

Learning from the children: Enabling 3- and 4-year olds as commentators on their own experiences

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Entering e-Society



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Entering e-Society

Main aims

- To investigate the early development of e-literacy and the competencies children develop with and through ICT
- To explore parents' understandings and expectations about their children's entry into e-society
- To examine the extent to which a digital divide is emerging between children with different family circumstances

Theoretical perspectives

- Background of respect for children's rights: to be listened to and consulted, to contribute to understanding of their lives, treated with respect
- Draw on socio-cultural perspective: learning as change in nature of participation; learning mediated through interactions with others; legitimate peripheral participation & situated learning;
- Acknowledge agency of children, adults and objects
- See children as agents of social reproduction and change: acquiring shared practices & values, constructing new practices

In this presentation

- Describe the methods we used to assist in articulating children's perspectives
- Give an account of what would have been overlooked if we had not consulted the children directly

Important to acknowledge our broad definition of technology – interactive, communicative & appropriate for preschool children: computers, interactive TV, digital cameras, video cameras, mobile phones, games consoles and toys that simulate 'real technology'

Research Design

Volunteer sample of 19 case study families

Gender of focal child 8 (42%) female; 11 (58%) male

Age 6 (33%) age 3; 12 (63%) age 4; 1 (5%) age 5

Technology status 10 (53%) 'technology rich'; 9 (47%) 'technology poor'

Family composition 4 (20%) no siblings; 8 (63%) older siblings; 7 (37%) younger siblings; 0 both older and younger siblings

Socio-economic status 12 (63%) advantaged; 7 (37%) disadvantaged

Data Collection

Case Study Families Round 3

Parents interview: child's use of technologies & ways learned to use them

Parents & Child: reactions to technologies portrayed in photographs

Video recording of child demonstrating use of 1 technology

Case Study Families Round 4

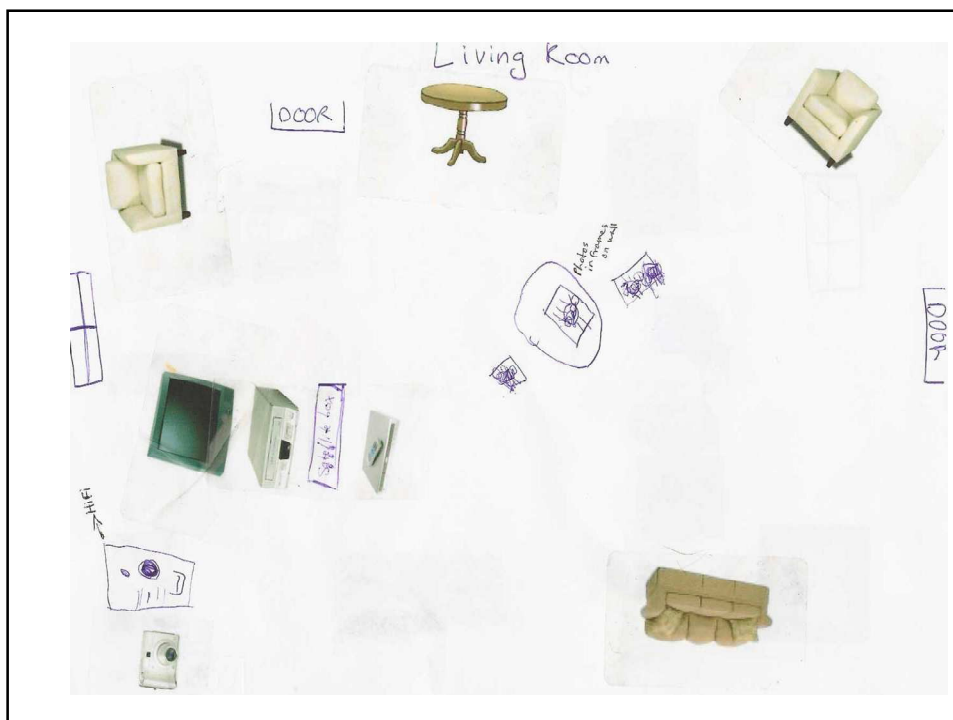
Parents interview: child's non-technological activities; preparation for transition to school

Child Mapmaking: mapping location of technologies in the home

Case Study Families Round 5

Parents interview: change in ICT owned or way used; family rules for ICT use; experience of transition to school where appropriate & ICT use at school;

Child: activities to articulate child's perspective on using technologies and learning to use ICT



EWAN IS GOOD AT ...



