Internet of toys across home and early childhood education: understanding the ecology of the child’s social world

# Keywords

* Digital child
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# Details

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## Topics

## Sample

Three families, their children and educators in England, Scotland, Greece and
Northern Ireland. The children were aged from 2 to 6.5 years.

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Other

# Abstract

This article presents findings from an ongoing international study of children’s use of Internet-connected toys (IoToys) across Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Greece. The authors sought to investigate practices with IoToys across homes and early childhood settings. Data from 12 case study families and approximately 200 children who interacted with case study children in early childhood settings were collected alongside interviews with parents and educators. Findings indicate that digital difference between home and education is recurring due to infrastructure and budgetary issues in early childhood settings, resulting in organic play-based IoToy use at home versus structured adult-directed teaching of IoToys in early childhood practice. Working from a social-ecological theoretical frame however demonstrated that children skilfully and fluidly transitioned between digital and non-digital play and across diverse socio ecological contexts of home and early childhood settings.

# Outcome

"In most cases, children’s access to IoToys appeared organic and at the child’s request, or indeed
the resources were freely available to use at a time convenient to children and/or parents. Families
seemed to have appropriate infrastructure to support easy set-up of the resources and appeared
comfortable with children using technologies. Only one case study family indicated a lack of
infrastructure to support children’s free access to the IoToys as they only had one iPad to connect
to the resources and often their father took the iPad with him for long periods while he worked offshore; this family described themselves as a technology-free household.
From the remaining families, the free-flow access was so great that in some cases it resulted in
the parents voicing concerns about children’s perpetual interest in digital devices, drawing on
terminology that resonates with moral panics " (Arnott et al., 2019: 405). The educational settings offered a more structured experience around IoToys where "the practitioners framed the technology as ‘carrots’ to attract the children to more ‘educational play’ for when they wanted the children to do ‘some work’. They were using IoToys to ‘seduce’ children to an activity like numeracy or literacy" (Arnott et al., 2019: 407).