



Oliveira, M.; Portela, P. & Santos, L.A. (eds.) (2012)  
*Radio Evolution: Conference Proceedings*  
September, 14-16, 2011, Braga, University of Minho: Communication and Society Research Centre  
ISBN 978-989-97244-9-5

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## Radio - the forgotten medium for users' creative mental interaction and co-production

TITTI FORSSLUND<sup>1</sup>

*Linnaeus University, Kalmar and Växjö*

titti.forsslund@lnu.se

### **Abstract:**

Twenty five years ago the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR)<sup>2</sup> was in the process of ceasing production of radio programmes for children. There were two main reasons expressed; firstly, the broadcasting role model BBC had recently given up their educational radio programming for children and secondly, the use of radio programmes (or tapes) in schools in Sweden had decreased in favour of television or video use. Surveys of teachers' attitudes towards radio usage in education revealed that teachers expected a lack of listening abilities in children, unless audio was accompanied by pictures. As a researcher of UR I made a reception study of children's listening experiences, which illustrated the abilities among 8-9 year old children to create mental images through listening to radio programmes. After their listening, children were pleased about their experiences and advocated an increased usage of radio programmes in school. The benefits of radio or audio and its absence of any pre-produced pictures are rarely acknowledged. Today, as a university lecturer teaching journalism students in a programme for journalism and media production (including radio, television and web) I find that radio is often neglected among the various media mentioned in media theory literature. When radio is brought up it is commonly referred to in relation to music. The special affordances of radio/audio narratives are seldom expressed. In this paper I will elaborate these affordances in relation to children's listening experiences and to interviews with teachers.

**Keywords:** children, identification, listening experiences, mental imagery, radio

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A lot has been written about radio, but not much about experiences of its listeners. Researchers, such as Andrew Crisell (1984, 1996) claims that radio is much more limited than other electronic media, addressing radio's "blindness" and not so much potential benefits of radio's "freedom" from pre-produced images and visual distractions. Other authors highlight radio's invisibility as one of its strengths, providing food for listeners' imagination (e.g. Shingler & Wieringa, 1998; Wilby & Conroy, 1994). However, they do not base their arguments on empirical research on listeners' creation of mental images while listening. Rather, there seems to exist a common sense idea that radio not only provides opportunities for listeners to create their own images, but also requires special imagination skills. This is implicit in teachers' expressed reasons for not using radio in school, when they claim that "today's" children's are not able to make their own mental images. Children are assumed "too spoiled by television, film and video to be satisfied with audio alone". (This was before the IT-revolution.)

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<sup>1</sup> Linnaeus University, Kalmar and Växjö, Sweden; School of Social Sciences, Journalism and Media Production, SE-391 82 Kalmar

<sup>2</sup> One of the Swedish Public Service sisters.

"They have no imagination anymore", "they cannot make their own mental images", "they are too unfocused to be concentrated" say teachers (Forsslund 1983). On the contrary, children appear to be both focused and creative when given the chance according to an ethnographically inspired reception study in 1986, presented further down. Ten years later, in 1995/96, I ran a project for UR (The Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company) titled "Educational radio for children in a multimedia environment". The aim was to enhance radio programming, improving adaption of educational programmes to their target groups and to increase the usage of radio programmes in school. About 40 teachers and their students, aged between 10 and 13 (grades 4-6), acted as "contact classes" in most of the 25 "local radio regions" in Sweden. The teachers had no recent experience of using radio in the classroom, when they tried "their" regional school radio series during the autumn semester in 1995. The programme topics dealt with local current affairs, local nature and culture etc., all being compulsory topics that extend the curriculum but often fall in between time scheduled subjects (Forsslund 1991). Using programmes every week during a period of 15 weeks, teachers responded to weekly questionnaires together with their students, providing the regional radio producers with feedback on their programmes. The questionnaires were later analysed and producers and teachers were interviewed in the spring of 1996, revealing experiences like this surprised expression by one of the teachers:

