Media Literacy and Media Education Research Methods

A Handbook

Edited by
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First published 2024

ISBN: 978-0-367-49264-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-49265-6 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-04536-6 (ebk)

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003045366-4

The funder of the Open Access version of this chapter is Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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Introduction

Do you remember 2010? Our phones had become smart, a new category of media technology, which would take the name of the "tablet", was about to radically change the way in which we engage with digital media. Within a few years, these devices were adopted massively in Western countries and beyond. The secrets of their success reside in some, at that time, original assets like touch screen technology, portability, and versatility (Straker et al., 2018; Marsh, 2020). The then-new digital devices appealed not only to adults but increasingly to younger children.

In 2014, before we conducted the study on which this chapter is based, very little was known about the substantial increase in the use of internet and digital technologies by young children in Europe or in which way they influenced the media education practices at home (Holloway et al., 2013). In the same year, Ólafsson et al. (2014) pointed out that research focusing on the benefits and challenges associated with children's use of the internet targeted mainly pre-teens and teenagers. The use of the internet required, at the time, a certain level of literacy, and only a handful of studies focused on children under the age of nine. Furthermore, most of these studies adopted a quantitative methodological approach. The focus was on the fixed internet, with a limited use of mobile devices, and on the associated risks rather than on the benefits afforded to children. Research on the use of digital technologies should not only be about risks and opportunities but also about the media education of young children in the home situation by their parents (Buckingham, 2007). Finally, Ólafsson et al. (2014) noted that the role of parents as media facilitators and educators was rarely investigated, and very few studies were cross-national.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003045366-4

This chapter presents the methodological lessons learned from an international, qualitative study, which explored the experiences with digital technologies of children under eight years of age and their families. The challenge was to investigate the digital engagement of young children in the home context cross-nationally, within a qualitative perspective and with the intention of extracting policy-relevant implications. Researchers collected qualitative data on young children's perceptions and behaviors related to the use of digital technologies through interviews with 234 families in 21 countries between 2014 and 2017. The chapter discusses four methodological dimensions of the study:

(1) The initial methodological choices and their theoretical framework;
(2) Country-specific and universal challenges that researchers came across in the data collection process and the solutions and strategies that they developed to address them;
(3) Challenges brought about by the data analysis, focusing on the demands imposed by the cross-national dimension, including the quality control and management of large and multi-language datasets;
(4) Ethical issues and dilemmas. These themes are examined from a research perspective that considers children as active participants and understands research as a reflexive process between researchers and participants.

Aims of the "Young Children (0–8) and Digital Technology" Project

To bridge the knowledge gap about the use of digital media by young children and their parents, the Joint Research Center of the European Commission (JRC) initiated in June 2014 a cross-national qualitative study, "Young Children (0–8) and Digital Technology". It was supported over three years by 31 research centers across Europe and beyond. Researchers investigated, through home-based interviews, the role(s) played by digital technologies in families with young children and how parents determined their media education practices around these technologies. Data were collected between Autumn 2014 and Spring 2017, through 290 interviews with families in 21 countries[1] over three distinct phases: a pilot study, an enlargement study, and an advanced study measuring changes over one year (Chaudron et al., 2015; Chaudron et al., 2018). The study sought to provide answers to the following questions and to investigate changes over one year:

- How do children under the age of eight engage with digital technologies?
- How do family members perceive digital technologies?
- How do parents manage their younger children's use of technologies?
- What role do digital technologies play in the lives of young children and their parents?
- What are the risks and opportunities associated with the use of digital technologies by young children?

This chapter focuses on the methodology (i.e., from the design to the reporting phase) and the challenges which were encountered throughout this cross-national, qualitative research project about how the digital literacy of young children is fostered in the home context.

