   Oh wow! What do we need to give them? Gifts [pointing to the figures of the Chinese girls]
NC   Choose the cake and then I will eat it myself!

NC   NEXT
DP   ok

[description of what is showing on the screen]
The setting of the games comes on again, this time with a Chinese character who enters it with a laugh and sound effects. Children imitate the laugh]

NC·   Ah
DP   Ah [she clicks on the items showing on the screen but is not successful]
DP   The hat is here.
NC   I think you need to move
DP   [she tries to move the mouse] It doesn't want to move.
NC   Pull down the clock.
DP   [she presses the keyboard]
RS   not the keyboard
NC   not the keyboard [repeats]
DP   here is one
NC   Press this, this one.
DP   I want to catch them. Uuf [getting irritated] Waaa. Get out get out [working the mouse quickly]
NC   No, they are coming down!
DP   As if they are coming down! [there is a downfall of items]
DP   They must not get away.

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NC   As well! The cake has come down.
DP   One [catches one of them]
DP   We need to give them chance to come down. PAUSE.[as she works on the game] but this one needs to move [referring to the Chinese girl figure]
NC   That's how it should be.
DP   Like that they come down by themselves. Miss [researcher] [she shows that she is getting tired handling the mouse]

NC   Come on – the long one.

DP   My hand is hurting me. PAUSE [as she works on the game] Come on come on – on her on her.

NC   *iii* [Maltese expression of exclamation]

DP   Now we need to take off form here [points to the screen]. *So it will work by itself and I don't need to move it myself.*

NC   Another one.

NC   Each cake that comes down is marked [points at the screen]

DP   not every cake [grumbling]

DP   It did not mark [she plays on]. It did not mark [she plays on]

NC   *iii* [Maltese expression of exclamation]

DP   Come on … others remained on the bottom

[description of what is showing on the screen]
The screen changes and the smiling [sound effect] Chinese boy and girl present the food basket. Items fly by.

DP   Oh wow! How many things flew down! Here, its your turn [she passes the mouse to Nick]

[description of what is showing on the screen]
Sagwa the Cat comes on with the caption for loading.

DP   Do we have to look here?

NC   Now we will see.

[description of what is showing on the screen]
RED ENVELOPES icon comes on.

NC   This is the seventh game. The last game [addressing the camera]. I think we have finished them all [he starts clicking to match the pairs within the game]. We once again came to the cards.

DP   The cards.

NC   We had already done this one. I know where they are [he clicks and matches the cards]

RS   Didn't you already play this one?

NC   But since we started with the first one, we are now in the seventh place.
        [he continues to match the cards with the master card. He does this from memory in some cases and in other randomly]

DP   Now for the next one, it will be my turn

NC   [he finishes the game and Sagwa the Cat comes on again with its usual cry. The children imitate the cry]

[description of what is showing on the screen]
LION DANCES comes on

DP   I can't take it anymore.

NC   PLAY

DP   [she starts working on building the jigsaw puzzle t omatch the dragon]

DP   I am going to start it, I am going to do something else. [she clicks on the first box and chooses a different dragon. She moves to the second box and realises that there are many parts belonging to the orange dragon]

DP   In fact, no [she starts looking for the remaining orange box and then changes her mind again and decides to go back to the blue dragon again. So she starts changing all the box to match them with the blue dragon.]

RS   What are you doing?

NC   A monster appears and we have to put the pieces together.

DP   Like this. [finds the final upper box]

DP   Like this. [finds the lower box]

NC   We are ready, Miss [researcher]

DP   We have to click LAST

NC   We are ready, Miss [researcher]

DP   The game is finished, Miss [researcher]

NC   Because it is until number eight

DP   [she fiddles with one of the boxes and turns it over and over]

DISCUSSIONS AFTER THE GAME

RS   Which impressed you most, Nick?

NC   When we had to collate the flowers.

RS   And you Daphne?

DP   I liked all of it.

RS   How is it possible that you liked everything? You need to choose. And in which country did we go to? Was it here in Malta?

NC   In the jungle.

DP   In the Chinese [to mean in China]

RS   How did you realise this?

NC   There was nothing but Chinese people.

DP   Because the people, ..., the people were dressed as Chinese. The playing cards were Chinese.

RS   Do we have like them?

NC   No! [said together]

DP   No! [said together]

RS   What else was different?

DISCUSSIONS AFTER THE GAME (cont.)

NC   The puzzle [pointing to the screen and referring to the dragon] the puzzle and the painting.

DP   The people were dressed differently.

RS   Pls give me your names

DP   Daphne.

NC   Nick.

END

Appendix F   Overview of online activities

Note: All the online activities were sourced from the official website of the Education Division in the Ministry of Education of Malta http://skola.gov.mt/primary.

Date	Website / Activity	Student Pairs	Themes and Links to interests/Calendar events
Session 1 26/11/2004	Discovery Kids Mummy Maker	Angie & Andy Sadie & Frankie	TV channels (History and Culture)

The children were quite timid and did not converse very much. It was interesting to note how they made relevant links to what they had learnt at school. One also made a reference to a documentary seen on Discovery Channel. The visual of their robes (referred to as sheets) helped them associate with the Egyptian culture. The children were very excited and motivated by the visuals and often, the written word was overlooked. In addition to this, it was noted that the children took a while to solve the challenge at hand simply since they had failed to read the instructions which were presented. Frankie linked the mummification process to his grandfather's culture as a taxidermist. He actually knew quite a bit about the process.

Date	Website / Activity	Student Pairs	Themes and Links to interests/Calendar events
Session 2 10/12/2004	PBS Kids Sagwa the Chinese Cat	Daphne & Nick	Christmas Activities (History and Culture)

The children generally worked well as a team. It was a collaborative effort, except when they became restless towards the end. One of them took on more of a leadership role. Reference was also made between the visual and the cultural differences represented in the game. This particular game presented the more traditional children's games, such as colouring, dressing up and matching pictures, using modern technology and tools such as clicking, dragging and scrolling. Nick was embarrassed when he saw the Chinese girl in her underwear.