*It was beyond all expectations! I could never believe the kids would appreciate listening to radio that much! I thought it should be boring to solely listen, without watching pictures.*

Initially, many of the teachers did not have positive expectations on school radio and of their students' listening capabilities. As the project moved on, their view changed and they soon became engaged in using the radio programmes. Although most teachers in this project used audio cassettes, received free of charge from their local Media centre (nowadays programmes are recorded on DVD), quite a few teachers considered pedagogic advantages in listening directly to the broadcast at 9.45 every Friday morning (Forsslund 1996):

*It makes the children listen more concentrated, they know they must listen very carefully, because you can't go back if you miss something.*

*It is more exciting! Maybe you hear a bit of the news first, and then there is this programme aimed at us! It feels so real, of current interest.*

According to teachers who tried radio in 1995, the main benefits of using it as a pedagogic medium in school were development of listening skills, development of concentration, development of reflective thought and development of creative imagination. Remarkably many of the teachers had initially claimed that they now had the toughest and roughest class of school children ever. Pupils were perceived as restless and unfocused and teachers expressed concern about the numerous new demands attached to the teaching profession. In this stressful and troubled environment, teachers found radio programme listening to be a peacemaker that provided opportunity for reflection, a kind of active rest, where listeners could enter into themselves for a while and create their own mental images.

### **What is mental imagery – and how can it be researched?**

Imagery has been defined in various ways in literature, often within different psychological disciplines.. Alan Richardson (1983:15) suggests: "Mental imagery refers to (1) all those quasi-sensory or quasi-perceptual experiences of which (2) we are self consciously aware and which (3) exist for us in the absence of those stimulus conditions that are known to produce their genuine sensory or perceptual counterparts." A more recent reference is Catherine Rush Thompson (2011), who suggests the use of guided mental imagery in order to promote learning, healing and movement in clinical health care. In line with Richardson she defines mental imagery as a quasi-perceptual experience, which "resembles a perceptual experience, occurs in the absence of the actual

external stimuli, can be induced through listening and has many variations in meaning". Thus it is possible to mentally view images that are not physically present to us, and these mental images can be evoked by listening. If Richardson is right, the imagining human being is aware (or can be aware) of her mental images, and these might therefore be possible to explore through reflective conversation. These kinds of studies, however, seems to be nonexistent in favour of various kinds of "objective" psychometric quantitative studies.

According to Alan Paivio (1991) mental images are generated from information in long-term memory. Many writers, he claims, have emphasized the importance of having a rich store of information in memory in order to do creative work. In that case it would not be a good idea to use children - with their relatively small amount of experiences - as research subjects when trying to explore mental images evoked by radio listening. On the other hand, in researching reception of radio listening, it might be an advantage that listeners are not possessors of a large amount of background experiences, as they might more easily stick to their comprehensive interpretation of the radio programme, upon sharing their experiences after listening. According to Richardson (1983: 34), relaxation facilitates the emergence of images into awareness. We relax when we feel safe and secure. This implies that both the listening situation when mental images are expected to form and interviews afterwards should take place in an environment where listeners feel relaxed and secure.

### **Previous research on children's radio reception**

Studies on radio reception are often related to media comparisons between radio/audio or books and TV/video or still pictures. Nowadays these kinds of media comparisons include internet, as Hesham Mesbah's (2006) experimental study of listening to different versions of radio news among older students, researching comprehension but not mental images. Among the studies of mental imagery is Patricia Marks Greenfield research presented in her book *Mind and Media* (1984). She assumes that listening children lack visual images after listening to radio or tape, while having them after watching television (1984:72). Laurene Meringoff (1982) compared reception of a film drama performance with reception of an audio *description* of the "same" story, which to me cannot be seen as comparable. Researchers did not use comparable formats as they did not dramatize the audio version. They did not consider the formative power of sound dramatization when making an audio version of the film drama. Wayne C. Booth (1961) stresses the distinction between "showing" and "telling". Drama and dramatic narration in radio esthetics are enhanced as sounds and voices are used to "show" the scenery and create atmospheres and characters (cf. Shingler & Wieringa, 1998). Other media comparison researchers found that radio stimulates children's imagination more than television, when they asked children to make up their own endings to stories they saw or heard (Patricia Greenfield, 1982; Greenfield & Beagles-Roos, 1988).

