Absorbency and utensilency: A spectrum for analysing children’s digital play practices

# Details

## DOI

10.1177/2043610619881457

## Issued

2019

## Language

English

## Volume

9

## Issue

4

## Start Page

## End Page

## Authors

Lundtofte T.E.;Odgaard A.;Skovbjerg H.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Global Studies of Childhood

## Publisher

SAGE Publications

## Topics

Literacy and skills

## Sample

two separate practice-based and video ethnographic research projects with young children (aged 4-7 years) in Denmark
Informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians of all participating children, including information on how to withdraw consent.

# Abstract

This article explores 4- to 7-year-old children’s tablet computer (tablet) use, drawing on empirical data from day-care institutions, primary schools and private home settings in Denmark. Data were gathered via video observations in two different studies: (a) a media ethnography on children’s tablet play practices in home settings and (b) a socioculturally informed, design-based study involving children as co-producers in institutional settings. We understand children’s tablet use via practice theory, framing tablets as actor-enacted objects in play practices expressed through play moods in qualitatively distinguishable ways. We suggest a conceptual spectrum (not dichotomy) for understanding how sociomateriality is articulated in children’s tablet play practices, ranging from absorbent to utensilent. Within sociomaterially absorbent practices, the tablet is foregrounded in intense involvement, thus mediating a focused play mood which relies on not being disturbed by outside actors. Within sociomaterially utensilent practices, the tablet is backgrounded as a node or nexus, thus mediating a distributed play mood of involvement with places and agents beyond the tablet. We contribute to previous findings by Marsh framed within the post-humanist approach as we suggest the empirically observed complexity in children’s digital play can be approached by tracing the relationally generated object positions. We add to this by proposing an analytical spectrum ranging from absorbent to utensilent sociomaterial practices that can be employed when analysing children’s digital play.

# Outcome

"a) children can seem absorbed by tablets without necessarily being so in a consistent manner and b) tablets can be part of play practices without being perpetually foregrounded" (p. 12)
Proposing: "a spectrum, ranging from absorbent to utensilent sociomaterial practices, that takes into consideration the material status of tablets in children’s play practices." (p. 13)