

Television and related media in the everyday lives of UK preschoolers: play, literacies and classed practices

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This paper engages with issues of diversity and inclusion by considering how social class is implicated in children's home practices with television and related media. Beck (2014) famously described social class as a 'zombie category', suggesting that thinking in terms of social class was blinding academic researchers to the real 'experiences and ambiguities' of modern life. And yet, inequalities in the UK not only persist, but are in fact growing. As Diamond & Giddens (2005) point out, the UK 'suffers from high levels of relative poverty and the poor in Britain are substantially poorer than the worst off in more equal industrialised societies' (p. 102).

Existing studies examining very young children's relationships with television in relation to social class or socio-economic status tend to be quantitative, light-touch and arguably rather reductive (with a focus on what and how much children watch). Social class is often inserted as 'another variable' in existing debates about negative aspects of television and related media. There has, thus far, been little detailed fieldwork examining the role that engagement with television and related media at home play in shaping children's very earliest understandings of the world and their early literacy practices across a socio-economically diverse range of participants.

This paper presents findings from a recently completed mixed-methods study, including the results of a survey with 1,200 UK parents and six months of ethnographic fieldwork at home with 8 UK families. It discusses the role that TV plays in shaping children's experiences of the world and their earliest learning, showing how digital technology, play and literacy are interrelated. It will illustrate a broad range of contemporary home/family practices around television and related media in a diverse range of UK homes and ask the question: 'how is social class implicated in these practices?' Drawing on a Funds of Knowledge approach and Bourdieusian notions of social capital, it will also take a new look at the gap between home and school literacies with regards to children's play around television and related media.