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“Multimodal Literacies in the Early Years”

Report for Participants

June 2008

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Multimodal Literacies in the Early Years

1. OUTLINE OF RESEARCH AIMS

In the context of unprecedented uses of digital technologies in everyday life, this research explores the range of literacy skills and practices that 3 and 4 year old children develop at home and in early education, as they engage with a range of printed and electronic texts.

The study investigates what kinds of written, oral, visual and digital literacies children engage with and how adults' beliefs and practices about literacy impact on the children's learning. It explores how children use different modes, such as spoken and written language, images, sounds and layout as they engage with different media.

Fieldwork includes a questionnaire about the literacy practices of staff, children and their families in one urban, early years setting, with in-depth video case studies of ten boys and girls aged three and four years, from a range of social backgrounds. Particular attention is paid to how the young children's literacy develops in relation to social contexts, processes and practices, how they move between the different modes and media available to them, and the implications of this for early literacy learning.

The study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

2. THE STUDY SO FAR

Before circulation, draft parent and practitioner questionnaires were approved by the head of the Children's Centre. Questionnaires were distributed by the researchers in person, in the foyer of the nursery at drop off and pick-up times, over 2 days, which gave parents the chance to discuss the study, ask questions and spend time talking to the researchers.

2.1 Parent questionnaires

41 questionnaires were returned from 39 families (41 children, 2 sets of twins), representing a response rate of 54% (76 children on roll at time of distribution). Responses were received from parents of 22 boys and 19 girls. Over 50% of responses were from comparatively high income families, and a high proportion of responses were from parents with high levels of academic and/or professional qualifications. Respondents were predominantly white British, with some white European, black, Asian and mixed race.

Figure 1

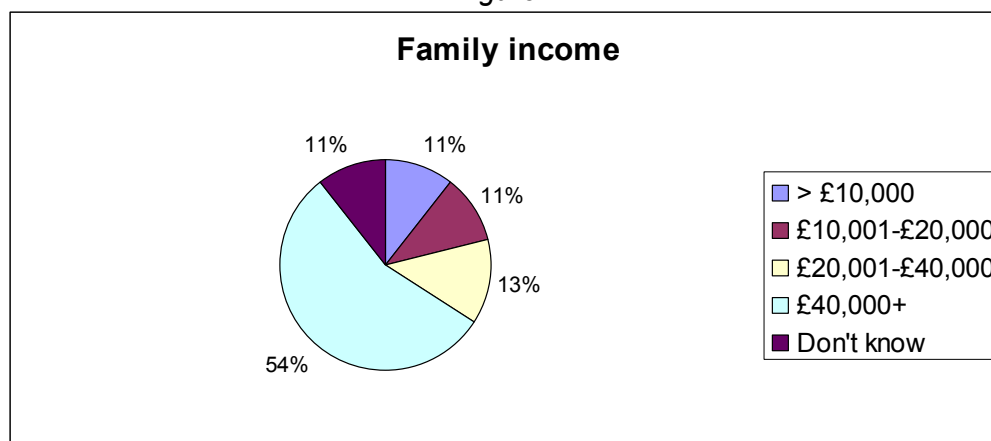
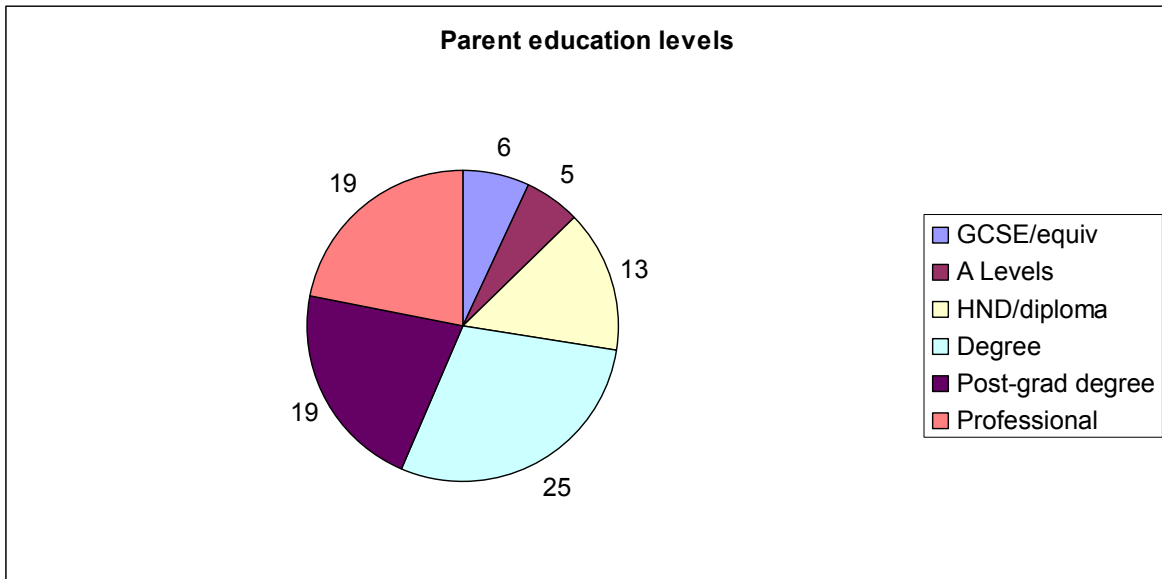


