Young Children (0-8) and Digital technology A qualitative exploratory study - National report - DENMARK

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# Keywords

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# Details

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## Topics

## Sample

"RQ 1: How do children under the age of 8 engage with new (online) technologies?
RQ 2: How are new (online) technologies perceived by the different family members?
RQ 3: What role do these new (online) technologies (smartphones, tablets, computers, video games, apps, etc.) play in the children’s and parents’ lives (separately and in relation to family life in general)?"

"This study is based on visits to ten Danish families. Two researchers participated in each visit and conducted qualitative interviews as well as observations with the parents and children in each family. Two academic researchers5 and one student worker6 took part in the interviews and took turns in interviewing parents and children, respectively."
"Parent interviews were recorded with a dictaphone; child interviews were recorded as well but also supplemented with photos of their bedrooms, their toys, and the technologies they had."
"Interviews were transcribed using a meaning condensation method. These transcripts were coded with reference to the four overall research questions of the study as well as a focus on additional/surprising findings. Furthermore, the ten family portraits were written on the basis of the interview data and the photos, which functioned as reference points and specification of the analytical points."
"The families interviewed in the sample were recruited in various ways (schools, after-school care, snowballing, Facebook, direct mails, personal networks). Due to the relatively short time span of the data collection period, the researchers had to rely on snowball sampling through private and professional networks. A certain diversity in family types and an equal number of boys and girls were among the primary recruiting principles for the sample. For instance, a variety in family types was seen as fruitful and important for the study. As a result, the sample consists of married and divorced parents - in some cases, stepparents and stepsiblings, older and younger siblings, and families with just one child. The sociodemographic backgrounds of the families were not as diverse as we would have wished."
"The interview guide was translated into Danish and adapted to a Danish context. In practice, the interview guide was never used very strictly. Instead, both parents and children were urged to tell their own stories about their everyday life, their use of technology, and their norms and rules regarding its use"
"Interviews and observations were supported by several smaller assignments, using different tools such as a deck of cards with pictures of different toys and technologies, word cards, and an activity book with stickers depicting different everyday activities, which was used to get the child to talk about his/her day and the things he or she did at home and/or at school, etc."
"Interviews were recorded on dictaphones and/or built-in dictaphones on smartphones. A series of photographs was taken in the children's rooms and family living rooms, using smartphones or cameras. Furthermore, video observations of children using various technologies were made (focusing especially on the most preferred technology, the iPad)."

(partly translated by the coder)

## Implications For Parents About

Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

# Abstract

Danish children are among the heaviest digital media users in Europe. More than 90 % of children under the age of seven have access to a tablet in the home1. Danish parents are encouraging and engaged - yet also, to some extent, concerned when it comes to their children's use of digital technology.
On one hand, parents are very aware of the possible positive outcomes of children's use of technology with regard to both everyday practices and the digital skills they achieve. On the other hand, they do not want their children to spend too much time with various sorts of media, and they encourage other sorts of play activities. Even though some/many parents in the sample focus on formal educational outcomes from children's media use, the media are more often seen as a means for relaxation and fun than for educational purposes. Moreover, in most families in the sample, media are used for shared family activities, e.g., watching films or playing games together. However, in all families, children (are also allowed to) use digital technologies on their own - either in their rooms or in the living room with their parents nearby. Some children, for instance, also use the iPad in the presence of other adults - for example, grandparents, who may have different rules and regulations regarding its use.
Children are active users of apps as well as streamed content via Netflix and YouTube. They also consume content (streamed television as well as apps) provided by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), which is held in high esteem by parents. Most 'television' viewing among children in the sample is actually digital, streamed content, and the iPad2 is their first choice of platform for this as well as for playing games, listening to music, etc.
Children who are 6-7 years old rarely own their own iPad. However, all the children in the sample have had access to one or more - usually their parents' or a joint “family iPad”. Either the parents have bought the iPad themselves, or they have been given one at work, which they can also use at home. In most cases, children are allowed to use it as well. Some of them are capable of downloading apps themselves, and they allowed to - usually, with the restriction that they can only download free apps. This is not a very common practice, however. For most of the children in the sample, use of the iPad is limited to the apps that are already downloaded and, as such, selected and approved by the parents. In families with older siblings, children generally have access to a greater variety of content (be it apps, games, or YouTube content). Moreover, children with older siblings are more likely to be early adopters of technology. In some of the Danish families, children started using the iPad before the age of 2.
Children from divorced families may have only limited access to iPads, for instance, if they are only found in the home of one of their parents. This does not seem to be a concern for the children, however; it is simply a condition they accept. As such, one may conclude that digital, mobile media are not (yet) personal tools for the children (even though some of them have a great desire to own their own iPad or smartphone). They use them whenever they can and are allowed to. However, when they cannot, they play with other toys and tools just as much. One child in the study specifically switched between watching YouTube Minecraft videos (on a laptop) at his father's house and playing Minecraft on the iPad at his mother's house. He uses the videos as inspiration for his own gaming and, thereby, cultivates his interest in Minecraft beyond his actual gaming practice.
Apps are the iPad feature most commonly used by children. Danish content from DR is especially popular, but English-language apps from TocaBoca or Dr Panda are also popular. The children rarely access the Internet via a browser - some of them explicitly state that they do not know what Google Chrome and Safari, for example, are for. Therefore, their knowledge of the concept of 'the Internet' is mainly focused on whether or not they have access to Wi-Fi and can, therefore, use the apps they like and/or watch the films or TV shows they want. As such, the Internet is a non-concrete concept for the children in the study. They do “surf the net” to look up information about their likes or interests; but these practices are always parent-mediated, and the children are not necessarily aware that information comes from Internet sites and not from the computer or iPad itself.
The technological skills and interests among the 6-7-year-old children vary a great deal across the families interviewed. One parameter determining this may be the presence of older siblings. Another seems to be gender: boys generally seem slightly more interested in technology, i.e., gaming. When it comes to technological skills, whether they are high or low, most of the parents interviewed say that their children are “self-taught”, and the observational part of the sample also seems to suggest that most children navigate, for instance, iPads, Sony PlayStations or ghetto blasters quite handily.
Children's use of technology may generally be described as mostly passive, resembling old- fashioned television viewing. Some of them participate in gaming, and few of them engage with technologies more creatively. Among the more creative uses commonly found are Minecraft, taking photos, and drawing. In one of the families, the parents and children play together with small, programmable robots and other sorts of technology.

# Outcome

" Danish children are heavy users of digital media. Their parents encourage this use even though they may have some concerns regarding time usage and specific content.
 Parents are aware that issues regarding online behaviour and safety will be relevant for their children - at a later age. At this point, they find their children's use of digital technologies mostly unproblematic.
 Parents are generally pragmatic in their regulation of children's use of digital media and technologies. They encourage their use for relaxation and for fun.
 The iPad is the most commonly used (and preferred) technology among all the children in the study. Apps are the most common tools for gaming, streaming, and browsing.
 Children under the age of 8 are rarely 'online'; they use online content, but they do not often engage in practices such as online gaming or social networking. This should be kept in mind with respect to the formulation of policies and recommendations.
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 'The Internet' is a non-concrete issue for the children in the study. They may be aware of whether they have Wi-Fi access or not; but they do not consider the Internet to be a 'space', and they do not use it for communication.
 Broadcast television is becoming less important for the families in the sample. Most of the children's television (and film) viewing is streamed content - often, via apps such as Netflix and Ramasjang3 or via YouTube (app or webpage)."