The Young Children and Digital Technology project was informed by the theoretical framework of the DigiLitEY[2] project (Marsh, 2020). Digital literacy is a multilayered concept (Marsh, 2020). It was defined in both projects as a social practice at the intersection of the three-dimensional model of literacy, the operational, cultural, and critical dimensions (Green, 1988), with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model that understands digital literacy practices as organized in multiple contexts and systems. According to Marsh (2020), digital literacy

> indicates the messiness and complexity of literacy in a digital world, but at the same time as expanding traditional conceptualizations, it also offers a means of integrating previously quite separate understandings of literacy (in its metaphorical forms, e.g. computer literacy, information literacy, media literacy).
>
> (p. 24)

Adopting this broad, but well-structured, definition of digital literacy allows us to look at issues traditionally covered by media education (e.g., critically adjusting the device/app to the tasks, being creative and expressing with media, reading different media texts in their cultural context). Our research extracts and expands them from the confined space of school (with which media education was mainly associated) and discusses digital literacies within a home context, with its dynamics in usage, provision or limitation of devices, rules etc.

Design and Methodology of the "Young Children (0–8) and Digital Technology" Project

To explore the media education practices of families with young children at home, we wanted to develop a methodology that would allow us to capture both the voice of the children and the perspective of their parents. To illustrate the complex, multifaceted, and sometimes surprising process of listening to young children, Clark (2005) has explored how the Mosaic approach can include the "voice of the child" as active agents in contrast to viewing children as passive and in need (Clark, 2005). In this approach, both visual and verbal tools were included, and the theoretical perspectives of the methodology were based on the notion of the competent child.[3] Using this theoretical basis and given the exploratory nature of the study, we chose a qualitative approach involving both children and parents (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Following the Mosaic approach, we combined the traditional methodology

of observation and interviewing with innovative participatory tools and developed:

(a) a multi-method perspective where researchers recognize the different "voices" or languages of children;
(b) a participatory perspective that treats children as experts and agents in their own lives;
(c) a reflexive attitude that involves children and parents in reflecting on meaning;
(d) a focus on children's lived experiences in their more intimate settings.

Selecting the targeted age group was an essential step before defining the participatory tools. We selected children aged between six and seven who possibly had younger siblings. Children at that age are usually capable of participating in a reflexive conversation with researchers about their media practices and the ones of their younger siblings (Christensen, 2004).

In all the phases of the data collection, we followed a common observation protocol. Notwithstanding, research teams had the freedom to make adaptations depending on the specific interview contexts and needs (e.g., country, culture, family context), given the exploratory nature of the study. An interview lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours following this structure:

- A short, interactive introduction open to the entire family;
- A short semi-structured interview with parents;
- "Interview" with children, using innovative and age-appropriate interview tools as mentioned earlier, completed by ethnographic observations (Irwin & Johnson, 2005);
- Conclusive reflections from family members and researcher(s).

To complement the semi-structured interviews, we developed a set of tools adapted for young children and their parents. During the interview, we invited children to:

(a) complete an activity sheet presenting daily routines and to populate it with stickers (Insafe, 2015), together with their parents;
(b) take the researcher on a tour of the digital devices of the family (Plowman, 2015);
(c) play cards using a memory-style cards game developed for the study and showing pictures of digital devices among other children's interests and activities;
(d) draw (their favorite) digital activities;
(e) take pictures of (their favorite) digital activities; and
(f) play with a device and show it to the researcher. Also, we used cards displaying words related to feelings to facilitate the parents' interviews.

The tools facilitated the interactions with the children. They created a playful atmosphere, provided a structure, and set the pace for the session. Altogether, they allowed us to map the family media education practices based on their stories and ways of playing with technology. Most of the interviews were conducted in the home of the participants. Some of them were conducted, at the families' request, in community service facilities or public spaces.

Each interview was (partially) transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to a hybrid approach based on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) supported by coding techniques from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The thematic analysis helps to capture critical features of a large body of data. Similarities and differences across the dataset can be highlighted, facilitating cross-national comparison. Although the analysis was conducted separately in each country, the coding of data was based on an analysis protocol jointly constructed by the partners. We dealt with a variety of cases rooted in a diversity of cultures (national and internal). To help the analysis at the cross-national level, we held several face-to-face and online meetings to present, compare, and discuss issues and challenges in understanding the data, agreeing finally on a common coding scheme and framework for the presentation of results. Moreover, each team prepared a national report following a common format, which also served as a basis for the cross-national analysis. This report included a "family portraits" gallery, which presented the interviewed families with anonymized short narratives encapsulating the diverse family circumstances and the dynamic uses of the digital devices.

