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### Conference Program

#### Developing Criticism – Developing Morality – The Importance of Reading as Part of Media Socialization from Early Childhood to Adolescence



**Prof. Dr. Gudrun Marci-Boehncke (guest speaker)**

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Gudrun Marci-Boehncke, born 1963, studied German and History at the Justus-Liebig-University/Giessen; 1989-1990 Professional Lecturer at the George-Washington-University/Washington, DC; 1993 PhD with a dissertation about the German Jewish author Fanny Lewald; Assistant Teacher at the Department of German at the Justus-Liebig-University/Giessen; 1998 Fellowship to the Conference of German Film at Dartmouth College, MASS.; 1999 Max-Kade-Visiting Professor at Colorado College, CO.; since 2001 Professor of German Literature and Children's Literature and Media at the University of Education/Ludwigsburg; Head of the research institutes Youth – Media – Education and Childrens' Literature.

#### Lecture Summary:

This contribution focuses on the importance of books and reading literacy within media society and the impact on the moral development of children. We will present results of our media study, "Ravensburger Jugendmedienstudien", a qualitative analysis based on questionnaires about the media habits of 1500 pupils on German highschools (Marci-Boehncke et al. 2005) and parents and teachers (as part of a mixed methods study) of 100 children in German Kindergarten (Marci-Boehncke/Rath 2005). The media study examined the importance of media socialisation and its impact on the ability of being critical and keeping a distance to media influences. More than books modern media are creating idols that are highly relevant for the moral shaping of a person's character – especially during adolescence. We wanted to know how young people react to the commercially created idols of popular culture. How are they influenced in their ability to keep a critical a distance and argue with reference to moral standards?

Part of the study was the Kohlberg-related Briechele test that measures the ability of moral argumentation (Colby/Kohlberg 1986; Kohlberg 1964; 1995). In addition to this more formal typology we were interested in the "material values used by the pupils when criticizing their idols (Marci-Boehncke/Rath 2006).

Today, facing the controversy amongst teachers and parents about the importance of media skills and the danger of media abuse, it seems called for to examine the individual strategies of children in the use of media. As one result of our study we would like to suggest the idea of "moral capital" (Lissenberg 1995), presented by different media idols – from Harry Potter to Michael Schumacher and to Eminem. Although the children who reach a slightly higher score in the Briechele test prefer books in contrast to other media (Marci-Boehncke 2005), our data show that the ability to engage in active criticism is developed best in those kids that take part in a wide use of different media – including books as well as modern media.

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