Date	Website / Activity	Student Pairs	Themes and Links to interests/Calendar events
Session 3 14/01/2005	Edu Web Mouthpower	Lottie & Samuel	School campaign on dental hygiene (Healthcare)

The children were very interested in the setting of the game, i.e a laboratory. Both children held back in their comments but got very much involved in their game. Links were also made to what was learnt at school. Their experiences were brought to the forefront through the examples they gave and the links they made to the food pyramid, among others. In Samuel's mind, the chicken drumsticks reminded him of Macdonalds.

Appendix F   Overview of online activities

Session 4 18/03/2005	Big Idea Junior's Own Adventure	Randy & Robbie Lottie & Andy	The Catholic Church (Morality)

The children quickly linked the main character David and the lost sheep with Jesus, the Good Shepherd. An important religious icon in Malta. In fact, one of the boys mentioned that he actually had an image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd in his bedroom. They also made a reference to their Religion lesson. The other boy commented that he had a wrestler's pin up portrait. The children enjoyed the challenge of having to find the lost sheep.

Session 5 13/05/2005	Archibald's Adventure Story	Angie & Andy Daphne & Nick	Green Week at school (Animals and the Environment)

There was a clear link to school activities. Nick identified so much with the main character that when he was invited to talk and also during the game, he spoke in the 'I' form, often with a great deal of excitement. Angie held back a little and left most of the activity to Andy.

Session 6 10/06/2005	Yahooligans Design and Dino	Randy & Samuel	'Dinosaurs' : Topic of the week at school (Animals as Theme Characters)

The children were quite enthusiastic. The intention of game was to design a dinosaur which helps with their creativity skills. While Samuel linked the subject to the non-fiction book he had at home, Randy referred to Barney, another popular dinosaur character for very young children. While Samuel's referral was age appropriate, Randy's was not.

Session 7 11/11/2005	School Games Machine Thorkel	Sadie & Frankie	Seafarers (History and Culture)

During this session, there was a power cut and the children, supported by their parents, were willing to stay after school for extra time to finish the session. This reflected that they were enthusiastic to participate, especially since it was a Friday afternoon.

Session 8 16/12/2005	PBS Kids Buster and the Alien	Randy & Nick	Movie: Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith (Media)

Nick was one of the most media savvy of all the children. He associated the main character with the film *Ghostbusters*. Through discussions and negotiations, they determined that they should select the type of arms etc. In fact, in this example, they chose the arms of the *Flintstone* character. The tradition of print media is reflected since they were given the task to create the front page of a newspaper. While they had been working on an English site, they quickly switched into Maltese for this task.

Appendix F   Overview of online activities

Session 9 03/02/2006	Edu Web Squish the fish	Daphne & Nick	The Sea (Animals and the Environment)

The children quickly realised that the sea was not in Malta due to different environmental aspects, such as the presence of the shark. One of the children commented that people dumped rubbish into the Maltese sea.

Session 10 10/03/2006	Edu Web The Ways of Knowing Trail	Angie & Frankie Lottie & Robbie	Africa : a neighbour continent (History and Culture)

The visual features assisted the children in their task. They were confident with the storyline but since there were many details associated with the jungle and its fora, the children felt a bit lost at times since they had no experience of such an environment. Few links were made to their past experience which includes media.

Session 11 05/06/2006	School Games Machine Dream of a Druid	Daphne & Samuel	Old Civilisations: Topic of the week at school (History and Culture)

The culture of the Druids was closely linked with Malta's temple history. Samuel also made a link to the Celts which were similar to a particular war game he played. He referred to the local touristic industry with pride, saying that there was a lot to see in Malta. This is in contrast to what was often observed throughout the data collection, that Malta does not always feature highly in the children's perceptions. American and European music, characters and films etc. were often preferred to the local ones.

Session 12 15/06/2006	PBS Kids Maya & Miguel	Sadie & Andy	2006 FIFA World Cup (Sports)

The allegiance of the children with Italian and English football teams was mentioned constantly. The children made links to their own experiences during their sports activities, both at school and as a hobby. The small size of Malta was referred to in terms of sports, the children did not expect the Maltese teams to be very successful in the global scenario.

Maltese (MT) into English (EN)
St Venera, Malta

NOTES:

Date of Session		22.02.07

Participant:	Initials	
Researcher	(RS)	

Participant:	Initials	Child's Ages at time of interview
Nick	(NC)	11 years' old
Robbie	(RB)	11 years' old
Samuel	(SM)	12 years' old

Translator's Notes:
1. Anything in square brackets either gives more relevant information to support what has been said in the source language or describes the bodily movements of the participants.
2. (...) three dots signify that the speaker did not continue his/her sentence – there is no missing text here.
3. There are certain expressions in Maltese which cannot literally be translated into English – as close a version as possible has been given.
4. This translation was carried out from the transcript of the filmed recording of the actual session. An attempt was made to keep as faithful as possible to the children's vocabulary and sentence construction while at the same time, reflecting the implied meaning of the text.

START

PAGE ONE

RS   Let us begin with Samuel. Based on what we had spoken about, what have you chosen?

SM   [flicks through the diary]   I played with the computer

RS   Ok, therefore you played on the computer, on what? Now explain what time you played and where you played it.

SM   I played with it at my uncle's

RS   At your uncle's and why?

SM   Because I don't have a computer. We have PlayStation.

SM   I don't know at what time I played it.

RS   No, I am only going to ask you this. Is your uncle big [literal translation - to mean grown up] or young?

SM   Big

RS   But not old?

SM   No, maybe he is 22?

RS   … and he loves the computer and play station? Is it only possible to play this game on computer? Is that right?

SM   and also on play station. There is like it,

RS   But why did you go to your uncle's?

SM   You can. Because I have my second uncle there. No but sometimes I do choose [to go there] as they have different games.

RS   But you told me that … [pause] I don't know what you told me.

SM   [said together] That I don't have a computer.

RS   [said together] That you don't have a computer.

RS   Ah, so you can't play this game at home then?

SM   I play it on the play station.

RG   You cannot play the CD on the playstation, you have to buy another CD.