It is more demanding to listen to a story than to watch it on film or television, according to Gavriel Salomon (1983). His theory of Amount of Invested Mental Effort (AIME) suggests that different subjects, presented differently in different media design requires different amount of mental effort in reception. A higher amount of invested effort would be a pedagogic advantage, as it indicates a deeper elaborating in reception, which in turn is assumed to enhance cognition and memory. AIME is related to users' preconceptions of the medium, which could imply that a radio programme in school would be expected to demand a higher amount of mental effort than radio listening at home, maybe regardless of its being the same programme. Attitudes to school and listening habits might be contributing factors.

### **A case study of children's listening experiences**

The aim of the case study I will subsequently draw my arguments from was to find out how listeners create meaning and mental images from audio information. Are they able to construct mental images out of a picture-less presentation? Previous research about children's listening and mental imagery is mainly about correct recall,

measured in experiments, while children's free interpretations and experiences of radio listening seems to be more or less unexplored.

My basic theoretic assumption is that listeners make their own interpretations of a radio programme - if the presentation includes something they can relate to, something familiar. The encounter between the radio programme and the listener is regarded as a meaning making process within a cultural context. This meaning making process is influenced by a variety of factors, such as the radio programme topic, design and the socio cultural variations in children like age, gender, previous experiences, knowledge and cultural dispositions. Since the current study concerns a school radio programme, intended to be used in school, the school culture is also an important factor.

### **Methodology, sample of informants and of radio programme, listening context and interviewers**

As I have not found research on children's own experiences of their radio reception, another aim of the study was related to methodological questions. Theoretically and methodologically I wanted to regard the listeners as cooperating subjects, not as objects of research. Individual semi-structured interviews were used, trying to make the child feel comfortable as a co-researcher, reflecting as much as possible about her or his experiences of the programme in a conversation like situation.

Since this was the first case study of a quite difficult research subject, mental imagery, I found it important to make the study as basic as possible concerning the choice of test programme and of informants. As listeners were asked to be able to put into words their experiences and mental images evoked by a radio programme, I chose informants one year older than the programme's target group. The cooperative teacher of my 9 year old son's class chose one programme she thought would be appreciated by children, among three programmes which I myself by introspection had found rich of evoking mental images. The programmes were part of the school radio series Bokhörnan (Book Corner), aimed at encouraging school children to read, by presenting in radio a piece of a story, which would make listeners curious enough to feel they themselves have to read the rest of the story in the book. The duration of the radio programme is 15 minutes, comprising of a sound dramatised narration read by the author of the book and short inserted clips of the programme presenter and his interviews with the author.

I wanted the children to enjoy this first programme and the research situation, as they might go on examine other programmes later. In order to make the 14 children feel as comfortable as possible to share their listening experiences, interviewers were chosen that were known by the children as classmates' mothers, (myself and another mother, at that time studying psychology), and a special education teacher. The three of us were listening together with the children and their teacher in the classroom. The class teacher told the children that we should talk about the programme with them afterwards. This might have made them invest more mental effort in the listening process (Salomon 1983).

After listening in the classroom, which is the normal listening situation, the 14 children were interviewed individually by us, the three interviewers in separate rooms. While waiting for the interview in the classroom the children were writing about the radio story, to keep it fresh in mind. An interview guide with open questions was used and children were told that nothing could be right or wrong, as we wanted to know about their individual listening experiences, which are always right. Questions and follow-up questions were like: When do you think it happened? Have you seen something like this before? Where was that? How did it look? How did she feel? What will happen next? Questions like "what did it look like" were met quite naturally, without questioning the fact that there were no pictures presented. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed and analysed. The children who wanted could try the tape recorder and listen to their own voices, which was appreciated by the children. After the interview the children would choose to continue writing or make drawings related to their listening experiences.