Figure 2



2.2 Practitioner questionnaires

17 questionnaires were returned from a total potential staff of 21, representing a return rate of 81%. Responses were received from: 1 x head; 3 x teachers; 2 x senior EY practitioners; 7 x EY practitioners; 1 x assistant EY practitioner; 2 x learning support assistant; 1x communication assistant.

Figure 3

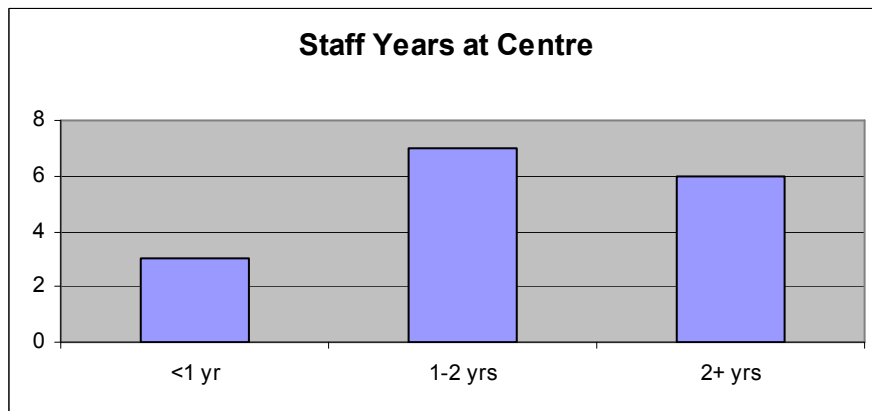


Figure 4

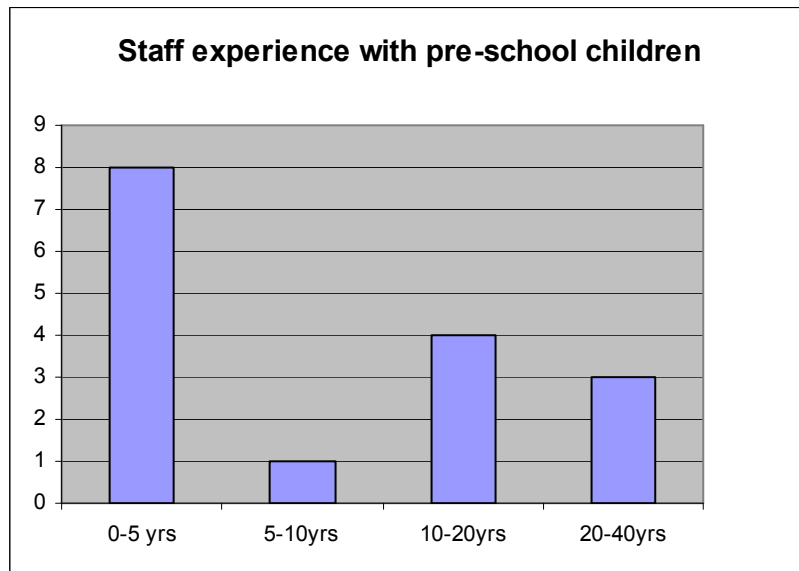
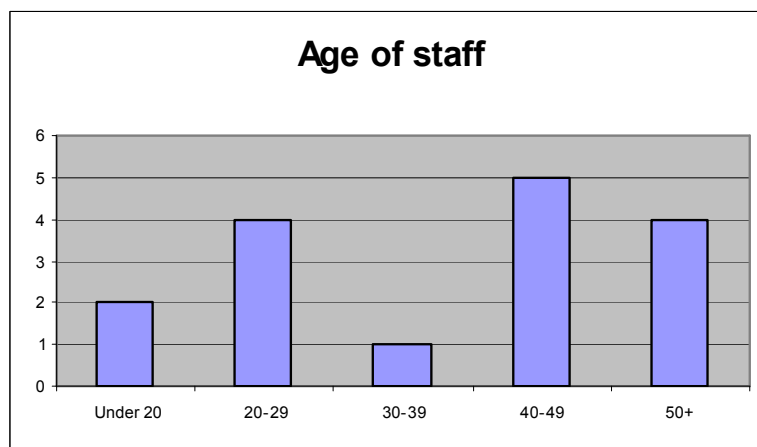


Figure 5



2.3 Case studies

The 1st round of data collection included general observations in the nursery, followed by the selection of 10 children for video case study observations, contacting parents and obtaining permissions, with the generous and much appreciated support of the nursery setting. Video observations at home and in the nursery setting were completed for 8 children, creating approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours video data on each child. Video data for 2 children is ongoing. All observation and interview data will be made anonymous, with names changed to minimize the risk of individuals being identified.

