Porous boundaries: Reconceptualising the home literacy environment as a digitally networked space for 0–3 year olds

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## Authors

Flewitt R.;Clark A.

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A two-year-old boy and a one-year-old girl from England

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Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

Most children growing up in contemporary homes in post-industrial countries use digital media as part of everyday literacy activities, such as to connect with distant family and friends, watch their favourite programmes, play games and find information. However, conceptualizations of the Home Literacy Environment (HLE) have not yet adapted to the implications of these comparatively new practices for young children’s knowledge about literacy or the ways in which they negotiate affectively intense relationships in digital networks. Furthermore, the digital activity of very young children aged 0-3 years and the diversity of print and digital technologies they use remain under-researched. Reporting on detailed case studies of a two-year-old boy and a one-year-old girl in England, which formed part of an EU-wide qualitative study of 0-3-year-olds’ digital literacy practices at home, we problematise the relevance of conventional definitions of the HLE for contemporary homes. Building on nascent research in this field, we argue for the need to reconceptualise the HLE as a digitally networked space, with porous boundaries that enable the very youngest children to negotiate affectively intense relationships and express meaning across diverse modes and media as they connect with distant others in a digitally mediated world.

# Outcome

"The findings of this study point to the networked nature of the contemporary
HLE [home learning environment], to the permeable nature of its physical boundaries, and to the affective intensity of young children’s relationships with near and distant family and
friends that often drives their digital literacy practices. Rather than experiencing
the HLE as a bounded space situated neatly within layers of nested social
systems, our findings place Petra and Charlie in direct and indirect contact with
multiple micro-, exo- and macro-systems which they access physically and/or
virtually via digital platforms. Their encounters with these diverse systems are
not fixed or static but occur dynamically in overlapping assemblages and
entanglements in the fluidity of everyday life.
In studying these networks, our analysis began to unravel how each child
exercised agency not through intentionality but through the dynamics of the
intra-action that unfolded between their own and others’ bodies and material
resources in actual and virtual social spaces." (Flewitt and Clark, 2020: 465).