

Chapter 94

Arts Teachers' Media and Digital Literacy in Kindergarten: A Case Study on Finnish and Chinese Children Using a Shared Blog in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Children live in a media oriented world, and media skills need to be taught already starting from the early years. Practicing media production can be seen as a core activity for media education in early childhood. The idea is linked to the 21st century definition of media: instead of thinking of media and digital culture as a simple, one-to-one way communication, it is better to consider media as parts of systems of actions and activities. In other words, it should be seen as a form of social processes. In this case study, the authors investigated children's shared blogging in a kindergarten in two different countries. The public blog was operated between Finland and China in order to build communication between those countries and get children's viewpoints from a different culture and shared communication. Arts education (visual art) was used as a tool for the online communication and blog's content production. On the basis of this study, a shared blog could be a pedagogically functional way to teach children the social media use and interaction as a part of their early childhood education. Pedagogically organized use of social media is also the way to give young children own voice in digital media culture, and to connect other children around the world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Media and other digital technologies have been widely used in education, and early childhood education should not be an exception. Digital media can provide children and young people possibilities for self-study and collaborative learning as well as support children getting to know children in other cultures and learning from their peers (even living the other side of the world). The media world, with its sophisticated systems of sharing and creating, is not only for adults, but also for children (Kupiainen & Sintonen, 2010). Children reflect and create their own media culture as they, referring to Corsaro (1997), interpret and reproduce all cultural forms, rules and ways around them.

In this research, we will mainly focus on the experiences about social media, especially blogging, gained in two kindergartens in Finland and China. Two kindergartens used a public blog for sharing children's visual art works. The objectives of this study includes:

- To use of a shared blog in children's communication between China and Finland,
- To investigate how kindergartens' teachers support their children to use and learn the blog,
- To examine kindergarten teachers' experience of the blogging with children in Finland and China,
- To consider the usage of a blog in supporting kindergarten's teacher's arts teaching and children's arts learning.

This paper focuses on the potential of blogs as learning spaces in early childhood education. We will scope on how kindergarten teachers express their agency and digital literacy in a process of producing their own blog with children in an early childhood education context, and what kind of experience the shared blog was for them from the pedagogical point of view. 'Blog production' refers to teachers' (and children's) orientation to interactive communication through the blog. 'Shared blog' refers to the usage of a same blog in two different kindergartens at the same time. The purpose of this paper and our reflective analysis is to offer exemplary accounts of what can be achieved in early childhood education when social media is involved.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Literacy in a Digital Era

A blog is typically referred as an informational site published on Internet. The ease of use of a blog has made it a media tool of great potential in education. In schools, students use blogging in classrooms for different purposes: Blogs are used to showcase individual or group's student work by enabling them to publish texts, video clips, audio clips, maps, photos and other images, projects and suchlike in a potentially publically accessible forum (Wang 2008). Blog in education can be also considered as a way of improving students' literacy (Glewa & Bogan 2007).

Literacy in the digital era is a complex set of various skills. Renee Hobbs (2010) defines digital and media literacy as a constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in the media-saturated, information-rich society. In 2006, Ofcom defined media literacy as "the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts". The definition is from the Tyner Aspen definition. There are four actions in digital literacy: access, analyze, evaluate, and produce. In Finland,

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