2.4 Keyworker interviews

Interviews have been conducted with 9 sets of parents, and with key workers of 10 children (1 child's parents gave permission for their child to be included in the study, but declined to be interviewed). These are currently being transcribed and in the next few weeks will be returned as confidential documents to the interviewees for checking.

2.5 Next steps in the study

A 2nd round data collection will take place late May/ June. The next stage of analysis will look in fine detail at episodes of children's literacy learning while engaged in a range of literacy-related activities, considering:

- social interaction around traditional and new technologies
- the characteristics of children's engagement with traditional and new technologies, including: perseverance, concentration, time on task, motivation, independence in learning, planning, decision-making and self-control
- the kinds of sign systems children have to learn to understand texts in different media, and how children acquire this knowledge (eg symbols, icons, letters, words, sounds)
- the language children experience and use within and around different media, considering language complexity, density of language they hear/ see, production of language (sounds, syllables, letters, words, sentences etc)

3. SETTING

3.1 The Children's Centre

The study is being conducted in a nursery within a purpose-built Children's Centre, opened in October 2005, and heralded as '(the local) County Council's flagship early years centre for pre-school children'. The nursery currently offers 105 places for children aged 3-4 years: 55 places for mainstream children from the local community and 50 places for children with SEN from within and outside the local area. It is over-subscribed for mainstream children, but does not have a full quota of children with SEN. At the time of the 1st round of data collection, 78 children were registered, from 76 families. Towards the end of the study 93 children attended: 62 'community children' and 31 children with special educational needs.

The Children's Centre is classed as a 'graduated centre', that is, other social, health and care agencies operate from the centre, but are not permanently based in it. It is located on the outskirts of a small city in an area of relatively high socio-economic well-being, but attracts families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The setting offers 'fully inclusive child care for children aged 2 to 5 years', in two nursery classrooms for children aged 3-4, and one childcare room for children aged 2-3. There are also breakfast, lunch and tea clubs for children, and a range of early care and parental education facilities, such as: Early Start and Smart Start sessions for parents and children with complex special needs aged 3 months+ to work with therapists; a monthly SOS Group (Share Our Strategies) 'for parents/carers who have children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder or Social Communication Difficulties'; 'Stay, play and learn'; ante- and post-natal care, yoga etc. These are mostly held in comfortable, light, airy and well maintained communal rooms.

The Centre is physically and socially welcoming towards parents. Members of administrative staff welcome families into a large, light foyer, which has comfortable sofas, an attractive, large, well-stocked and well-maintained fish tank, a small range of children's books (which can be borrowed by families as part of a book-lending scheme), information leaflets, child-size table and chairs. Parents can, and do, wait in the foyer at any time, then escort their child(ren) through a set of secure, pass-coded doors to their designated classroom, where they are greeted by staff at nursery drop-off and pick-up times. Almost all parents/ carers seem to bring and collect their children fairly promptly.

3.2 The Nursery

The nursery is open every weekday from 8am – 4pm, 48 weeks per year, with nursery sessions (for children aged 3-4) from 9:15am - 11:45am, and 12:45pm - 3:15pm. Parents can pay for their children to stay for lunch, which is cooked on-site, or children can bring a packed lunch. Some children stay all day, five days per week, but most attend one play session, five times per week and some stay over lunchtime. Currently, five nursery sessions per week per child are state-funded: parents pay for extra sessions, and for 2 year olds' attendance.

At the time of this study, most children in the nursery are from White British backgrounds, with some White European, Asian, East Asian and mixed race families¹. Many of the children identified with special education needs who attend from out of the local area have funded taxi escorts to and from the setting.

There are two adjacent nursery 'classrooms', each run by different members of staff. Staff teams in these rooms work separately, but in parallel. The allocation of children to each class depends on the availability of spaces, with a balance of ages, genders and educational needs.

The classrooms have slightly different atmospheres, but the quality of provision and staff/child interaction appeared to be similar when observed by the researchers using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Extension (ECERS-E) and Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised (ECERS-R). Both classrooms are accessed via a covered walk-way that gives onto a very large, well-equipped and well-designed outdoor play area. Children can wander in and out of either classroom, but do not do this very often. Each classroom has two main play areas/rooms, divided by a smaller, wet-play area, which can be closed off with sliding doors (creating 3 rooms in each classroom). Well appointed, adjacent, shared rooms are also available for 'sensory play' and small group work, mostly for children with special needs, but other children can select to join in. There is a large 'ball-pool' room in the children's centre, which nursery children can access with adult supervision, although this does not appear to be used frequently.

