

VUW Digital Government Research Project Outline

Understanding children's use and experience with digital technologies

Background

As the use of digital technologies, such as the Internet, is extending to younger children in critical activities like their education and learning, there is an increasing need for research to understand children's use and experience with these new technologies and how these technologies are affecting children's daily lives. Besides the prospect of enhanced opportunities for learning, creativity and communication, digital technologies also offer substantial risks, such as invaded privacy by both strangers and peers, cyberbullying, and access to unsolicited content. This raises important empirical questions about the online knowledge, skills and experience of primary school-aged children, how they should cope when confronted with online risks, and what support they might need in order to make the most of their online experiences. Growing up in a world in which the Internet has always existed, it is often assumed that youth, as so-called 'digital natives', automatically are very knowledgeable and capable in using digital technologies. However, although many children nowadays have deep experience with digital technologies, this does not mean that they inherently have the knowledge or skills to make the most of their online experiences (Boyd 2014: 176).

Moreover, with a substantial part of the New Zealand population having limited or no access at all to digital technologies at home, there likely is a huge variation in online knowledge and experience amongst children from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, available research shows that the most digitally excluded groups in New Zealand include children with special needs, Pasifika, Māori, people from low socio-economic backgrounds, and people living in regions or communities with low Internet uptake rates (e.g. South Auckland, Gisborne, Northland). A robust evidence base is lacking on why these groups are more digitally excluded than others, how limited online access at home is having an impact on children belonging to these groups, and what support they might need in order to make the most of their online experiences.

Research objectives

- To understand how primary school students from various backgrounds use and experience digital technologies, and how these technologies are affecting their daily lives;
- To understand what support might be needed for different groups of young New Zealanders in order to manage online risks and make the most of their online experiences.