RS   Now you are confusing me.

RG   … that the computer can read it.

RS   That it is good for the computer – I have understood. On what [subject] was this computer game?

SM   *Lord of the Rings.*

RS   Mmmmm. Why do you like it?

SM   Because it is [pause] 'fantasy'.

RS   Where did you hear about it?

RB   Film

SM   *iiii.* [Maltese expression of excitement]

RS   Did you see the film?

SM   [said together] Yes!

RB   [said together] Yes!

NC   [said together] Yes!

NC   I have the set.

RS   You told me 'fantasy.' And you told me that you [addressed to all of them] saw the film

SM   About seven times

RS   Seven times!

RB   I saw it about four times.

RS   Really?

NC   I have 3 CDs – the whole set.

[children talking inaudibly together]

RS   One at a time!

RS   Cinema, who saw it at the cinema? Did you see it?

SM	About seven times
RS	At the cinema?
SM	No, once [at the cinema] and then at home.
RS	Did you all go to the cinema?
RB	[said together] No, at home
NC	[said together] No, at home
SM	Yes ... there are a lot and now they are going to issue another one.
RS	You [addressed to all of them] saw it once at home and then you continued repeating [to seeing it] at home? So you tell me [that you watched it at home] ... [on] DVD?
RB	Film. They made a film and I saw it.
NC	On TV
RS	*Lord of the Rings?*
SM	On *Canale 5* [an Italian station]
RB	On *Italia Uno* [an Italian station]
NC	On *Italia Uno* [an Italian station]
SM	Even on *Canale 5* [an Italian station]
RB	I saw it twice.
RS	So, this was in Italian, right?
RB	Yes
RS	And so? [a Maltese expression to encourage more information]
RB	I understand Italian but I did not choose the Italian [version]
RS	Now you understand Italian, you have Italian [as a subject at school]
RB	German
NC	French
RS	And Italian, God Bless [a common Maltese expression]
RB	I don't even like Italian
RS	How do you understand Italian?
	[children talking together]
RS	One at a time. Of *Lord of the Rings?*
NC	I learnt it from the television
RS	From the television?
NC	Italian is always on the television
RS	And do you understand it well if it is in Italian?
NC	When we talk, for example, when I went up to Italy with the dogs ...
RS	So you are telling me that you learnt Italian from the TV?
	[question directed to Nick]
RS	And you? [question directed to Robbie]
RB	the same.
RS	But when there are difficult words? Like for example ...
RB	No not when there are difficult words.
NC	*Lord of the Rings* does not have difficult words.

RB   We always understand it.
RS   But when there are difficult words, how do you understand them?
NC   Sometimes I keep them in my head and ask my Italian teacher.
RS   Is this true? But at that time you don't understand.

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NC   At that time, I don't understand. I keep the word, for example, *cioccolateria*, in my mind and then I tell the teacher.
RS   Do you learn Italian here?
NC   I did not choose it as we have three languages in four weeks.
RS   Ah ok … then you are not lying! [all children laugh]. You, Robbie, what do you do?
RB   I have a dictionary.
RS   True? But during the film …?
RB   I keep it near me.
RS   True?
RB   Yes, I often do it.
NC   My sister, that is what she does when we watch [channels from] the French satellite. She stops the film [imitates his sister flicking through the dictionary]. She stops the film. She keeps on looking up the words each time. Do you know how she bothers me! She spoils [uses a swear word] the film.
RB   I have French, German and Italian dictionaries.
RS   Do you do what Nick does?
RB   Sometimes [but] we don't stop it [the film].
NC   Because with satellite you can stop it. It has 'pause,' you get the dictionary and you check.
RB   Yes, you can.
NC   She [his sister] keeping checking. She spoils [a stronger word was used] the film for me. I just get up and leave.
RS   Right, but she would want to understand. And in your case Robbie, do you check in the dictionary? At that time or afterwards?
RB   No, at that time otherwise how am I going to understand the film?
RS   What sort of things do you look up? [pause] Now we will come to that … In other words, in *Lord of the Rings* or similar?
RB   [In] that [the film] the words were easy.
RS   What sort of things do you look up?
RB   *Narnia*
NC   *Narnia* – yes.
RS   Now wait [a moment] we are talking about Italian TV or have we changed to satellite?
RB   No now cinema.
NC   Cinema

RS   But hang on a minute, if you saw it at the cinema, that was in English as I saw it.
NC   Even I, but its words were difficult.
SM   But, if I am right, I heard that they have issued it in Italian.
RB   They brought it out in Italian too.
RS   But you have to tell me depending on how you saw it.

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NC   I saw it in English because I went twice.
RS   So, let us close on this point. We are saying that you saw the film many times on the Italian station and at the cinema in English.
NC   I saw it twice.
SM   But then there is 1, 2, 3 [referring to the Trilogy]
RB   After each other.
RS   Mmmm, in Italian?
SM   Ehm, in Italian
RS   Now what I wanted to tell you was [about] when there are difficult words or when you look them up in the dictionary.
RB   I tell my mother and my father.
RS   Do they know? [to mean – do they understand?]
RB   Because my father was in Australia – he used to learn Italian there.
NC   When I went to Australia, I got confused with words. We went into shops, to the market.
RS   Eh?
NC   the money, ok, I got used to that. For example, they say *l-ħalib* [the Maltese word for 'milk'] not 'milk'.
RS   With an accent? [referring to an Australian accent]
SM   So how do they talk?
NC   They say that English is too difficult.
RS   With an accent? [referring to an Australian accent]
NC   I asked my uncle "What is this?"
RS   So, Samuel, referred us to the game of *Lord of the Rings*.
RB   On Saturday?
RS   Does that mean on Saturday?
RB   I thought we were going to refer to Saturday. [i.e. when he went to his uncle's house]
RS   Do you know what I wanted to ask you [about]? So, you have done it [played the game] on playstation, you have seen it at the cinema …
NC   I don't have a computer.
RS   Sorry, he does not have a computer, book?
SM   Book, me? I don't have the book.