Two qualified teachers job-share in each classroom (all day Mon/Tues and Weds morning for one teacher, then Weds afternoon and all-day Thurs and Fri for the other). All four qualified teachers, the Head and Deputy Head (who is also the SENCO²) meet every Weds afternoon or lunchtime for weekly planning meetings, to exchange information and to ensure provision is coordinated. A cohesive team of early years practitioners with varying levels of experience and training works in each classroom, directed by the teachers. Several staff members have expertise in working with children with special needs. Staffing seems to be stable.

A June 2007 Ofsted Report of the setting rated 'Overall effectiveness' as 'good', noting:

'... teachers' expectations vary and some inconsistencies exist. Key workers make a valuable contribution to the teaching, interacting well with individuals and role-modelling learning experiences skilfully. By the time children leave the Nursery, they have good language skills and express their needs and ideas confidently. Children's mathematical development is less rapid, because learning tasks are not challenging enough'.

'Achievement and standards', 'quality of provision' and 'curriculum and other activities' were rated as 'good'. 'Personal development and well-being', 'care, guidance and support',

¹ 17 families from Ethnic Minority and Mixed Race groupings, including: 8 Asian families; 3 east Asian families; 6 Mixed Race families.

² Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator

leadership and management' were rated as 'outstanding'. The nursery was particularly commended for the high expectations, quality of provision for and achievements of children with a range of special needs, and for the high value that parents placed on the nursery as '*a wonderfully, encouraging place, where the staff teach, guide and support children exceptionally well*'.

4. LEARNING, COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Since September 2007, the nursery has been following a programme of 'Continuous and Enhanced Provision', a system encouraged by the Local Authority (LA), whereby resources are constantly on display for children to select (i.e. child-selected and child-led) rather than pre-decided and selected by adults. To enhance particular areas of learning staff develop and display resources that reflect children's interests. Not all staff appear convinced about the overall advantages of 'Continuous Provision'.

4.1 Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL)

The setting's CLL policy is on display in the foyer for parents and visitors to view. It includes quotes that recognise the links between language and literacy: e.g. '*Reading and writing float on a sea of talk*' and emphasises the role of computers and 'non-functioning' technical equipment in literacy development. Information is presented visually, with links to the Foundation Stage and many examples, with photographs and captions, of how CLL learning aims are experienced by children in the setting. For example:

- Outings are photographed and made into books to stimulate recall, relive and share experiences. The emphasis is on 'verbal/non verbal communication', including actions/objects.
- Walkie-talkies, computers and 'non-functioning equipment' such as old keyboards, phones and faxes are deemed 'appropriate resources to extend play and encourage communication'.
- Small world and role play as opportunities 'to play with the ideas children meet in books'.
- Opportunities for listening to and using spoken and written language e.g. retelling stories, developing a repertoire of songs and rhymes with a steady beat as a means to 'understanding the rhythms and sounds of the English language'. These are identified as the foundation for success in reading and writing.
- Attention is drawn to the importance of sharing tasks: interaction and language for communication thrive where children have 'opportunities for uninterrupted play and exploring/extending ideas with practitioners'.
- Children are given opportunities to develop hand-eye co-ordination and strengthen fingers through use of dough/imprinting and cutting.
- The meanings children attribute to marks/mark-making are valued. There is a clear emphasis on the purpose and function of writing. Worksheets and tracings are avoided.
- In recent months practitioners have introduced a structured programme of Finger Gym to assist children's (particularly boys') fine-motor development. One teacher explains this is in preparation for 'writing when they go to big school', and notes that boys appear to be particularly reluctant to paint/write in the nursery.

- Children are encouraged to look at print and illustrations in books and to begin to recognise important words, especially their names. Sounds and letters are promoted through puzzles and games.
- The potential of computers for developing communication is introduced on the final page – presented as evidence that the nursery is being ‘responsive’ in order to ‘reflect the ever-changing world of communication and technology’. Reference is made to computers as ‘another writing tool’: children are given access to word-processing and drawing programmes to gain experience of making signs/lists and familiarity with keyboards.

4.2 Resources: New technologies in the setting

Currently, each nursery classroom has:

- *Hardware*: A computer corner, with computer and printer on a child-height table, enclosed by toy shelves. There is room for groups of 3 or 4 to gather around the computer. Computers are controlled by a number of devices - a mouse, keyboard and switch (a large red button). Switch is linked to specific programmes including cause-effect activities and widens access to children with SEN – as one practitioner says it allows certain children control that they may not experience elsewhere and develops their ability to make choices. Time limits are sometimes imposed on children’s use of the computer and to encourage sharing, e.g. a large egg-timer to indicate turns at controlling the mouse. Sometimes, the computer is switched off and not accessible to children.
- *Software*: Children sometimes have controlled access to the Internet with a selection of activities/games that are spin-offs from popular television shows, e.g. CBeebies Balamory, In the Night Garden. They also have access to educational tasks/games stored on the PC hard drive e.g. Tizzie’s first tools, which invites children to choose from a palette of processes (write, print, publish, present, decision-making).

