

The low-tech child in a digital world

Professor Lelia Green, Edith Cowan University

Dr Donell Holloway, Edith Cowan University

Ms Kelly Jaunzems, Edith Cowan University

Ms Kylie Stevenson, Edith Cowan University

Dr Leslie Haddon, London School of Economics

Keywords: toddlers, touchscreens, digital futures, parents, discourses

For more than twenty years parents have been at the receiving end of an evolving series of injunctions around equipping their children to function in a digital society. Calls to parents to take their digital responsibilities seriously have changed as a reflection of the proportion of children online, and the age at which children first began to participate in digital environments. Thus, in the 1990s, parents were told that their children should have the opportunity to use computers: families with children were the largest group of new adopters at this time. Within a few years, parents began to think that children needed broadband access to reach their online potential. By the mid-2000s, when a majority of children in Australia had internet access, the discourse changed to one of risks: pornography, gaming addiction, cyberbullying and compulsory filters at the level of the internet service provider. With the advent of the smart phone, new narratives gradually emerged around toddlers and touchscreens. Even though tap and swipe technologies liberated the youngest children from needing the fine motor skills required for a keyboard and mouse, parents were increasingly warned not to allow 0-2s online.

This paper reports on emerging research with the under 5s; and particularly addresses the phenomenon of highly technological parents who have chosen a low-tech early childhood for their children. Comparing two families, one in the UK and one in Australia, it examines the ways in which these digital/knowledge worker parents have negotiated the various injunctions directed at contemporary caregivers around the responsibilities of digital parenting. It examines the strategies and rationales employed in the raising of these low-tech under 5s, and considers the parents' judgements about the benefits offered by their approach and the futures for which they are equipping their children.