The methodology produced rich data that allowed us to explore an understudied field and to answer our initial research questions. Our study identified four main categories of digital activities in which young children engage. These categories varied depending on their scope: entertainment, information and learning, support to creativity, and communication. The analysis showed the natural learning patterns of children of that age with regard to the development of their digital skills. Furthermore, the study allowed us parenting strategies. The findings put a focus on the relations between parenting style and mediation strategies as categorized by Valcke et al. (2010) – authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and laissez-faire – and highlighted the essential dimension of parents' availability of time and knowledge. Finally, the results of the study provided a categorization of risks and opportunities associated with the use of digital technologies by children aged under nine. This allowed us to confront parents' perceptions on the matter with actual data from children's practices and also set the stage for practice and policy recommendations in the report (Chaudron et al., 2018).

In the next two sections, we discuss the challenges that a cross-national qualitative study on domestic media education can face. Also, we describe key issues from the data collection and analysis processes and how we dealt with them.

Challenges Encountered During Data Collection

There are several issues that a cross-national, qualitative study on domestic media education may encounter in the process of data collection. Here we focus on the issues of sampling, finding a balance between standardization and flexibility, development and implementation of the common research protocol, and ethical considerations. We also discuss how these issues were overcome.

Orienting a Diversity-Sensitive Purposeful Sampling Process

A sampling process is a challenging process in a qualitative cross-national study. The first step is to define some common criteria at the cross-national level to help organize the national sampling process. The criteria that oriented sampling in the project were diversity in terms of age, gender and digital media use, and family structure and socioeconomic background. To overcome this challenge, the researchers contacted more families than they initially needed for the sample and then after initial inquiries decided if the family was suitable for the research project sample. Considering that children's use of digital media in the family is a rather sensitive topic, most teams faced an additional challenge of recruiting, not only families which were confident in how they handled their children's media education and wanted to share their experiences but also those who were less confident or thought they had nothing interesting to share. What helped in these situations was if the families were already acquainted with the researchers or if the initial invitation came from a trustworthy source, such as their social service, school or church.

Finding a Balance Between Standardization and Flexibility in Access and Fieldwork, Accommodating Different Sociocultural Realities

In a cross-national research study such as this, it is often a challenge to find a balance between flexibility of the research process and a level of "standardization" across countries, participating families, and research teams. To overcome this challenge, it is useful to anticipate possible challenges in advance. Because of the length of the family visits (3–6 hours) researchers had to rely on the time the family considered to be the most suitable for them – after school, on weekends, or public holidays – and to recognize how conditions and routines could differ significantly. It was important that family members, both parent and child, allowed enough time to be fully engaged and to complete the research process, to collect high-quality data and put it into perspective, taking into consideration other conditions that might have affected the data collection process.

In addition to time demands, access to families and homes also proved to be challenging. Some of the participating families were still hesitant about sharing their experiences or to allow researchers into their homes. For example,

in Romania, the researcher was welcomed in the restricted space designated for entertainment and welcoming guests but not to the entire home. A further question is how much of the family space or dynamic was staged for the researcher's visit. For example, a smartphone that would be usually left within a child's reach could be put out of the child's sight when the visit was done. This might mirror the family's lack of confidence in mediating their child's digital media activities. To overcome these challenges, researchers would ask questions about the family's daily routines and try to build a positive rapport with the members of the family to reassure them that they were not there to "evaluate" or "judge" their actions but to learn from them. On some occasions, the interview with the child was done in the presence of the parents while on others, the focal child was alone. This was for various reasons, such as parents resisting the idea of the child being left alone with the researcher, the child being shy or scared and needing parental support, or simply because the space in the home was limited. In such circumstances, the researcher would adjust and observe the effects of the presence of the parents on the children's answers. For instance, one child said things that contradicted what the parents had said, in an apparent effort to attract their attention (see Matsumoto et al., 2016). The possible differences in the children's narratives when the parents were not present during the interview were recognized, and in the analysis, they were put in perspective.