Since children encountered the programme with different previous experiences of media, school and other socio cultural factors, questionnaires were delivered by the class teacher a week before the programme test. The aim was to get some background knowledge about the children's media preferences and attitudes to school, to use as a potential resource in the interpretation of the interviews and listener's writings about the programme. The children knew that the teacher would never see their responses, as she immediately put the questionnaires into an envelope, sealed it and gave it to me.

## Results

The classroom is quiet and still. 14 pupils are concentrated listening, sitting at their desks in a semi circle. Their paintings of water colour and ink on paper and cloth decorate the walls. Crumpled trolls, flying birds, picture stones. The sun is shining in through the tall, old windows. The sea is shimmering beyond rooftops. On the tape recorder the audiotape is rattling round and round. Loudspeakers on the wall – but you must make an effort to hear.

The story is about Majken, a girl who runs away from home early in the morning while her family is asleep. She wants to visit her best friend Sven-Olof in the hospital in town. The story is composed of clips from the first half of the book, chosen to show five critical incidents: 1. The first is that Majken must not be seen or heard when she leaves, but happens to make a noise; 2. She tries to sneak up on the milk truck; 3. Majken is found on the truck; 4. At the hospital she is mistakenly thought to be a patient by a nurse and is subjected to a blood test; 5. The last critical stage is when Majken finds out that her friend is not sad, the way she had imagined, when she came to comfort him. Through an open door Majken happens to get a glance of Sven-Olof happily laughing together with a beautiful girl patient. Majken gets a strange feeling, which she has never felt before. It feels like being beaten, but inside. It hurts terribly. "There we leave Majken on the threshold to Sven-Olof", says the programme presenter. "She is sad, standing there in all her misery. What happens next, you will have to read in the book, "Majken en dag i Maj" (Majken, one day in May).

Two boys in the front cannot sit still. They look at each other, turn around, one finds something on floor, the other crawls under the desk. They do not seem to be listening at all. When another teacher knocks on the door and the class teacher hurries to ask her come back later, these boys closest to the door look as they are the most bothered pupils. In the individual interviews, however, one of them, Erik, was able to retell his interpretation of the story and describe his mental images very well.

### → This is our first lesson: we cannot tell if children are listening or not only by observing them.

There is no description in the programme of Majken's home, apart from statements that suggest there is a front door which Majken "opens slowly", wet grass outside and a water barrel at the corner of the building. However, Erik knows what it looks like. He describes an overview image, which he narrows into a closer detailed description of the stairs to the front door:

*It was a fence like this here [he draws with his finger on the table] and a gate here and a house there which was white with green trim and quite high stone stairs in front of the door. And a black handrail of steel with sticks like this.*

Nor are there any descriptions of Majken's mother, apart from a statement that she is often ill. Maria creates a picture of her, as a woman sitting in a black rocking chair, with a blanket over her knees.

### → Listeners create mental images beyond what is told in the radio programme

As Wolfgang Iser (1985) suggests, readers/listeners fill empty spaces in the literary text. When creating his mental picture of Majken's house, Erik uses his experience of his grandparents' country house: "It resembles it a little", he says. Maria uses her memory of the picture of the cover of a book she had recently read, when she sees Majken's mother in a rocking chair.

→ **Listeners form their images based on their own direct experiences or indirect experiences of other media.**

In another picture Maria uses her prior visual memories of different places and mixes them into a new picture as she imagines the story taking place in Lummelunda, with a factory chimney that looks like the one in the sugar factory in Roma, another place on the same island where this research takes place.

→ **Mental images may also be converged by a combination of material based on listeners' previous experiences.**

Sometimes listeners don't know where their mental images come from.

