



Children Online:
Research and Evidence

Theories and Concepts for Understanding Children’s Digital Lives: An Annotated Bibliography

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This annotated bibliography provides a roadmap for understanding nine key areas of children’s digital lives. It has been designed for researchers and research users and provides essential and supplementary texts on each of the areas.

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Key areas of children’s digital lives

Children and young people The child, children, young people Development and evolving capacity Structures and cultures of childhood Diversity and difference	Digital environment Technology and affordances Uses, users and domestication Normative values in design Innovation, datafication and AI	Access Place and time of access In/equality and in/exclusion Fixed, mobile and wearable Transcending on/offline
Opportunities and benefits Internet engagement Engagement and participation Information and exploration Play, creativity, fun	Skills and literacies Learning and information skills Digital skills and competencies Data literacy and e-Safety Civic and other literacies	Risk and harm Content, contact, conduct, contract Familiar and emerging risks Cross-cutting risks including privacy Relation between risk and harm
Health and wellbeing Digital wellbeing and health Mental ill health and anxiety Resilience and coping Vulnerability	Social support Parental mediation Socialisation, family and school Sociality and peer support Professional help services	Policy and regulation Children’s rights in the digital age Law, policy and regulation Agency, voice and activism Responses to emerging challenges



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ACCESS

This section addresses theories and concepts for analysing the relationship between access to technology and the implications for children's everyday lives. Many of the suggested sources point to the multifaceted nature of access that goes beyond the type of device children use and the places where they go online to incorporate dimensions such as quality of internet connectivity, functionality of devices or opportunities to use them, and number of different types of devices vs. mobile-only access. The sources introduce important dimensions related to the role of existing social and economic inequalities (for example, based on gender, household income, parental education, household ownership and use of devices), which shape how children engage with the digital and the outcomes that result from such inequalities.


Several approaches point to the need to conceptualise access in relation to the individual, social and community contexts of children's lives, thus theorising access as social and relational – for example, with regards to the encouragement and support children receive to use technologies (or the opposite, the restrictions and limitations), the role that access to technology plays in children's domestic life, relationships and socialising.

 Berker, T., Hartmann, M., Punie, Y. & Ward, K.J. (eds) (2006). [*The Domestication of Media and Technology*](#). Open University Press.

This is a definitive statement of domestication theory, setting out how technology adoption is hardly the end of the story but rather, the beginning of the process of material and symbolic appropriation of technologies within diverse households. As the contributors to this edited volume argue, to understand the role of technology in family life, we must explore the dynamic process of 'taming' the 'wild' digital objects to understand how people actively make them meaningful in context.

 Helsper, E.J. (2017). [A socio-digital ecology approach to understanding digital inequalities among young people](#). *Journal of Children and Media*, 11(2), 256–260.

Access to the digital environment is explained in terms of individual, social and community contexts, going beyond accounts of individual access to technology or even digital skills. Socio-digital ecologies are proposed and argued to shape how young people engage with the digital and the particular outcomes that result. Thus it is not enough to provide technology, or educate to raise skill levels, without taking into account children's biography and context.

 Helsper, E.J. (2017). [The social relativity of digital exclusion: Applying relative deprivation theory to digital inequalities](#). *Communication Theory*, 27(3), 223–242.


Scholars working in the field of digital inequalities will benefit from Helsper's elaboration of relative deprivation theory. The 'social relativity of digital exclusion' framework will enable researchers to determine how individuals and communities come to value ICTs through a process of everyday comparisons.

Katz, V.S. (2017). [What it means to be 'under-connected' in lower-income families](#). *Journal of Children and Media*, 11(2), 241–244.

Katz argues that access to technologies should be understood in terms of a continuum of connection, with some users being 'underconnected'. The reasons for 'underconnectedness' can be inconsistent and low-quality internet connectivity, limited functionality of devices or opportunities to use them, or by having mobile-only access. This affects how meaningful digital connectivity is to children's everyday lives. For families (problematically) defined by their deficits – in income, parental education, minority status, and so forth – their frequent and intense technology engagement should be treated as an asset by initiatives to reduce digital inequality.

Mascheroni, G. & Ólafsson, K. (2014). [*Net Children Go Mobile: Cross-National Comparisons*](#). Educatt.

This report presents how children across several countries in the EU access the internet (with a focus on access, use, divides) from the results of the Net Children Go Mobile project. It presents access and use looking at different parameters: where children use the internet, age of first use, which device and apps are used, ownership, and also parents' use of the internet. Although it is largely empirical, it represents a prioritisation of the main factors that define access and associated inequalities.

 **Nikken, P. & Oprea, S.J. (2018).** [*Guiding young children's digital media use: SES differences in mediation concerns and competence*](#). *Journal of Child Family Studies*, 27, 1844–1857.

This article follows Bourdieu's theory of social cultural capital to argue that parents will differ in concerns and mediation practices, since systematic distinctions in social, cultural and economic capital among parents may affect a family's affinity with media.

Ragnedda, M. & Muschert, G.W. (2013). [*The Digital Divide: The Internet and Social Inequality in International Perspective*](#). Routledge.

This book introduces the concepts of digital divides and digital stratification in the light of social stratifications. These are relevant for understanding differences in access between various socio-demographic groups of children.

Tondeur, J., Sinnaeve, I., van Houtte, M. & van Braak, J. (2011). [*ICT as cultural capital: The relationship between socioeconomic status and the computer-use profile of young people*](#). *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 151–168.

The article deals with the topic of digital divide by investigating whether and how differences in access and computer use relate to children's inequalities in terms of cultural capital.

 **Vicente, M.R. & Lopez, A.J. (2010).** [*A multidimensional analysis of the disability digital divide: Some evidence for internet use*](#). *Information Society*, 26(1), 48–64.

This article proposes a framework for discussing digital divides in relation to disability that incorporates multiple internet-related dimensions such as access, affordability, motivation and attitudes, and skills.

Warschauer, M. (2006). [*Laptops and Literacy: Learning in the Wireless Classroom*](#). Teachers College Press.

Warschauer provides a detailed exploration of the micro-processes of power, privilege and exclusion operating in the classroom in the context of national efforts to introduce technology into learning. The result is a nuanced and critical analysis of what is meant by access to technology, rejecting diffusion or marketing approaches, along with much government policy.