Cross-national studies involving various research teams, diverse in their composition and separated geographically, also faced other kinds of challenges. Most teams had two researchers available to complete the interview session with each family, but a few had only one. Needless to say, it was more challenging for one researcher to complete the interview with both parent/s and child, and it also prolonged the time spent in a visit with the family. It also added the difficulty of keeping the child(ren) occupied if there were no other people present in the home while the researcher interviewed the parent. In conclusion, distinct challenges occurred that prevented researchers from conducting the fieldwork in "ideal" conditions. To overcome these hurdles researchers had to acknowledge them, monitor their possible effects, and put the challenges into perspective in the process of analysis.

Harmonizing Data Collection Methods and Protocols Across Cultures in Europe

The creation of protocol materials to conduct interviews with children and to make the interaction with them fluent gave rise to cultural challenges. The use of visual materials is relatively common in research with children, as it can elicit children's active participation, which might be difficult to achieve only through verbal means (Harper, 2002).

In our study, we used visual materials: an activity book (Insafe, 2015) and picture cards as an "ice-breaker". Developing an ad hoc card game that was suitable across different contexts was a demanding task. We had to adapt

the sets of cards to different countries and also between different phases of the project, as new devices appeared on the market and had to be included in the sets. Additionally, some teams had distinct sets of cards for boys and girls, which became problematic in a few cases when the focal child did not identify with the gender ascribed in the cards. The set also contained pictures of devices that were not considered essential to be included in some countries (e.g., drone). Moreover, researchers were aware of the possibility that the cards might restrict children in their opportunity to tell their "story" of daily use of a device because the cards depicted a different activity done with the use of that device (e.g., a child can use the smartphone to listen to the radio, but in the narration this activity may not appear, as it was not captured in the picture cards). When such a situation occurred, the researchers encouraged the child to give additional examples of how he or she used specific devices.

Ethical Challenges

Research with children about their digital practices requires researchers to pay particular attention to ethical issues. Dealing with online communities, social media, and mobile devices brings about many ethical considerations that need to be addressed during the research process. To meet this challenge, Flewitt (2020) calls for a reflective, situated, and dialogic framework, having child and adult participant's perspectives integrated and reflected throughout all the phases of the research process – in addition to following universal ethics norms. For example, in seeking children's consent to participate, Flewitt emphasizes the importance of revisiting and renegotiating their consent at different phases of a study and not only at the beginning of the research encounter. In particular, if the focus is on online and digital practices, it may be difficult for children to fully understand what taking part in research means in practice. Other authors also refer to the issues of anonymity, privacy protection, confidentiality, and the safety of the collected data, as well as to issues related to access of the participants to the data that were collected from them (Lobe et al., 2007).

Bearing in mind such possible problems, our study took an approach with which we respect the family and the child's voluntary and comfortable participation, resolving the issues and dilemmas as we encountered them. One problem a few teams encountered was that the study introduced some of the children to unfamiliar technologies. A few researchers "experimented" during the visit with providing the focal child with a tablet to observe whether and how the child would handle such an unfamiliar device. In some cases, this was the first time that the child was introduced to a tablet, either because of the family's decision to postpone introducing such devices in the lives of their children or because these technologies were beyond the financial means of the family.

A further issue arose regarding the video recordings collected by some of the national teams. As previously mentioned, we conducted video recordings

only in countries and in families where it was legally possible to do so and with the family's consent. Although video recording has significant advantages (e.g., the gestures of children could be informative), it also raises serious ethical issues. We had to take great care in this regard by ensuring that the recordings captured the children's actions and movements rather than their faces. Furthermore, while recording episodes when the children were interacting with media and digital devices, we had to ensure that personal information such as passwords, social networking profiles, or email exchanges were excluded from the recordings. These challenges were overcome by covering the camera lens on-site or by masking/deleting this information from the raw recording.

Another ethical issue in the project arose when children were assured confidentiality of the information they provided, and then later the parents asked the researcher about what the child had said or when they eventually read about some episode in the study report. We followed the advice of Staksrud (2019), who also acknowledges these kinds of situations and advises to anticipate them with both parents and children. There are however situations when children can confide something with the researcher that in fact might affect their safety and well-being, for example, that they are being bullied or lured by strangers. In these situations, the researcher is obliged to share that information with the parents to protect the child (see more in Livingstone et al., 2011).