RB	Neither do I [said together]
NC	Neither do I [said together]
NC	I would like to get it as I like the story a lot.
SM	I wonder how thick it is.
RS	And what if it is thick?
SM	It will start hurting my head.
RB	Do you know how long I took on book that size? A year!
NC	*Harry Potter* was that thick [showing how thick]. I took as long as I stayed in Australia – three months.
RS	Listen to this one's. This one's is even better!
NC	*Harry Potter* was about this thick [showing how thick] and in Australia I stayed about three months.
RS	You spent three months reading it?
NC	That's how long it took me to read it.
RS	Did you understand it?
NC	Yes, I understood it.
RB	My cousin doesn't even sleep if she starts a book. She just keeps on and keeps on ... [reading]
RS	She just continues.
RB	She has kept on [reading] until the morning. With a book that size, she just keeps on going.
RS	But not like you [addressed to all the boys] it seems. Do you read books?
SM	No! [pulls a face]
RB	Yes
RS	What type of books do you read?

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RB	Football, swimming ... because I am going [to imply that he is playing football and going swimming]
RS	Nick, do you read books? [addressing all the boys] Tell me the truth, don't worry about me.
NS	I have just come back from a weekend break and I took a book with me. In the evening ...
RS	What did you take?
NC	First I took *Tom & Kate* [laughs]
RS	[laughs]. Did you take the [book about] the dogs?
NC	And then I took the one of the dogs!
RS	Oh yes by the way, then tell me about this.
RS	Robbie, from your diary, what did you choose to do?
RB	Saturday [to describe what they did on Saturday]

RS Ah, where do you go?

RB To *Razzett tal-Hbiberija* [an institution for disabled children and adults with many facilities, such as gyms, parks etc.]

RS Why are you doing the swimming?

RB Because my family and my cousins all go. I am fed up. They had started encouraging me [to take up] football. I stopped and went swimming.

RS So you are swimming?

RB Yes.

RS To take it up seriously?

RB Yes, we did [have reached] 28 laps per hour.

SM [whistles] I have never done those. I would get killed!

RB Backwards is the most difficult.

RS How did you learn to go backwards?

RB You go and wear your bathing trunks.

SM It would be really hot.

RS Ok. Is what you do, just in the pool or do you need to do some other things to learn about swimming?

RB Because he teaches you.

NC There will be the 'inspector' [referring to the instructor]

RS The coach

SM I learnt [it]. There is where I learnt how to swim. We went with the school.

RS In Malta, swimming is our sport.

SM It is not very popular.

RB My cousin [a girl] is twelve and she is with the Under 16s.

RS In the National Team? National ...

NC Because there is like in football 11 to 16.

RB Now if she wins this, she should advance ...

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RS to represent Malta?

RB No.

NC To play [swim].

RB To train with Malta

RS Good!

RB Because she is not with Malta [the Malta team] for now. Do you know by how much they passed her? Five, not seconds, but milli seconds!

RS Oh definitely ... Ehm do you follow them? Do you follow the swimming sports? Where?

RB Ehm, I go to the big pool.

NC There they do a lot ... football.

RS   And on the television?
SM   Eurosport [a cable TV channel in English]
RB   We also watch them on the Italian ones.
NC   We watch them mainly on satellite.
RS   Let Nick tell me his and then you can add yours. [addressing Robbie] Do you have satellite?
RB   [Robbie nods]
RS   ok
RB   Italy doesn't have the Olympics. No not the Olympics. In Italy, sports take place once a year. They have swimming ... those what are they called?
SM   Javelin [makes a throwing motion] – they shoot with the bow in the middle. [child used the wrong terminology for the sport]
NS   Be careful not to hit the camera [laughs]
RB   Skiing and then they shoot.
RS   [paraphrased] Are we once again referring to the Italian station? You seem to be picking on the Italians *hej* [a common Maltese expression to mean *'my goodness!'*] On which station?
RB   *Italia Uno* [An Italian TV station]
SM   Eurosport [A TV station on cable]
RS   [addressed to Samuel] Therefore, do you enjoy watching sports? How come you are referring to it? How do you know about it?
NC   Because he knows about it.
SM   Because sometimes I just happen to come across it but I think that it would the football as they bring many players dribbling here and there.
NC   I would love to go and learn rugby.
RB   Those had chosen me but they never called me to go with them.
NC   Do you remember that at school we used to play rugby?
RS   You had mentioned this to me.
RB   In one particular game, I scored eleven goals.
RS   That's good!
RB   Each goal is worth three.
NC   I scored three – I was at the Marsa. [A large sports centre and rugby field]
RS   Now let's try not to go out of subject. [addressed to Robbie] Well, you go swimming. Is there anyone that you admire?
RB   Sort of, a few. There is one who trains with Malta, Mark.
RS   And how do you know him?
RB   Because he is my coach.
RS   [laughs]
RB   He is my coach and he is eighteen years old and he already trains with Malta [with the Malta national team].
RS   That's good.
RS   Nick, what did you select from your diary?

SM   In Qawra [the next coastal town next to Salina]
NC   I went on a weekend break and I went to the Internet Café.
RS   Where did you go?
NC   To the Coastline [a seaside hotel in Salina, Malta]

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NC   How do I know!
RS   What did you do in the Internat Café?
NC   At first I logged into my MSN and then I connected with my aunt in England. I did not stay too long, about a quarter of an hour.
RS   What do you mean?
NC   Because it is a bit awkward.
RS   In English or in Maltese?
NC   I logged into MSN and I chatted for a short time with my aunt in England. At the same time, there were about 30 others online. I really hurry on the keyboard and such *"there you are lol"* [laugh out loud] and then I press [connect with] another and I continue in that way. I amaze my father.
RS   Would you mind if I ask you with whom you chat?
NC   I have an uncle in Australia.
SM   His fiance!
NC   She was with me, that one *ha ha*! [laughter]
NC   We were great friends.
RS   From school. Friends from different places.
NC   Glenn
RS   Glenn was someone from school or someone you knew from your sports [activities], for example?
NC   Glenn is someone from school and from once when I travelled.
RS   By any chance, do you travel often?
NC   Every year.
SM   Better than me. Once to Tunisia.
RB   [paraphrased] I am meant to be travelling for two whole months.
RS   Where to?
RB   To Australia [said together]
NC   To Australia [said together]
NC   When they mention two months … I am going to Lourdes between the 14th & 18th of May.
RS   [addressed to Samuel] Do you chat?
SM   On MIRC.
NC   I don't have that.
RS   What is the difference?