Through the video data we are making a detailed log of which games children are using, how they are using them, and who they are using them with.

- *Television, DVD player and tape recorders*: These are brought out and put away by members of staff when required for particular, planned activities. For example, sometimes at story time, children and staff sit on the mat listening to recorded stories or watching sections of popular TV programs with stories and/ or rhymes. Field observations suggest that it is not always possible for staff to respond to children’s requests to use electronic equipment more spontaneously (time/ staffing levels). Children at lunch-club sometimes watch a video. Access to TV and video appears to be adult-controlled. These technologies are mostly used indoors, but tape recorders have also occasionally been observed outdoors.
- *Digital cameras* are used frequently to record children’s work and activities (for ongoing assessment, as stimuli for discussion, and to use as a resource for further activities e.g. labelling a height chart with children’s pictures). Photographs are sometimes uploaded to the computer and made into a slide show by staff for the children.
- *Remote controlled dinosaurs/animals* operated by large switches and arrow keys: sometimes used indoors and sometimes outdoors.
- *Beebots* the setting has *Beebot* programmable toys (similar to Roamer), which have been observed occasionally in use, although staff seem unsure of their potential.

- *Digiblues* are available but technical problems in the interface with the computers seem to be preventing their use currently.
- *Musical keyboards* are occasionally used by children, although their use has been observed to be restricted by staff due to noise levels. However, observations have shown good evidence of collaborative activity between case-study children and peers in the setting, which reflects children's enjoyment of keyboards at home.

5. SOME EMERGING THEMES

Below are some themes that are beginning to emerge from the parent and staff questionnaire responses, interview and observational data about literacy development using traditional and new technologies, both in the nursery setting and in children's homes.

5.1 Access to literacy resources in the nursery and at home

5.1.1 Access to traditional reading resources

In the nursery access to a variety of traditional tools for literacy (e.g. books, signs, posters on walls, children's written name cards, writing/ drawing/ painting resources) is unrestricted, and children can opt to use these resources at almost any time. Use of these resources has been observed mostly indoors, but children also occasionally have used them outdoors³. Word and picture signage is used in the outdoor spaces.

A range of story and non-fiction books are presented in child-accessible stands located in comfortable reading corners in each classroom. Children appear to use these frequently, to look through on their own, to share with friends (mostly girls observed doing this so far), to request a 'reading' by an adult (almost always then attracting a small posse of children tumbled/ nestled around the reader) and to enjoy during whole-group/ 'family' group shared readings.

Initial study recommendations:

Library books could be used more actively to supplement the book stock, and comics (which would reflect some children's home reading) could be a useful addition to literacy resources.

Several parents have commented that they do not use the nursery book lending service, are unsure how it works, and would not dare to borrow books from this or the city's central library services in case their younger children damage them.

Bean bags/ floor cushions might be useful to extend seating in reading areas for slightly larger groups of children.

At home different children appear to have different levels of access to traditional printed resources (books, comics etc). Some have open access to a wide range of age-appropriate resources, books for older children and illustrated books for adults. Some children regularly visit the local library with their families to choose new books. Some have

³ 1st round of data collection was mostly in inclement weather, when outdoor facilities were used extensively, but the conditions were not conducive to outdoor use of many literacy resources. Outdoor use of literacy resources appears more frequent during the 2nd round of summer observations.

many opportunities to share a range of printed texts with adults at home with extended episodes of enjoyable, high quality, sustained shared interest with children asking questions and pursuing themes that emerge in books and in the talk about books. Other children have some access to a smaller range of age-appropriate books, and regularly enjoy story-readings with mum and/or dad. A few children seem to have access to a limited range of books, many of which are more appropriate for younger children (i.e. are not challenging/ extending potentials for knowledge), and appear only occasionally to share books with adults.

Several sets of parents have reported that they have stopped using the city's main library as it has a strict policy of silence which can be uncomfortable for children and embarrassing for parents. Parents do not often seem to use the setting's book lending service.

Initial study recommendations:

The setting staff might consider how to engage more families in book borrowing and more active sharing of a range of literacy activities.

5.1.2. Access to writing/ drawing/ painting/ sticking/ gluing/cutting materials

In the nursery resources for writing/ drawing/ painting are always available for children, either set out for children to use (e.g. painting easels, paints and brushes in the wet areas; resources as props in role play areas), on tables (e.g. sticking and cutting resources set out on a table-top), or on shelves which children can access at any time. Some children make use of these choices more than others. Some children only seem to use mark-making/ cutting (etc) resources if they happen to be out, if their friends or peers happen to be using them, or if using them emerges out of their interaction with an adult. Some boys are reported to be reluctant to paint/draw. Staff have observed that many boys do not engage with mark-making, so they have introduced structured programmes of Finger Gym to encourage fine motor development in preparation for writing activities.