*"I just imagine" says a boy.*

→ **Listeners' images can be close to the story, created mostly out of what they heard.**

*She was standing outside the house and the door was not completely closed. Here is the house and here was that hedge where she sneaked like this. And here is that barrel and the ball she kicked, says Louise.*

→ **Mental images may be created and recalled differently**

Above Louise's shows an entire scene by gestures. In the interview, as she recalls her imagination of the scenery, she describes a frozen picture, which might have been formed as moving images while listening. What is created during listening is not likely to be exactly the same as what is expressed in the interview.

→ **Mental images may be created in multiple modalities, as static stills or as a series of stills like a comic strip, or as moving images like a film.**

Malin describes the environment as a still picture

*It was pretty close to a shop, one of those small ones. And you could see a barn. And the milk truck roughly opposite. And quite far away was the milk shop, says Malin and found it reminding her a bit about the small island Fårö.*

Linda constructs her images as still pictures in a series like a comic strip, without movements:

*It was a barn that the farmer was inside. He heard the car [...] And then the farmer stands outside the barn".*

Lars' description begins with a still picture and continues with a moving image of a man coming out.

*It was quite a big barn. Red, with black roof. Tin roof. A farmer is coming out."*

→ **Mental images can be film-like including kind of kinesthetic feeling**

This is found in Nina's and Erik's experiences. The programme sound effects of an old truck engine, increasingly louder (coming closer) and then fading away, might have helped to invoke these images, which have no reference in the reading.

*The gravel road changes to asphalt over the railway, when they are heading town," says Erik  
I saw from the front kind of a milk truck, in which she sat and it bobbed and bounced, says Nina.*

→ **Imagined sound experiences may also be mentally created.**

Bertil heard an angry man shout in a special dialect, which made him think that the story took place in the south of Sweden. Is this a conclusion because of the narrator's accent?, the interviewer asked. "No Oskar, when he said something", Bertil answered, thus having heard a man in the dramatic reading carried out by a woman. His mental construction of this sound was probably assisted by the narrator's change of articulation into a louder and more energetic voice.

→ **Comprehension seems to be important for constructing mental images**

If the listener cannot make sense of parts of the story, then it is hard to create mental images out of these parts:

When she sits there, I cannot see it, because it says that she sat, but that tarp cannot be as high whatsoever.

Erik did not notice this part of the story: "There is a large tarp slung over the boxes. Below it will be good to hide." Bertil wanted more details of a dramatic event at the hospital: "Now we will have a little blood test here, says the nurse hasty, and before Majken get time to protest, she got a hold of a finger and stuck. A big bright red drop of blood comes out of Majken's finger."

I wonder what the thing looked like, which was used to get blood, I could not see it.

→ **New material are constructed to make sense of the story**

A listener, who missed part of the story, creates a mental image, beyond what is told, which helps her to make sense of the story. That is what Nina is doing when she says the ground was covered "by gravel instead of grass", a conclusion she drew to explain the noise problem when Majken kicked the ball. Nina did not notice the narrator saying Majken kicked the ball at a water barrel, which was roaring and rattling.

→ **It may be easier to create a mental image than to draw it on paper.**

You should only see her looking in through the door... maybe crying... see that she becomes disappointed, and then she sees them sitting there laughing. The door is not so open so those inside can see her, but she can see in.

In the interview Nina has a clear mental image of what she would see as a cover picture of the book.

*I cannot draw the pictures I am thinking.*

## **Identification and empathy**

The arts allow identification, empathy and sharing lives with mediated characters, and it is through our emotions we know what is good or bad, that is to make a moral stance, according to Veronica Stoeihrel (1994). Jonathan Cohen (2001) claims that while identification with media characters is widely discussed in media research, it has not been carefully conceptualized or rigorously tested in empirical audience studies. In his overview of media research involving identification, Cohen suggests identification with media characters may be defined as an imaginative process invoked as a response to characters presented within mediated texts. Identification is fleeting and varies in intensity, a sensation felt intermittently during exposure to a media message. According to Diana Fuss, referred to in Martina Ladendorf (2008), identification is a process linked to the human's own identity. It is a way to relate to others, to incorporate something of the other's identity. Identification is not only with characters you like and wish to be like. Fuss in Ladendorf (2008) describes different kinds of

disidentifications with media characters that audience members dislike. Disidentification as well as identification may be part of one's own continuously identity work.

