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# Researching 0-3-Year-Old Children's Language and Literacy Play at Home in a Digital Age

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# Overview

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among friends



# Background

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- Digital tech features heavily in family life (Chaudron et al. 2018; Kumpulainen & Gillen 2020)
- Very young children observe/use digital tech playfully (Arnott et al. 2019; 2021; Zhao & Flewitt 2020)

# Objectives

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1. Build empirically robust body of knowledge about how 0-3 year old children's lives intersect with digital techs at home in diverse families (ethnically, socially, city, town, rural) in the 4 UK nations
2. Understand how 0-3 year olds develop early talk and literacy while engaging with different semiotic systems in diverse media and how family members mediate and safeguard
3. Construct theoretical models of sociomaterial entanglements in the contemporary Home Literacy Environment (HLE)
4. Develop innovative participatory methods with our methods palette

# Project team

**Prof Rosie Flewitt,  
Principle Investigator**

Dr Sandra El Gemayel,  
Researcher

Angie Cooke,  
Project co-ordinator

**Manchester  
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*Scotland*

Dr Lorna Arnott; Dr Zinnia Mevawalla

**University of Strathclyde**

RA to be recruited 2023

*Wales*

Prof Janet Goodall

**Swansea University**

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*Northern  
Ireland*

Prof Karen Winter; Dr Katrina McLaughlin

**Queens University Belfast**

RA to be recruited 2023

*Also in England*

Prof Julia Gillen

**Lancaster University**

RA to be recruited 2023

International  
Advisory  
Board

# Theoretical framework

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- All language learning is embodied and embedded in multimodal semiotic domains (Kress, 2010)
- Meaning making and relationship building is entangled with “humans, nonhumans and more-than-humans” (Kuby & Rowsell 2017: 286) – participation requires mastery of complex repertoire of modes
- HLE: a digitally networked space, with porous boundaries where young children negotiate affectively intense relationships as they connect with distant others in a digitally mediated world (Flewitt & Clark 2020); constant crossing of material/virtual and offline/online boundaries (Burnett & Merchant 2020)

# Ethics

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- Methodological and ethical issues are constantly entwined (Kuntz, 2015)
- Genuinely participatory approaches with 0-3s need to recognise imbalance in power; offer ways to decline; eschew regarding children as a homogeneous group; see children as experts (Arnott et al., 2021; Flewitt & Ang, 2020)
- Working in the HLE demands flexibility and an ethnographic sensibility (Sandberg & Gillen, 2021)



# Methods - overview

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**Phase 1:** survey

**Phase 2:** interviews

**Phase 3:** case studies

**Phase 4:** consolidation

## Phase 1: survey

Aim for 270 respondents per nation total 1080, online recruitment; translation into multiple languages

Device ownership, use and parental attitudes. For each device:

- Does your child OWN the device?
- How confident are you using the device?
- How often does your 0–3-year-old child play with this device by themselves?
- What activities does the child do themselves on this device?
- How often do you use this device when you play with your child?
- What activities do you do together with your child on this device?
- How often do other children (siblings, friends of your children, child relatives) use this device when they are playing with your child?
- What activities do other children do together with your child on this device?
- How often do other adults (aunts, uncles, adult cousins, grandparents, family friends) use this device when they are playing with your child?
- What activities do other adults do together with your child on this device?

## Phase 2: interviews

- 60 semi-structured interviews (20 families in each nation & 20 ECEC professionals)
- purposive diversity in recruitment
- digital device ownership & use
- parental beliefs on play & learning including with digital devices
- parental attitudes towards children's digital safety and security

## **Phase 3: case studies**

10 families in each nation  
purposive diversity in recruitment

### **methods palette**

co-creation of approaches to data collection and analysis, e.g.

- participant accounts in various modes (paper or iPad – given)
- parent diaries; parent and child-generated data e.g. vlogs in secure space; screen capture; apps
- Day in the Life methodology
- photo/video elicitation etc.

## Phase 4: consolidation

Data analysis and write up, revisiting key objectives

1. Build empirically robust body of knowledge about how 0-3 year old children's lives intersect with digital techs at home in diverse families (ethnically, socially, city, town, rural) in the 4 UK nations;
2. Understand how 0-3 year olds develop early talk and literacy while engaging with different semiotic systems and how family members mediate and safeguard;
3. Construct theoretical models of sociomaterial entanglements in the contemporary Home Literacy Environment (HLE);
4. Develop innovative participatory methods with our methods palette

# Summary and questions

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- Provocative questions for a friendly audience
- Are we in a “post-digital” age cf. posthumanism?
- Is our aim of working with very diverse families feasible – and should we be cautious of ‘families’ cf. ‘intergenerational groups’?
- What do you think of our “methods palette”?

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# RESEARCH: TODDLERS, TECH AND TALK

Understanding how very young children learn language and literacy at home in a digital age.