SM   With MIRC you can chat with everyone and with MSN you cannot.
NC   With MSN you can chat with everyone but they have to accept you. With
      MIRC, you can get involved in a lie, or be involved in something negative or
      they trick you.
RS   It won't be safe.
NC   My father removed that for me.
RS   Let us see what Samuel is doing. When and with whom do you chat and in
      which language? Do you choose Maltese? Do you speak to them in Maltese?
SM   Everyone [chats] in Maltese. I write 'Maltanet' [a Maltese network] and I
      click.
NC   With my friends, sometimes [in Maltese] or in English. I have a school friend
      who uses English - on Friday, Thursday and Monday, they only talk English.
RS   Where does he go to school?
NC   I can't remember at the moment.
RS   Is that really what you do?

NC   If I connect on Friday or Monday, [then it will be] in English. I don't connect
      often with him.
RS   Why?
NC   Because I get fed up. In Maltese I hurry more on the keyboard [motions how
      he uses the keyboard]
RS   Does that mean that you are comfortable in English? [addressing Samuel]
SM   I am better in English [motions how he uses the keyboard]
RS   Do you chat in Maltese?
SM   In English, but if I am on MRIC, then in Maltese.
RS   You have confused me.
SM   I am sometimes on MSN
RS   So therefore, do you communicate in Maltese on MRIC?
SM   [nods]
RS   Why?
SM   Because everyone speaks in Maltese ... you write Maltanet
RS   Of the Maltese ... and when you change it over to English? When you change
      it over to English?
SM   There would be those who write in English but I am not one of those. When I
      use MSN I use English.
NC   On which MSN? Sorry but he said that he does not have a computer.
SM   Not me [mine]. My uncle's.
RS   Oh [said together]
NC   Oh [said together]

RS   When you go to your uncle's does he let you [use it]?
SM   He lets me [use it]
RS   How often do you use it?
SM   About a day ... [thinking]
RB   You spend a day there?
SM   *iiii.* [Maltese expression of excitement]
RS   Do you spend a day there or on the computer?
SM   If I am going to be on the computer, then I am going to be at his [house]
RS   Ah
NC   Ha ha [laughs]
RS   Robbie, do you chat?
RB   I don't have MSN but my sister is meant to connect it for me.
RS   Does that mean that for now, you don't chat?
RB   I have SKYPE, what do they call that one ...?
SM   I have that
      [children all talk together]
RS   Tell me, what would you do with it [SKYPE]
RB   With it? [SKYPE]
RB   I did nothing with it as nobody had it.
NC   Even I, I had connected to it.
SM   But that is like *Firewall* [motions with hands]
RS   Defence [i.e. protection against viruses etc.]
SM   [nods in agreement]
RS   Let us once again refer to our diary so that we will remember what else we did.
      For example, if he remembers, Samuel read us something from the book.
SM   Penġa.
RB   Penġa – that is what I am reading too. Nice.

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RS   Show us, let us see. Would you mind? [takes diary and brings it towards the camera]
SM   Here, the light sometimes is cut off.
RS   True?
RS   Let's check this out [brings diary closer to the camera]
RS   You also play football, right?
SM   But the school one.
RS   Alright. Once we have spoken about sports, Samuel, do you play any sports or do you follow any?
SM   [tut tut] no sports, nothing.
RS   And Nick, what about you?

NC	I do [play sports]
RS	What do you play?
NC	Dance not sports
RS	I will come to that. Do you follow any sports?
NC	Basketball.
RS	How do you follow the sports scene?
NC	When I don't have anything to do, I would not be on the computer as there would be my sister or someone else, I switch on satellite and I go through the channels.
RS	Once you have mentioned satellite, why do you tell us about the Italian channels? Which channels or which [media to include TV] packages do you have?
NC	There are so many! There are so many to see, you know!
RS	What do you watch?
NC	*Italia Uno* [an Italian TV station] - we get it on satellite and when it is clear, we flip onto it.
RS	Does that mean that you watch Italian stations?
NC	More the Italian ones. On the satellite, more French ones.
RS	*"On the satellite, more French ones."* What does that mean?
NC	What happens?
RS	What do you think takes place?
NC	When there is a French film, I leave it on as there are always subtitles.
RS	And the subtitles will be …?
NC	… In English.
RB	For example, I understand French.
SM	bla bla bla [an expression to show that Samuel thinks that Robbie is exaggerating his language skills]
RB	I understand it but I do not speak it. That is why I chose French and not Italian. Even in the exam, I have a facilitator. When she started to read to me, I understood and I wrote it down and I got the highest one [marks] in Italian and German.
RS	That's good.
RS	Do you also have satellite?
RB	Ah ha [yes]
RS	*What do you* watch most of?
SM	Mainly films.
NC	Football
RS	Now we will come to that? As Nick said, he follows the subtitles, *what do you do?*
RB	In French? I put on the subtitles but only a bit. I don't read them.
NC	You can remove them.
RS	[Does that mean] you hardly read them in English?

RB   Because I understand the French. Oh, sometimes there will be about four [a Maltese expression to say 'a few'] words that I don't even …

RS   [addressing Samuel] You mentioned that you did not have satellite at home.

SM   My grandmother has it.

RS   Do you watch it at your grandmother's?

SM   [pausing to think] Movie Channel

RS   In English?

SM   In English, In English. That day we watched *Narnia* but that was sometime ago.

RS   And the problem they are mentioning?

SM   What is it?

RS   Of the language.

SM   Italian and German

RS   Does that mean that you receive programmes in German?

SM   No! Everything is in English. Because there is like a black box and there a sort of numbers.

RS   No then that is Cable, Your grandmother has cable.

