Very Young Children's Digital Literacy: Engagement, Practices, Learning, and Home-School-Community Knowledge Exchange in Lisbon, Portugal

# Details

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* Learning
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## Sample

People from Caneças, a small community of 12 000 inhabitants, situated within the county of Odivelas in Lisbon (Portugal): 25 teachers and 38 parents answered a questionnaire, 38 children (22 aged 4-6 years and 16 aged 7-10 years) were interviewed and field notes were taken.

## Implications For Parents About

## Implications For Educators About

* Professional development
* STEM Education
* School networking
* Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

The starting point is that, despite the continued existence of digital divides, most children live nowadays within rich digital environments, that they gradually become more independent in their use, consumption, production, and sharing of media content within these environments, that, nevertheless, these activities do not mean automatically that children are increasing their social participation, and that very young children's online practices have been largely ignored by policy-makers and researchers in many countries.
In this context, "the chapter will demonstrate that a community-based action research project aimed to develop very young children's digital literacy competencies was successful when developed through a model proposed by Sefton-Green et al. (2016), enriched with in-service teacher training, and by employing a deep characterisation of the community in order to model and adapt the project to specific contexts" (Tomé, V. Brites, M., 2021: 491).
"Thus, it is a key task for educators and researchers 'to understand how young learners make sense of multimodal texts in digital environments, and how they impose order on the juxtaposition of different modes' (idem, p. 20). Young children 'learn watching others, especially parents and other family members' (Chaudron, 2015, p. 14). There is a need to articulate formal and non-formal learning contexts, i.e., to embed core skills in the school curriculum, such as flexibility, innovation, creativity, and problem solving, as well as helping children's families evolye from family literacy to family digital literacy (Marsh, Hannon, Lewis Ritchie, 2015). Digital literacy is 'a social practice that involves reading, writing and multimodal meaning-making through the use of a range of digital technologies' as well as traditional technologies that 'can involve accessing, using and analysing texts [in a broader sense: text, sound, moving and still image]. in addition to their production and dissemination', which implies 'the acquisition of skills, including traditional skills related to alphabetic print, but also skills related to accessing and using digital technologies' (Sefton-Green et al., 2016, p. 15), such as 'create, work, share, socialise, investigate, play, work, communicate and learn' (Meyers, Erickson, Small, 2013, p. 356). Regarding digital literacy and children, the leading themes are "parental mediation of children's digital literacy practices in homes, children's media engagement and literacy learning in homes, and home-school knowledge exchange of children's digital literacy practices' (Kumpulainen Gillen, 2017, p. 3). This chapter focusses on the third theme, i.e., on the interconnected and interrelated connections betwecen home and school, taking into consideration the non-formal places of action, such as where children act daily and where the home is established. This context can blur the boundaries of the different geographies (idem, 2017). Recognising the need to develop children's digital literacy through the implementation of multidimensional projects that aim to create 'digital citizens' who can fully exert their 'digital participation in society' (Ribble, 2011), the communinity project 'Digital Citizenship Education for Democratic Participation' (2016-2018) was developed in Portugal between 2015 and 2018. The project aimed to foster the social participation of children (aged 3-8 years) through their media use, and to involve teachers, parents, and the local community of Caneças, a district in Portugal's capital of Lisbon" (Tomé, V. Brites, M., 2021: 492).

# Outcome

"The project and its results showed that the intervention model is suitable to develop a community- -based action research project aimed to develop very young children's citizenship and digital literacy competencies. Starting with an in-service teacher training programme (and to continue supporting teachers through planning and assessment meetings), to then characterising the community context, and adapting the model on a regular basis, it is possible to continuously develop adequate digital literacy activities involving teachers, children, parents, and other community members. The school's voluntary adoption of the project enabled its continued sustainability. with the school newspaper progressively becoming the community newspaper. According to the teachers' perceptions, the activities have helped children to mobilise their operational, critical, and cultural areas, as well as increasing the children's social participation both in and outside the school and shaping their practices as citizens. Results also showed that children are 'digitally fluent from a very young age', suggesting the need for 'a re-conceptualisation of young children's learning in early years pedagogy' as well as a re-examination of 'the way children learn and the way in which the early years workforce organise their learning environments' (Palaiologou, 2016). As the project showed, children participating largely through traditional printed media are slowly converting across to digital media, as exemplified by the production of the news broadcast. This situation must evolve rapidly to overcome the gap between high digital use at home versus low digital use at school. This project is however limited by a set of factors. First, it has been developed in a local context and its results cannot be extrapolated. Second, the results are also based on teachers' and parents' perceptions, and on data collected by the researchers through tools adapted or designed by them and not validated for the Portuguese population. Third, study participants were those who voluntarily accepted and/or those authorised to participate, which means that the results may have been different even if they involved individuals in the same context" (Tomé, V. Brites, M., 2021: 498).