Identification processes might be like unconscious fantasies, which are not accessed by interviewing, according to Fuss (in Ladendorf 2008). The interview questions and conversations about Majken's feelings and how the listener felt while listening in the current case study, however, showed to be fruitful. Some listeners prefer writing, which may reveal identification as we will see below.

➔ **Listeners may identify or disidentify in their emotional involvement with the main character when they don't like the behaviour of the protagonist.**

*She should have told about her plans, says Malin.*

*She could have gone to the hospital on patients' visiting times, says Johan.*

*You don't do that, says Erik.*

*I would never have done that, says Lars.*

➔ **Both girls and boys may identify with a female main character in a radio programme.**

Not only characters of same sex are subject to identification. Both girls and boys identified with Majken or had empathic feelings for her. Some listeners show they are aware of this identification, others do not. Some reflect over their identification:

*In the end, it was just as me too, that I was Majken and stood there and was sad. And only saw them sitting talking. Lump in the throat. Sting in the head" says Maria.*

*I was thinking about how it would feel to be the same person as she, says Linda.*

*If I was going to do that [as Majken], I would probably go back indoors again. And regret what I had planned to do" says Louise.*

Niklas did not say anything in the interview that could be interpreted as his identification with Majken. In his writing, however, this is clearly revealed, when he changes perspective from third person to first person, from "she" to "I":

*She left with the milk truck. But when it stopped at a farm and a farmer jumped up on the truck platform and pulled back the tarp I sat there shivering. What are you doing here? I could not get a sound out of my mouth, and then came the chauffeur and shouted: What the hell are you doing here. I only shivered and shivered more and more. In the end I could squeeze out a word.*

In addition to interviews, writing is here shown to be a useful instrument to reveal identification. As we prefer to express ourselves in different modalities, in different situations, the research subjects should be able to express themselves according to their own preferences. If we want to regard the child listeners as subjects rather than objects of research, interpretations of children's drawings should be accompanied by conversation, not to draw too far-reaching conclusions.

### **The programme design**

Some listeners faced problems when trying to make sense of the programme because of its design. The presenter's inserted interviews with the author, who is also the narrator of the story, were interspersed with the story. In the first insert the programme presenter talks about another book about Majken, which includes a story of lingonberry jam in the snow, thought to be blood. In the next interview insert, the author says: "That stuff about the blood spot in the snow is absolutely true." This was confusing for some listeners, who tried to link this with the story: She went with that truck. But I don't understand the spot of jam. Quite a few listeners thought the story



must have taken place during winter, because of that blood spot in the snow, in spite of the title of the book mentioned in the programme, Majken one day in May.

In their evaluations of the programme many listeners said they had preferred the story, without inserts. The producer's ambition was to invite listeners to the author as well and learn how she makes up her stories. This ambition did not work the way it was designed in the radio programme. What could have facilitated discrimination of information in the interviews from the narration is the fact that different grammatical tenses are used. The narration uses mostly present tense, the interviews past tense.

### **How can listeners' forming of visual images be assisted?**

This was a question in Richard Palmer's book *School Broadcasting in Britain*, from 1947, calling for research, which probably had never been realised. The suggestions included sound effects and dramatized narration, both being features used in the Majken programme. Early school broadcasters also suggested to "begin with a bang so as to reduce the warming up phase to a minimum". The Majken-programme starts in media res: "When Majken slowly opens the front door..." The clips from the book about Majken are chosen to show the most dramatic situations and omit long text passages about Majken's thoughts and emotions.