NC   On the roof, do you have like a big dish?

SM   I have never been on the roof.

RS   I think she has cable.

SM   A black box

RB   It lights up like a clock.

NC   Red numbers and with buttons on top of it.

SM   Yes a black box.

RS   Yes, and the stations? [Are they] Arabic?

NC   No.

SM   MBC [an Arabic station]

RS   Do you watch it?

SM   Sometimes while I am changing the channels from one to the other, I see a man with something on his head talking away – bla bla bla. [indicating that Samuel does not know what is being said].

NC   I have a DVD which was made by the Arabs, made in Tunis and in Malta. The prison of Malta and the rest of Tunis. I can't tell you how nice it is.

RS   Do you follow it?

SM   How horrible! [the Maltese word is much stronger]

RS   Why *'How horrible!'*

SM   I don't like Arabs. And neither Tunisians.

RS   Nick?

NC   Ehm, well those who cover their faces like Bin Laden bother me.

RB   Me too! Those are not people [i.e not people I want to be associated with. 'M*hux nies'* – a common Maltese expression used when people from whatever race and for whatever reason do not match up to someone's expectations in manners, approach, work etc. Sounds much harsher in English than in Maltese]

NC   Those are not people

RS   Don't you watch stations? [referring to TV stations]

NC   No, no.

RB   Films. When there are films, you know how well they make them.

RS   Where?

RB   On satellite. When you press the middle button 'ok' and you get that chart.

NC   Menu

SM   Is it blue?

NC   There are many channels. We find them through the numbers.

RS   Ok – 'options'

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RB   It gives you the Italian, French – whatever you want. You find the Arabic and it gives you whatever you want. Do you know how great they are? I really like the films about the war, they hid themselves underground.

RS   Is that how they make them?

RB   That is how they make them, they hide in the sand, they shoot …

RS   … and with regard to language, do you understand them?

RB   That's right, they use Italian. You can choose. Sometimes, as sometimes they don't.

RS   And what is your preference?

RB   Either English or Italian.

RS   What is your preference, Nick?

NC   Either English or Italian. The Italian is better on satellite. Now this one said of the Arabic [station]. My father cannot read. He enjoys watching films on satellite and I tell him - can you tell me how you see them and explain them to me?

RS   Good – that is a very good question.

NC   Because from the images and how they work the film. It is like we are having a meeting.

SM   Maltese is like Arabic.

NC   I mainly use satellite to watch dog shows.

RB   For example, my mother *mah* …

RS   Do you know what I wanted to ask you? Let's get to the point that Nick
          mentioned about his Dad.

RB   Do you know why they bring in the film?

NC   But I need to be careful.

RS   Yes but when there is a document about dogs.

SM   *Animal Planet* [a TV station]

NC   When there are these shows, he watches them with me. They mainly bring the
          legs of the dogs.

RS   But

NC   Yes, but there will be the shows … when I mentioned the judge. On MSN I
          chat with an Italian judge but he hardly ever logs on as he is very busy. In
          Italy, there are many dog shows. There are so many breeds. I look for their
          pictures on the websites … Pharoah hounds … those that have a ball under their
          stomach… that's what I call them! [laughs]

RS   How you understand [referring to his knowledge about dogs]

NC   Miss, they [the judges] check the teeth of the dogs. Then with their fingers,
          they check their legs to see if they have 'open' legs. [makes an arching motion]

RB   The judges don't talk.

NC   What do you want them to say? He has legs which are a few centimetres
          shorter. I understand a lot about dogs. When I go out and see a dog, I say that
          that one does not have a good posture for dog shows because I see them on the
          internet. I spend about three hours a day training my dog.

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RB   I was very lucky yesterday. It [referring to a dog which was passing by] nearly
          killed my dog which is worth six hundred and fifty euros. I have a pug. I feed
          it twice a day. Miss, I am always adding terrapins to those I have as my sister
          works as a hairdresser and she always brings terrapins from her clients and I
          end up looking after them. It was not long ago that she brought [another] one.
          They used to keep it in an aquarium, poor thing! That is cruelty. It was this
          size! [showing the size of the terrapin]

RS   Now, [about] your love for animals and dogs. Where do you get to know about
          dogs for example?

SM   On *Animal Planet* [a TV station]

RS   True?

NC   And I from books too. More from books.

RS   Do you read books? Like what?

NC   When we go up [i.e when we go abroad] every year, since I am a member, they send me a book with pictures of dogs. With it there is a calendar and once you turn over the last page, it shows you a lot, some pills for worms, for healthy bones.

RS   then information.

NC   I give the dogs, one of olive oil for their bones, of the fish, of the fish [fish oil]

RS   Where do you get this information from?

NC   From books.

RS   Only from books?

NC   I see my dogs too and I learn.

RS   So these are all sources of information.

NC   Since I go to the shows, there is always someone to explain [things] to me.

RS   In Maltese or English?

NC   In Maltese. It depends where I am because in Italy, you can't imagine how they have shows but I don't always go.

RS   What do you do? Do you start to understand in Italian?

NC   That is why I understand a lot in Italian. I read a lot of Italian. I see it [hear it] on television. Once there was an Italian judge that I could not understand because ...

RC   Can you speak in Italian?

NC   A little [laughts]

RS   But you understand?

NC   Yes, I understand a lot.

RB   Like me. I understand but I cannot speak.

RS   And what about you Samuel, do you understand [the Italian]?

SM   [thinking] I understand and I can also speak ...sort of speak!

RS   In Italian?

SM   Yes In Italian.

RS   For now we are speaking about Italian. About the animals that you have?

SM   On *Animal Planet* [a TV station]

RS   I have a mixed breed dog.

RB   Like my grandmother's – a mixed breed.

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RB   A mixed breed.

RS   Do you enjoy learning more about animals? How do you get to know [more about them?] In which way?

RB   To get to know more about animals, I need to learn how to look at them.