Challenges of the Data Analysis Process

The data analysis stage of the project was also confronted by various challenges related to the cross-national dimension of the project. The issues are related to various phases of qualitative data analysis, including data management and coding, defining analytical units, organizing teamwork, or considering representativity problems in the interpretation of the data, and the development of policy-relevant implications (given the nature of the JRC-sponsored project). From our perspective, these issues can be grouped under two themes that we will discuss in this section: (1) the organization of research teamwork and (2) representativity as an interpretive factor.

Organizing Team Data Analysis

The data analysis process of this project was a collective effort. At the cross-national level, the JRC created guidelines and coordinated regular meetings in which analytical procedures and steps were shared and established. The principal output from each national team was a national report built around a shared report template with detailed instructions proposed for each section and the organization of the analysis and narrative. These reports built on data grids that were discussed and systematized, allowing for a second coding phase at the cross-national level. As explained previously, the overall

project developed in three phases, in a way that at each successive phase a national team that joined the project could draw from the accumulated experience and materials of previous phases. At the national level, most teams had researchers from different disciplines and at different stages of their careers. The description of the project and the annexes to the final comparative report (Chaudron et al., 2018) describe in detail the analytical tools that were used in the project and the preparation of the reports (e.g., family portraits, digital competencies grid etc.). In this project, the transition from "raw" data (collected in a variety of languages by local national teams) to "structured" data and reports (produced in English as the project lingua franca) happened at the national level. This material was, in turn, compared and coded at the cross-national level.

As previously explained, the JRC project templates provided the shared questions and analytical categories for the project; yet each national team had to complete the task of working through the raw materials of the collected data, code the data, and define the analytical procedures. An initial challenge is that, in many ways, what is "noticeable" in qualitative data is influenced by the disciplinary and theoretical–conceptual frameworks of the researchers. Within and across national teams, researchers came from different disciplines (e.g., education, psychology, sociology, humanities, or communication) and included experienced researchers and university faculty, postdoctoral researchers, and graduate students. The challenge is then how to build a dialogue between these different voices that can move the analysis forward. In summary, three types of dialogues seemed to occur across national teams, each with particular realizations.

A first type of dialogue draws on team discussions and in developing a consensus about how the data is initially coded and interpreted. Within this approach, the size, composition, and particularities of each team influenced the shape of this dialogue. In larger teams involving diverse researchers, sometimes based in different localities, these discussions could be considered more *organic*: individual researchers would make the first contribution to different aspects of the analysis and provide a template for the rest of the team to consider and then discuss, revise, and adjust where necessary. This emergent strategy allows researchers to distribute the work and for emergent researchers, mainly master students, to be "apprenticed" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 2011) into qualitative data analysis and the procedures of this particular project. Smaller teams of two or three researchers were often composed of experienced researchers who had worked together on previous projects and maintained close contacts on a daily basis. Under these circumstances, it is easier to share an initial understanding of the data and to collaborate and discuss at all stages of the process to agree on the analytical categories and initial codes. This scenario moreover allows researchers to incorporate with ease data analysis software into the process and to adopt a more proceduralized approach to data analysis and coding (e.g., Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A second type of conversation can be considered to be much more hierarchical and involves smaller teams with members who have clearer roles and a project leader. Often, an experienced researcher led the team and worked with graduate researchers who were trained to conduct different parts of the analysis and coding. Their work might have been centered on a specific task of the project or their participation in the project might have been part of their own research and training agenda (e.g., a master's thesis project). Such an arrangement, in turn, influenced how supervision was structured. In the first case, data coding or other tasks such as transcription and data management were construed "technical skills" that novel researchers acquired and practiced through their involvement in the project. In the second case, data coding became part of a larger formative process and unfolded alongside other aspects of the project.

Finally, some of the project reports were written by individual researchers on their own. Under these circumstances, the notion of dialogue becomes explicitly much more dialogical (Greco, 2017), where the researcher builds the coding in an iterative process between the data and the researcher's conceptual background and by engaging in careful self-monitoring.