At home different children (both boys and girls) appear to have different access to mark-making resources: some homes offer a rich variety of mark-making resources and activities. A few parents reported that they do not actively encourage mark-making at home, and expressed concerns over mess and the risks of younger children swallowing crayons. These parents preferred to leave any type of potentially 'messy' mark-making to the nursery (including e.g. paints, colouring pens and pencils). The parents of some boys have reported that their sons rarely do mark-making/ cutting/ sticking at home, even when encouraged to do so (this applies equally to boys who are allowed access to computers/e-games at home and to those who are not allowed computer/e-game access).

Initial study recommendations:

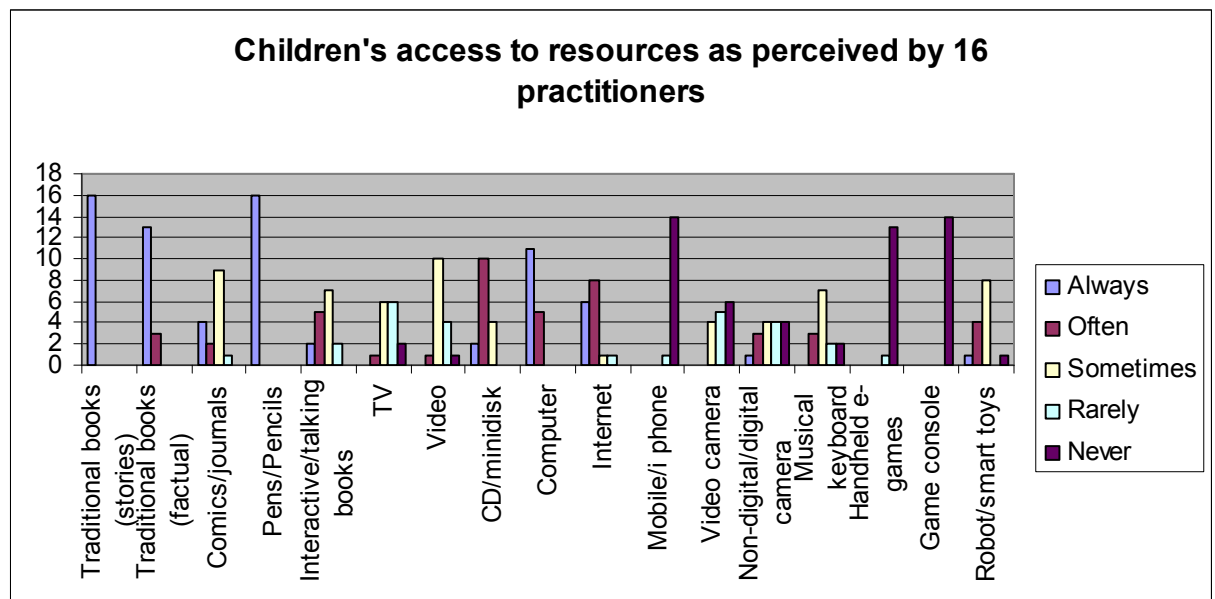
Consider how to engage parents of boys and girls in a broader variety of mark-making activities at home.

5.1.3. Access to new technologies for 'reading' and 'mark-making'

In the nursery: As mentioned in Section 4 above, the nursery has a range of resources associated with new technology. Some are used frequently and seem to be embedded in practice e.g. using cameras to take photographs of and record children's work, whilst others remain on the periphery of nursery activity. See *Figure 6* for staff reports on children's access to diverse literacy resources in the nursery.