A quite recent article by Ebbe Grunwald and Jørgen Lauridsen (2007) on image-evoking language in journalism suggests that figurative everyday language ("linguistic exposures"), descriptive and concrete language, including rhetorical measures such as metaphorical and metonymical expressions, will increase recognition and comprehension and invoke images in readers' minds. The researchers studied how and to what extent these techniques are used by journalists, but not in relation to readers' experiences. Drawing on Grunwald's and Lauridsen's assumption I can conclude that the language of the Majken story is mostly concrete and comprises of everyday expressions, including a swear word, when the narrator expressed Oskar's exclamation when he found Majken on the truck: "What the hell!" This expression, banned in a school context, surprised child listeners and was explicitly appreciated by some, who smilingly imitated it in the interviews. Other listeners revised the expression in a "milder" way, in Swedish "för sjutton gubbar"; "for 17 guys!"

### **In sum**

In this study all the 9 year old children in one way or another proved that they were able to describe their recollection of their mental images constructed while listening. In their creative listening experiences children constructed mental images of different modalities, and drew conclusions beyond the radio presentation. Listeners became involved in the story and showed empathy for the main character and even identified with her. The listeners' creation of mental images can be regarded as a mental interactive co-production of the radio programme.

### **Discussion**

Teachers' prejudices about radio as a pedagogic medium and about children's abilities, wishes and needs seem to be the major obstacle to the use of educational radio (or audio discs) in school. This is evident from interview studies with teachers as well as with students. The case study shows examples of mental image modalities created by 9- and some 8- year old school children while listening to a dramatized narration in radio. The result cannot be generalized to any listener of any programme in any context, which was not the aim of the study. What can be concluded is that children are able to be capable and creative radio listeners and that producers and researchers ought to talk to children rather than listen to adults' prejudices about children's abilities of radio listening.

Methods for researching mental images, listening circumstances and interview situation seem to be of great importance to make children co-researchers, who want to find out about their own mental processing while listening. Of course we cannot capture listeners' direct listening experiences, but indeed their recollection of their experiences in individual interviews. Mental images created while listening, may be further elaborated in interaction with the interviewer. To improve further research I had therefore added the following question in the interview guide: "Is this what you see now? Was it the same during listening?"

Most children appreciated our interest for their mental images and thoughts and were very cooperative as co-researchers. There were however differences in styles in interviews carried out by a teacher compared to non-teachers. (Even in another study with another teacher.) The teacher placed many questions in a short time and got short answers from her interviewees. This might be the manifestation of a mutual problem; children knowing the interviewer as a teacher and that teaching often comprises of many short questions which teachers already know the answer to. In the instruction to interviewers I tried to make clear that there is no right or wrong in this study – the listener is always right of her or his listening experiences. It might be a good idea to include child interview training in teacher education, making teachers listening to children. According to Richardson (1983: 34), relaxation facilitates the emergence of images into awareness, which implies that both the listening situation when mental images are supposed to be created and the interview afterwards must be conditions where the listeners feel relaxed and secure. This does not seem to be the case for Lars, one of the boys who did not sit still and who became most disturbed during listening. Unlike Erik he could tell only a few pieces of his listening experiences, and he told the interviewer that during listening he had been thinking about who might be the one to interview him. Thus it could be assumed that he was not relaxed enough and therefore could not listen focused enough to be able to create mental images.

When comparing their different mental images, listeners understand that they have a great role in shaping and constructing the programme through their own interpretation. They learn that "texts" are interpreted differently by different human beings. *Aha, my programme is different to yours!*, one of my interviewees exclaimed happily, when she realized her own important role while adding her own picture dimension to the programme.

Why do young listeners become so happy when they understand they make half the radio programme themselves? Maybe this is an effect of listeners using their previous experiences in their interpretation and that would imply that knowledge and experiences of their past are acknowledged. This might be one reason why also teenagers of grade eight, who disliked almost everything in school, was so concentrated and happily listening to radio dramas or narrations, according to teacher interviews in an earlier project (Forsslund, 1984).

Programme design seems to be very important for listeners to be able to make meaning of the programme content. As a former radio producer I know it is regarded unprofessional not to provide varieties by using different inserts in a programme, even if we produce an elaborate sound dramatized narration. I think we have to take into account the listeners' opportunities to make sense of our programme and learn more from listeners than from professional colleagues when evaluating programmes.