Across these communicative arrangements, a key issue is how to control researcher bias, which specifically in such a project can materialize in two interrelated dynamics: excluding/omitting particular instances of data as they are considered irrelevant or "imposing" particular theoretical–conceptual interpretations on the data. Arguably, this challenge is even more pressing in an exploratory study where it is especially important not to discard data threads produced during the research process. Sharing responsibilities in the coding alleviates these risks but not all of them. If the team starts with specific shared assumptions – or coders are trained to apply them – the initial coding might be prematurely oriented toward particular theoretical interpretations. In situations where researchers work individually, bias can be controlled only through careful reflexive monitoring or eventual contrast and discussion at a transnational level. Yet reflexivity is relevant not only to the work of individual researchers. Teamwork and all the forms of dialogue we have discussed so far also build from and contribute to a collective reflexive process in the coding and broader research effort (Creese et al., 2016).

The Meaning of Representativity in Exploratory Qualitative Case Studies

The project was framed as qualitative and exploratory, so our understanding of representativity is not anchored in a statistical interpretation of the term. Rather, as each national sample was defined as a collection of family case studies – recruited through various procedures, as discussed earlier – critical issue concerned what diversities and intersections of these diversities (Alper & Goggin, 2017) the recruitment process actively sought out.

Starting with the strengths, we can state that the project captured a diversity of family forms and structures – reflecting contemporary changes in

family formations (Golombok, 2015) and trends in European family demographics (Oláh, 2015). Each national team recruited different family forms (single-parent, two-parent households, divorced/separated, and reconstituted families) and, to some degree, managed to incorporate these family dynamics into the portraits of each report. The socioeconomic status of these families is also diverse, although the majority fall into a middle-income and middle-class bracket – categories that, in themselves, have a different operationalization in each national context. Turning to the forms of diversity that were mostly excluded from the project, the study did not seek out migrant and transnational families – as it was considered that this would involve additional layers of complexity to an exploratory project. Only the UK report included families with a migrant background. Also, all focal children in the sample – as far as we know – were normally developing and schooled children, so functionally diverse childhoods are not captured in the reports and project (Alper & Goggin, 2017).

Being explicit about the restrictions in the sample of families is also an invitation to develop new research targeted at the types of children and families that were not included in these studies. However, these initial restrictions also have consequences that we were not able to foreground in the analysis and have emerged later as we returned to the reports, or the findings were put on the spotlight in the context of prevailing socio-historical events. Two issues illustrate this point. On the one hand, it could be said that there is a monolingual bias in the sample of families that participated in the project that does not reflect the linguistic complexities of European nation-states or linguistic diversity in Europe. Only two national teams worked systematically with two national languages and collected data in two languages. For example, in contrast, in another European qualitative and comparative project on young children and digital technologies – in this case between 0 and 3 years of age – that is also based on a convenience sample of case families, a much more linguistically diverse portrait of families emerged (Gillen et al., 2018). On the other hand, given the characteristics of our sample and the implications that we drew from studying it, we candidly were not sufficiently aware of the magnitude and consequences of the digital divide among families that the COVID-19 pandemic and the school lockdown across Europe in 2020 have dramatically uncovered (e.g., COTEC, 2020).

Conclusions

The chapter discussed the methodological challenges we faced in conducting a cross-national project on media education of young children in the home. To conclude, we sketch out some methodological recommendations for future investigations in this area. To do so, first we review the methodological issues involved. This discussion is situated within the complexities of digital technologies and childhood that we restate here.

Digital technologies are ubiquitous (at least in the Western world) and accessible to children from their birth, in terms of both availability in households and ease in their manipulation (Marsh, 2020; Straker et al., 2018; Mantilla & Edwards, 2019). Moreover, as Lemieux and Rowsell (2020) point out, discussions of childhood and digital technologies are politically and ideologically charged. Thus, the ubiquity of devices and the spreading of emergent practices conflict with previous recommendations about young children's engagement with media (Miller et al., 2017; Straker et al., 2018; Mavoa et al., 2017).