Easy or hard



Happy or Sad



Ethical Concerns

- Contribute to children's well-being
- Avoid stress or distress
- Allow children to feel positive about their involvement
- Ensure children can make informed choices about taking part

» Hill, M. (2005) 'Ethical considerations in researching children's experiences', in S. Greene & D. Hogan (eds) *Researching children's experiences Approaches and Methods*, pp. 61-86 London: Sage.

What did we learn from the children?

- Discriminating users
- ICT does not dominate preferences
- Family matters but so do individual interests
- Children have a 'because of' agenda
- Developing e-literacy is entry to family culture – shared funds of knowledge

The children's evidence: making choices

Likes: **outside** - physical activities (swimming, bike riding, slides)
inside - new technologies (computer, TV, DVD), drawing

Dislikes: technology and traditional toys – if boring, had accident;
technology - 'too hard' to operate or activity too difficult.

- [Its] hard to move the arrow because sometimes you can't get the arrow to move . . . , *Grace*
- using the controller [for the Playstation] can be hard because there are so many buttons it's hard to use them all at once
Kenneth
- [It's hard] because you've got to try to use the white one to get the balloons to burst them . . . you've got to catch them *Grace*
referring to Disney Plug N' Play

The children's evidence: differentiating competencies

- Wide range of 'good at' choices
- 'Good at' technologies – Playstations, computers, Leap-Pad, TV, remote control cars
- Identified success and limitations
 - Freddie described himself as failing with the Toy Story game ('I die on that one, its rubbish, too hard') but good at the Pokemon game which he can do himself.

The children's evidence: technology and family relationships

- Restrictions and locations
- Sharing resources
- Outgrowing resources

The children's evidence: learning to use technology

Age appropriate technologies

Easy for Ben to use as he is five and getting big *Alex referring to mobile phone*

Easy! Because he can do it . . . At his age he is able to do that *Kenneth referring to remote control car*

Could learn to write texts and take pictures but not until he is bigger. . . . could learn to play games on it now if Mum showed him where they are. *Angus referring to mobile phone*

Learning how to use ICT

you just press a wee button at the bottom and it will come on . . . and then you have to click on the internet and then you press the wee word. Then it will be a long line and you look for CBeebies and then you just click on it and it comes up *Catryna referring to CBeebies website*

Sources of help

Mum and Dad could show her which buttons to press and then she could use it on her own *Evie referring to LeapPad*

[He] could pick it up quickly with [his] mum's help . . . showing him how to switch it on, click on his name on the icon then click on the Internet . . . On Cartoon Network he can do what he wants to do *Angus referring to computer use*

Do our methods help children to contribute to the research?

Features important to enhance children's contributions:

1. Waiting until children are familiar & comfortable with research team
2. Using forms of responding within existing repertoire of young children
3. Researcher as friendly, purposeful visitor

Implications

- For policy
 - Policies and innovations that fail to take account of and understand children's agency risk failure or unintended consequences
- For practice
 - Individuals differ; children reproduce and change practices and culture; contexts facilitate & hinder
- For theory
 - Further evidence of children as active agents, family and children shaping practices, situatedness of learning
- For researchers
 - Value of engaging directly with children, 'child-centred' methods for 'adult-originated' questions, interrogating/valuing alternative forms of data

Stephen, C., McPake, J., Plowman, L. & Berch-
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pp. 99 – 117.

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