### **Why should radio drama or literature imagery be important in human development?**

The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum emphasizes imagination to improve development of compassion and civic responsibility:

*"Literary imagination develops compassion, and if compassion is essential for civic responsibility, then we have good reason to teach works that promote the types of compassionate understanding we want and need."*  
(1997/2003: 99)

Apart from the development of important human characteristics as compassion and empathy, mental images evoked by educational radio, relating to listeners' previous knowledge and experiences can be assumed to

acknowledge the listener as a knowledge creating human being. This acknowledgement could encourage students to continue learning for life.

In Australia for instance, creation of mental images is assumed to be an important method to enhance children's reading comprehension: "Explicit teaching of mental imagery using the senses improves listening comprehension and oral retell of Grade 1 students"<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, radio programmes are good for dyslectics, teachers have claimed (Forsslund 1996). One teacher noticed a surprisingly high level of retention of information after a very long time, which he supposed had to do with the high amount of mental effort that listening demands. This notion supports Salomon's theory on mental effort (1983).

Listening is one of the basic skills that should be taught in school, but is often neglected. Maybe it is even more important in today's media climate, where people use social media to talk about themselves more than listening to others.

In my current research project 2011<sup>4</sup>, shadowing new multimedia journalists in their work, I find radio/audio on the web to be paying a short visit and finally ceasing, because it is assessed as demanding too much effort of editing in relation to the few cliques of audio clips on the web. When audio was there, it was accompanied by pictures. The new journalists were educated as multi-journalists with experiences of producing radio, television, print and web. Some of them work at local public service radio stations, making news, culture programmes and talk shows. They appreciate the special benefits of radio or audio, with sound atmosphere and voices offering feelings of fear, anger, happiness etc, making the news more intense and inviting listeners to a deeper understanding or empathy. However those journalists working in paper or media companies mainly on the web, with possibilities to use video and audio apart from texts and pictures, prefer video or sound accompanied by photos. As it is easy to present pictures on the web, it is assumed to be an extra service to users. Of course pictures are of great value in journalism about news and current affairs and other subjects that are new to the listeners. Nevertheless, it can also eliminate listeners' imagination and as in television, viewers may focus the presenter rather than the information. That is what interviewed teachers argue, after using school radio in 1995. It is easier to listen to what people say, when you do not need to pay attention to how they look (Forsslund, 1996).

Radio may contribute to saving the art of storytelling (I do not mean storytelling as a means of advertising). For current affairs or educational programmes compelling stories may well put facts into a context, making them easier to understand. In my study about the history of Swedish school radio (Forsslund 2002) I was surprised to find programmes in the 1940s and 50s about difficult subjects such as for instance the invention of the nuclear bomb presented in a fascinating drama format. And for young school children there was a programme teaching dental health care in the format of a dramatized fairy tale about a king who loved sweets and did not know how to brush his teeth. These types of edutainment programmes offer listeners indirect learning through committed or joyful listening. The benefits of edutainment were also found by Solange Davin (2003) in a television reception study, where viewers perceived medical soap operas as being quality entertainment as well as efficient pedagogic tools, because they allowed identification (and repetition) which enhanced their learning.

Educational radio in school or university functions as a social medium where listeners simultaneously get information together, compared to text reading. Individual interpretations can be discussed, comprehension problems may be solved and meaning makings and understandings might be enhanced. This kind of use was included in the instructions of school radio methodology in classrooms in the 1940s and 50s when school radio had its golden age.

There are a lot of questions for further research on the importance of radio in human life, except for use in school. If children have access to radio programmes of good quality, they might become happy adult listeners.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://online.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/LiteracyResearch/pub/teaching\\_strategies/AMullan\\_TS.pdf](http://online.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/LiteracyResearch/pub/teaching_strategies/AMullan_TS.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> On the threshold of a profession. Becoming journalists in new media realities.

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