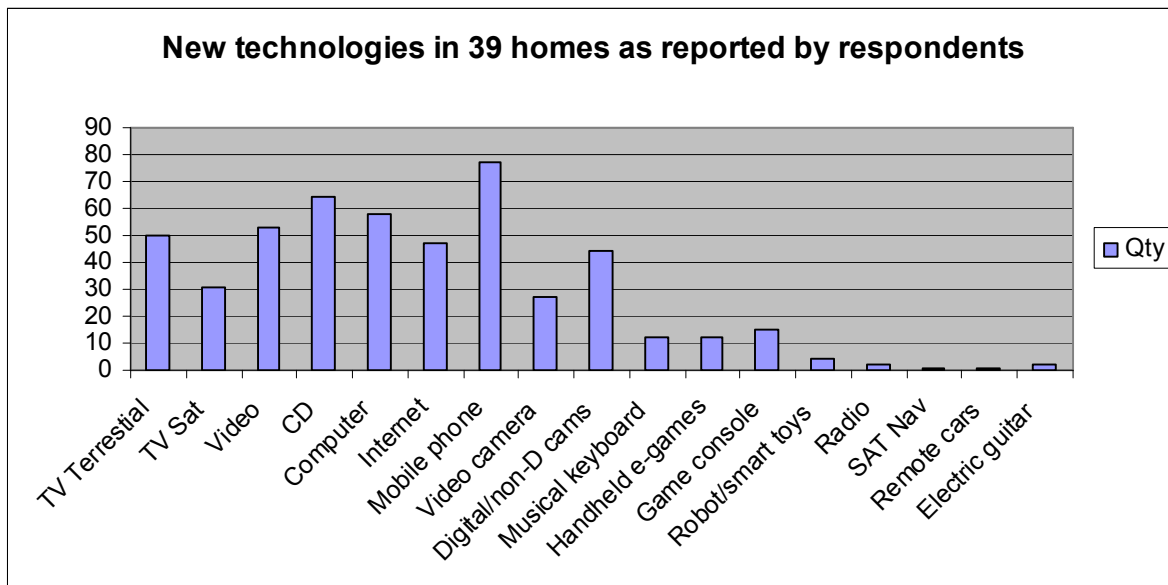
- TV/ video/ tape recorder access appears to be largely adult controlled
 - The computer in each room is almost always present, but its use is sometimes restricted by staff placing a large label 'No computer use today' struck through with a red diagonal cross.
- NB Over several of the study observation days, the screen from one class was removed as it was needed by admin due to a technical breakdown in other equipment. This was an exceptional occurrence but may reflect the level of importance associated with children's access to computers.
- Children's computer art is celebrated and displayed on the walls, although not all children use art-based programs
 - Some staff members support and extend children's use of computers; others do not seem to approach the computer area and children are frequently observed using the computer in small, collaborative peer groups with no adult support
 - Video data include observations of children collaborating to log on using their names as passwords. For some children, this is challenging: computers in the setting do not have lower case overlay. For example, one girl's literacy skills were well-developed and she searched confidently for the shape of the initial letter of her name. A few boys and girls could identify almost all the letters in their names unaided on the computer keyboard, but needed adult guidance for some letters. Some children could sound out their names, but could not yet select the letters. This applied particularly to children with less experience of computer use at home. Some children could identify the initial letter of their name, and needed adult support for the remaining letters.
 - The computer in one classroom is physically located in a 'through passage' and therefore does not have quite the same quiet, learning atmosphere as in the other class. Video observations suggest that location appears to have an impact on the quality of the interaction around computers.

Figure 6



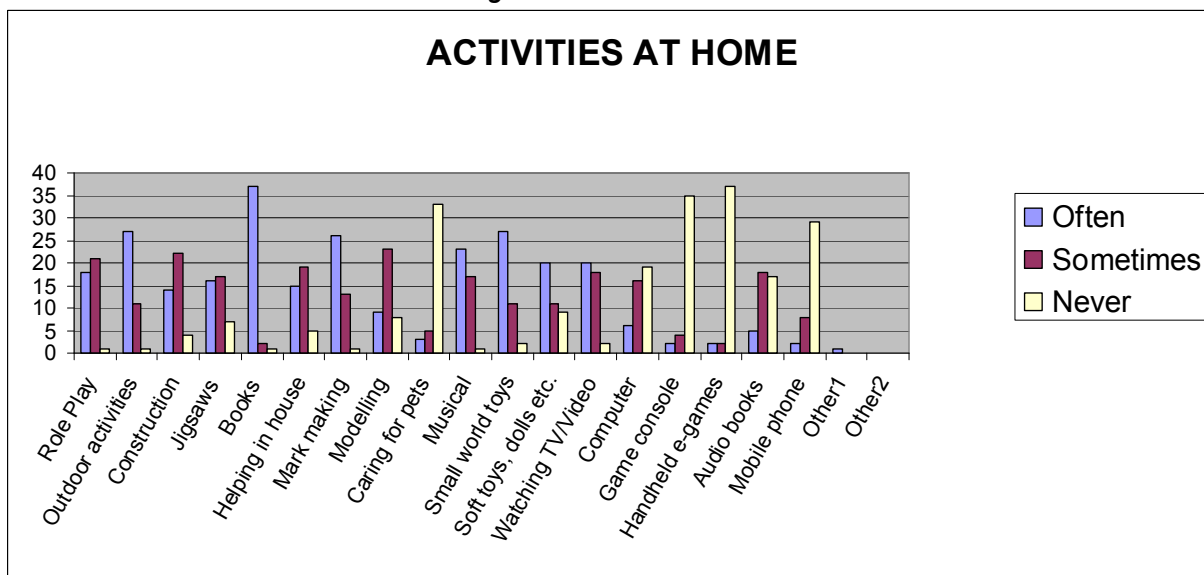
At home: The questionnaire data clearly shows that the homes of nursery families are well equipped with a range of new technologies (see *Figure 7*). Ownership and uses of a range of technologies appears to cut across socio-economic groupings:

Figure 7



As can be seen in *Figure 8*, 'traditional' literacy resources, such as books, mark-making, outdoor play, musical and small world play are the most frequently reported activity types, but many children are also reported to engage with 'newer' technologies, such as T.V. (including satellite and interactive), computers, audio books and mobile phones.