RS   No, we are referring to information. For example, Samuel mentioned *Animal Planet* [a TV station]

RB	[thinking]
RS	From where about animals? Is there nowhere from where you can learn or get information?
RB	I have a cousin who knows a lot about animals and he looks after them too.
RS	You keep talking to him, through discussion only.
NC	I look at my dogs.
RB	For example, I trained a bull dog.
RS	Yes, but I don't know, [addressing Robbie] ...if you like something, as Nick is saying, he researching, he receives that catalogue, he is a member...
SM	I don't receive anything!
RS	If you are a member, how much do you pay? Do you pay anything?
NC	About ten Maltese pounds every three months but those every month ...
RS	Do you communicate with them?
NC	I have the MSN of an Italian judge but he hardly goes in as he is very busy. In Italy, there are too many dog shows. There are many breeds... *tal-fniek* [a common Maltese breed known internationally as the Pharoah hound] I refer to them as 'of the ball' as it is as if they have a ball underneath.
RS	Yes, it is true, it grows on their stomach. From your end, you have the membership, do you fill out any forms?
NC	You submit that form at that time and then every three months they send you another.
RS	They send you a ... what do they call it? leaflet, newsletter. Do you receive a newsletter?
SM	I receive it together.
RS	Yes, now we will get to that.
NC	Yes I receive [it]. When I receive the book, you can't imagine how many things I have [receive]. Once I found a biro in the shape of my dog.
RS	Is that once a year?
NC	No, with every book you have something.
RS	No, how often do you receive the book?
NC	Every three months.
RS	then you receive four every year.
SM	And how many [things] do you get?
NC	I either get a bookmark.
RB	Not only on the books. My father had cocks, there are none like them in Malta. Small cocks.
RS	Does he breed them?
RB	the cocks were small but then he had to kill them. They were that size [uses his hands to show the size] and the feathers [uses his hands to describe them]

RS   I had not wished to spend too much time. Nick is going to say something about dance. *"Because once I went to train during the week."* And you, just the last small point – what you have to add to what you have done in the diary, even maybe with the school, connected to school. Think a little bit so that we won't take too long.

RS   Nick, what did you do last week or the one before or from when you started keeping the diary?

NC   I went on a weekend break and I spent from ten in the morning dancing. But I think I will have to stop as I went to the doctor, Latin dance has a lot of stomping.

RS   Did you train recently?

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NC   Oh, the whole week.

RS   And do you like to learn about training, about dancing techniques?

NC   Not much.

RS   You don't watch them?

NC   I forget to surf on the computer, when I have a dance.

RS   Where do you look?

NC   On the catalogue. There is a website which they call 'catalogue' and it keeps bringing you the different steps and such. Once, me and my partner, the one I dance with, came home and we searched on the computer, we looked at the screen and danced! Ha ha [laughing]

RS   In English or Italian?

NC   In English – these people are English.

RS   And who told you about this?

NC   My dance teacher told me about it.

RS   Who is your dance teacher?

NC   Francis but I call him Frans.

RS   [referring to Robbie and Samuel] did you make any other comments in your diary? [Samuel is getting tired and distracted]

RB   I always add to the terrapins. My sister always finds the terrapins and I always take them.

RS   Do you like to know more about them? How do you find out more?

RB   Because they take them to my sister, the vets come because my sister is a hairdresser and I ask them.

RS   to these vets? Do you speak to them?

RB   For example, I looked after this terrapin – what a pity, they used to keep him in an aquarium this size [motions with his hands to show the small size] and as big as this [motions with hands to show the size] and as big as he was.

RS   Do you enjoy learning more about the animals?

RB   A lot.

RS   So what do you do? Are there some of your friends who love animals and you speak with them?

RB   That's it – there are not many friends that …

RS   Not even some group, that you have got involved with?

RB   I go to Youths and the local [referring to the local council]

RS   Where do you go?

RB   Youths and the local

RS   And what happens – do they love animals?

RB   They do many things.

RS   Let him tell me.

RB   On everything.

RS   Do they organise talks for you?

RB   They organise talks for us, not one by one – all together. We play games, sometimes … look [what happens] at Christmas.

RS   But with animals, let's try to stick to the subject Robbie.

RB   they sometimes speak about animals.

RS   Who comes to speak to you, for example/

RB   Same as the meetings.

RS   I see, same as the meetings. And you Samuel, something small before I conclude from what you did [wrote] in the diary. Is there any other activity [you did] with school?

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SM   When the Miss [teacher] came, we watched the film here.

RS   What was it called?

SM   [inaudible] *Barnyard*.

RS   What was it called?

SM   *Barnyard*.

NC   We saw *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

RC   Who did you see it with? With which teacher?

NC   With the teacher of Social Studies [said together].

RB   With the teacher of Social Studies [said together].

RS   And why? Just for entertainment?

SM   We had a free lesson.

RS   How much of it did you see?

NC   Half of it.

RS   Didn't you do anything interesting which was related to it? I don't know …

RB   We didn't even go out.

NC   In Year 6 [the name of a class at school].

RS   No, recently, from the diary Nick, from the diary.

NC   Always lessons

RB   Recently, the school ...

RS   For example, homework, did you have anything interesting where you had to look up something?

NC   Yes for English

RS   Eh?

NC   The English [teacher] gives us many projects. For example, the first one she gave us was on Halloween, Hallowood.

RS   Wait a second, Halloween or Hollywood?

SM   Halloween [said together]

NC   Halloween [said together]

NC   Then we had one about Christmas.

RS   And where did you look for information?

NC   She gave us a website.

RS   Do you search at home? Do you use the internet at school?

NC   Now she gave us one on transport.

RB   Because for example, on the one at home, you cannot get into everything. Games nothing.

NC   MSN

RS   But those you do [access] from home. But at school, at what time do you go on the internet? At what time do you go [access it]?

RB   In the break [said together]

NC   In the break [said together]

RS   Do you book it?

RB   You sign for it.

RS   Because there would be many children who want to use it.

RS   For example, when was the last time that you went? Try and remember.

SM   A long time ago. A long time ago.

RB   About three days before the exams

RS   What did you *do*?

RB   I went to check about transport.

RS   Transport in Malta?

RB   [nods]

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RS   Did you find [anything]? In Maltese or in English?