For example, Straker et al. (2018) argue that there are two conflicting views on whether and how young children should become engaged with digital technology. On the one hand, the educational system/the government and the tech industry promote the use of digital technology from the youngest ages (Marsh, 2020; Mavoa et al., 2017), as a way to get children prepared for their digital future (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2016). On the other hand, health authorities remain skeptical or openly oppose young children's engagement with the digital world, many times reducing the discussion to the long-standing and sterile issue of screen time (Miller et al., 2017; Mavoa et al., 2017; Straker et al., 2018). Meanwhile, families are placed in the middle of these discordant discourses and must develop their own emergent interpretations and digital practices in relation to young children that do not necessarily match these debates. For example, Mavoa et al. (2017) identified three types of "interpretive repertoires" (p. 4) in an analysis of parents' social media discourse on the topic of iPad use in early childhood education, involving different constructions of childhood and media and digital technologies in education and development: a status quo discourse that portrays media and digital technologies in negative terms, a future-focused discourse that underscores a positive impact of digital technologies, and a balanced interpretive repertoire that tries to find a compromise between these two positions.

Despite all these misalignments, and despite the moving target that is researching (young children's engagement with) "new" digital technologies, there is an agreement that there is an urgent need for informed and timely recommendations. This includes addressing all the traditional stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, policymakers) and also recommendations for industry, a new active stakeholder in this field (Marsh, 2020; Mantilla & Edwards, 2019; Troseth et al., 2016; Straker et al., 2018). To offer informed and timely recommendations, it is critically important to discuss the basis from which we offer these recommendations. That is, the methodological approach of the studies on which the findings are obtained, as this shapes the results and consequently the practical and policy recommendations (Miller et al., 2017; Lemieux & Rowsell, 2020; Marsh, 2020).

To move beyond conflicting recommendations, Straker et al. (2018) suggest some methodological strategies to which the approach in the JRC

coordinated project aligns and summarizes well how a cross-national study on the topic should be designed:

(1) Building a new, transdisciplinary understanding of young children's engagement with technology that goes beyond singular approaches (being it health- or education-centered);
(2) Considering family media practices as a whole and not only centering on children's isolated practices, with a focus on the modeling role of parents and siblings in young children's digital practices; and
(3) The necessity for longitudinal and holistic studies that go beyond the simplistic topic of screen time to considering the type, content, context, and timing of the technology use. Informed by the theoretical model of digital literacy (Marsh, 2020), the present project started with child and family situated practices, the needs and uncertainties of parents and children and built from the creative solutions and responses that families were (are) generating in their homes and daily lives.

As we have discussed throughout the chapter, such holistic, cross-national, and multidisciplinary strategies brought out new challenges as those we faced in the "0–8" study. Finally, we would like to emphasize the importance of constant communication and dialogue to build common strategies among researchers aimed at moving forward a valid and rigorous study. Each step could be deeply influenced by the disciplinary and theoretical–conceptual frameworks of each researcher, and only open discussion of these issues can turn these hurdles into productive opportunities.

Further Reading

Alper et al. (2016) argue on the need of diversifying the study of children's digital experiences by including diverse families and children.

The "DigiLitEY Methods Corner Blog: methodological issues in the study of young children's digital literacies" offers methodological tools on researching children's digital practices and literacies. It provides recommendations made by key researchers in the area of children's digital literacies. Available at: https://digiliteymethodscorner.wordpress.com/

Kumpulainen and Gillen (2020) provide a comprehensive state of the art of the emerging field of research on children's digital literacy practices in the home context.

Marsh and Richards (2013) show the affordances of integrating children as researchers in qualitative studies on children's cultural practices, based on the idea that they are experts in their own lives and so that they can assume the role of mediator in empirical studies.

Notes

1 Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.
2 The project Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices of Young Children (Digi-LitEY) took place between 2015 and 2019 across 38 countries. It developed an interdisciplinary network of researchers to further enhance collaborative work on young children's digital literacy.
3 As Clark (2005) shows, the notion of "the competent children" – that is derived from the Reggio Emilia pedagogy – see children as autonomous meaning makers of their environment, active in this process. They are also able to communicate these meanings to adults, and it is worth listening to them as they are best placed for an intimate knowledge of their experience and environment.

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