Digital technologies, learning and school: practices and perceptions of young children (under 8) and their parents

# Details

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## Topics

* Learning
* Social mediation
* Internet usage, practices and engagement

## Sample

They interviewed a set of 25 families with children aged from 3 to 8 years old, that used at
least one digital tool at least once a week. For selecting the sample, they used theoretical sampling in order to obtain a wider range of narratives about the use of digital technologies for learning

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Opportunities of the use of technology in the classroom

# Abstract

This article explores the practices and perceptions of young children (under 8 years old) and their families about the use of digital technologies at school and their potential for learning, as well as the articulation between formal learning at school and informal learning at home. Data was collected through activities with children and their families, and then we used qualitative content analysis to explore them. The results show that the use of digital technologies at school is more common in Primary, being rare in Preschool. However, the pedagogical potential of devices like computers and tablets is underexplored both in schools and at home. Parents consider that children under 8 are too young for using digital tools in school work and believe they are not prepared to do so yet (although children are actually tech-savvy).

# Outcome

The questions were explored comparatively (two age groups): children between 6 and 8 years old, in Primary; and children between 3 and 5 years old, in Preschool.

"At school, although both age groups have access to digital technologies, these are more present in Primary than in Preschool, namely computers and interactive boards. (...) In both cycles, the activities performed at schools are alike, being mostly playful and educational games on the computer" (Brito, R. Dias, P., 2017: 72).

"In Primary, some of the children play and do some online searches at school, mostly in the school’s library, as in the classroom the computers are used almost exclusively by the teacher. At Preschool, children also play on the computers. Kindergarten teachers that use the computer as a support for learning are the ones that prefer constructivist teaching methods" (Brito, R. Dias, P., 2017: 72-73).

"However, our main conclusion is that, both in Preschool and Primary, schools are far from exploring the full potential of digital technologies, either in the classroom, either for articulating with families" (Brito, R. Dias, P., 2017: 73). Only one child reports the use of a tablet at school on a daily basis, revealing independence in searching and positive effects regarding learning and critical reasoning.

Computing classes are included both in Preschool and Primary, as an extracurricular activity. The parents who decide to enrol their children in this activity share positive perceptions towards digital technologies: they will be important work tools in their children’s future.

"Concerning informal learning at some, some of the parents of children in Primary help them in online searches regarding schoolwork. On the other hand, others assume not using digital technologies at all, because they weren’t needed so far. Besides this occasional articulation with school, most parents do not explore the pedagogical potential of digital devices at home, in particular the tablet’s. Parents perceive this device as one more 'toy' and do not favour the choice of pedagogical apps, letting the children choose freely the content they prefer. Parents justify this attitude with lack of time, lack of interest from the children and lack of content in Portuguese. Thus, they use the tablet mostly as a babysitter, to keep the children entertained on their own while the parents are busy" (Brito, R. Dias, P., 2017: 73).

Even so, some parents consider that entertainment with tablets and consoles generates learning of skills different from those on school syllabus.

"In sum, although children live with a panoply of digital devices at home, and despite the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science’s effort to equip schools with digital devices, their use with educational purposes is insipid both at school and at home. Besides, practices at school are very different from the families’ uses" (Brito, R. Dias, P., 2017: 73).

Thus, the main barriers to a better exploration of the pedagogical potential of digital technologies are not access or skills, but the perceptions of teachers, parents and children (rethinking and reconceptualizing schools, classrooms and Education in this digital age is necessary). The strategies must be constructivist, reassessing the traditional approaches and methodologies of teachers and also syllabus, in order to promote better learning environments.