RB   I wanted it in English.

RS	Do you search for information in Maltese?
RB	They hardly give us projects in Maltese.
NC	No, we had one project in Maltese.
RB	I didn't even do it! [said together laughing]
NC	I didn't even do it! [said together laughing]
RS	Therefore, the English [teacher], the English [teacher] gives you more. With regard to the Maltese, and we shall close on that point, sometimes you had to search the internet or collect information in Maltese.
NC	Once because he gave us a project book.
RB	The same one, on transport.
NC	No, we found that we had a lot on transport, traditional feasts.
SM	I had said that I was going to do one on 'Maltese games' but I did nothing at all.
NC	I did but I only go halfway [laughs]
RS	But do you research Maltese sites?
NC	No
RB	There are only a few.
NC	There are only a few but you do find Maltese ones if you want, because I have found some. You are likely to find information – if you go to grandfather he will tell you that there is no point in wasting half hour going through things, you have to look until you find [what you are looking for.]
SM	I go to my uncle's
RS	Do you get the information from him?
SM	To my uncle with the computer.
RS	And [from] Maltese websites?
SM	I have never gone in [accessed it]
RS	Why?
SM	Because I never find [what I am looking for]
NC	I search using Google. I can't tell you how much I search. For example, I insert 'Maltese Feasts' or 'Maltese Traditions' and I go in. But they have loads of pictures, people on top of each other [crowds]
SM	I sometimes find pictures in that way [motions with hands]
NC	But didn't you say that you did not go in [access it]?
SM	I sometimes see them.
RS	Let me listen to this point.
SM	there would be many pictures like this [motions with hands]. They bring in maps of Malta, and then some feast, and then a picture of a saint.
RS	The Maltese?
NC	First I look at the way Malta looks and then how we celebrate.
RS	And you Robbie? Let us conclude here.
RB	The Local Council can give you information about the feast.

NC	I often go [to the Local Council]. I needed the name of the Mayor and of the Secretary.
RS	Do you go? Did he give you the information?
RB	Pictures, information.
SM	On that day, he gave us stickers.
RB	Yes me too! [said together]
NC	Yes me too! [said together]
NC	I have a pile this high! [motions with hands]
RS	And for you to write the project, he is going to give you information. You cannot prepare a project with stickers.
RB	Information on the stickers.
RS	How would it be?
RB	A paper
RS	Ah, a leaflet. Is that what you did?
RB	I went [there]
RS	And you got the information?
RB	He gave me but I only wrote a little.
NC	Even the passport, that is where I got it – I did not go into town [Valletta, Malta's capital city]

END

Appendix H   Overview of the small group interviews

Interviews on the subject of media ownership		
Sessions/Subject	**Groups & Schools**	**Date**
Interview 1 *Media ownership*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary School – Group 1)	31.01.2007
Interview 2 *Media ownership*	Nick, Samuel, & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	22.02.2007
Interview 3 *Media ownership*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary school – Group 3)	23.02.2007

Description: The children were very involved in the discussion on media ownership. Most of the participants come from households which are well equipped with a range of media, to a level which the researcher considers as standard for a Maltese household from a blue collar working family. She became aware about how conversant the participants were in the use of the different forms of media available to them. Two children did not have access to internet at home. Both of them found an alternative route to compensate for this. The researcher observed that there was evidence of the bedroom culture, as outlined in the literature review, whereby some children had access to their own TV, MP3 player, mobile and/or computer.

Interviews on the subject of intergenerational attitudes towards the media		
Sessions/Subject	**Groups & Schools**	**Date**
Interview 4 *Intergenerational attitudes* *towards the media*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary School – Group 1)	14.03.2007
Interview 5 *Intergenerational attitudes* *towards the media*	Nick, Samuel & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	26.03.2007
Interview 6 *Intergenerational attitudes* *towards the media*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary School – Group 3)	30.03.2007

Description: Through her questions, the researcher was able to determine the level of regulation that the children received from their parents when accessing the media within the household. In the case of television, the children engaged in shared viewing with other family members. From the children's comments, the researcher was able to determine that a great deal of interaction took place between themselves, their siblings, their parents and grandparents when accessing the media. What was clearly indicative from the children's comments was the differnce between the children's experience with the media and that of the other generations within their family.

Interviews on the subject of media practices		
Sessions/Subject	**Groups & Schools**	**Date**
Interview 7 *Media practices*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary School – Group 1)	20.04.2007
Interview 8 *Media practices*	Nick, Samuel & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	26.04.2007
Interview 9 *Media practices*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary school – Group 3)	30.04.2007

Description: The intention of the researcher with this group of interviews was to determine the level of knowledge, attitudes and skills the children gained from their engagement with the media. The children actively used the media by surfing the net, downloading music and films, chatting, preparing for project work and shopping online. The researcher observed that from their exposure to programmes, documentaries and online material about such subjects as animals, sports, singing, fashion and entertainment, the children were then keen to develop their information base and skills. This often led to their commitment to hobbies and their personal involvement in certain activities, such as dance and art lessons.

Interviews on the subject of media preferences		
Sessions/Subject	**Groups & Schools**	**Date**
Interview 10 *Media preferences*	Andy, Frankie, Daphne & Angie (Primary school – Group 1)	25.05.2007
Interview 11 *Media preferences*	Nick, Samuel & Robbie (Boys' secondary school – Group 2)	31.05.2007
Interview 12 *Media preferences*	Lottie, Randy & Sadie (Girls' secondary school- Group 3)	01.06.2007

Description: The scope of this group of interviews was to determine the particular preferences that children selected when engaging with the media. With regard to language, while the first preference was usually in their native language Maltese, the children commented that they referred to English/American information & productions very frequently due to reasons of availability and choice. Engaging in the media in Italian was also common but this was restricted exclusively to television. With regard to media genres, the children preferred cartoons, music, sports and action films. Children's educational programmes were referred to. They also mentioned watching peak time transmissions with their parents, productions which were certainly not designed for young viewers.

APPENDIX I   **Clips from filmed data collection sessions**