Figure 8



However, there are wide discrepancies in children's regular access to and use of new technologies at home. Some parents restrict their children's access to new technologies, by locating them in out-of-the-way places (e.g. computers placed in attic conversions or adult study) and/or by limiting the amount of time children can spend on them. Many parents report frequent use of T.V. and video but low or no use of hand-held electronic games or video/ computer games.

Some parents do allow (time restricted) access to computers and supervised use of the internet, but discourage other electronic gaming.

Many parents seem unsure of the learning potential of digital media, including computers. For example, one mother expressed concern that when using a keyboard, children are not learning letters but rather the pattern of keys they need to press in order to produce particular words.

Some parents encourage their children's use of a range of new technologies (computer, DVDs, mobile phone, hand-held games). These parents tend to have high confidence levels with new technologies, to share in their children's use/ enjoyment of them and to offer high quality support to their children's learning with new technologies. Some children with older siblings also observe their siblings engaged in computer-based play, imitate their actions when they have a turn and collaborate with their siblings in game playing. Children in these families have the highest observed levels of confidence and expertise in new technologies, and their use of new technologies does not appear to infringe on the diversity of their other activities. Indeed, the observed children who were most competent and confident with computer games also had the broadest reported (and observed) range of activities.

There are gendered differences in parents' reports of their children's activities at home, as shown in *Figures 9 and 10* below, where:

- The most frequently reported activities for boys are: 1) books 2) small world 3) outdoor activities 4) musical activities 5) mark-making
- The most frequently reported activities for girls are: 1) books 2) mark-making 3) soft tots/ dolls 4) role play 5) outdoor activities
- More girls than boys 'often' play with dolls/soft toys, do role play, mark-making and modelling activities
- More boys than girls 'often' play outdoors, play musical activities, with small world toys
- Similar levels of activity for girls and boys were reported for jigsaws, books, helping in the house, watching TV/ videos, listening to audio books and playing on computers
- Slightly more girls than boys use games consoles and hand-held e-games, although the numbers are too small to be significant.

Figure 9

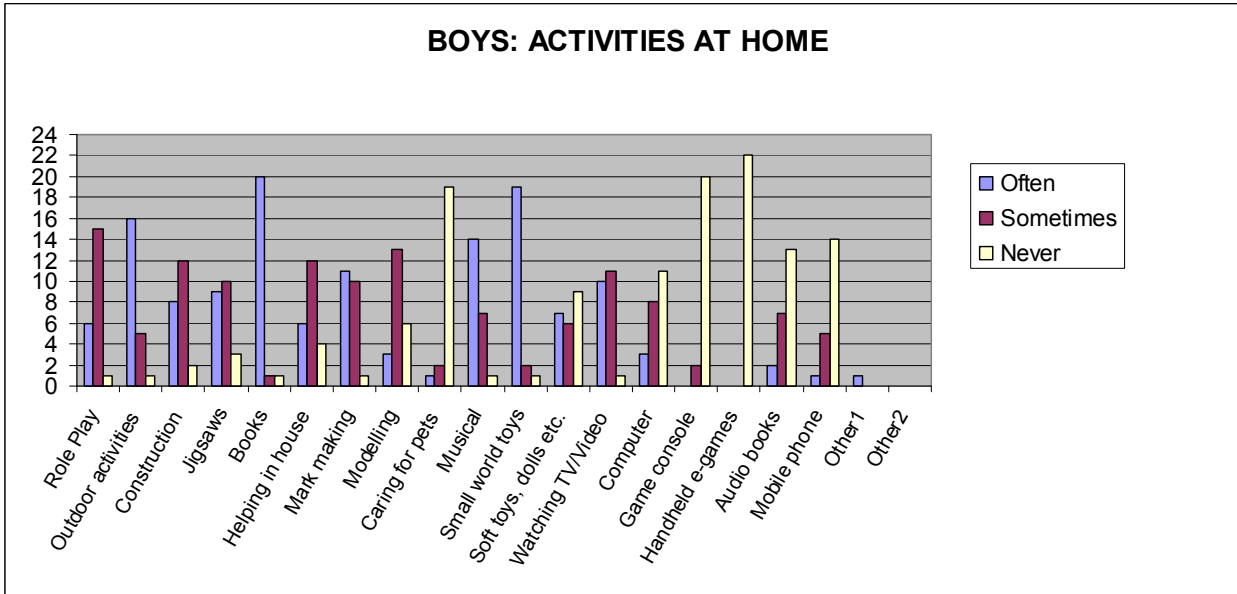
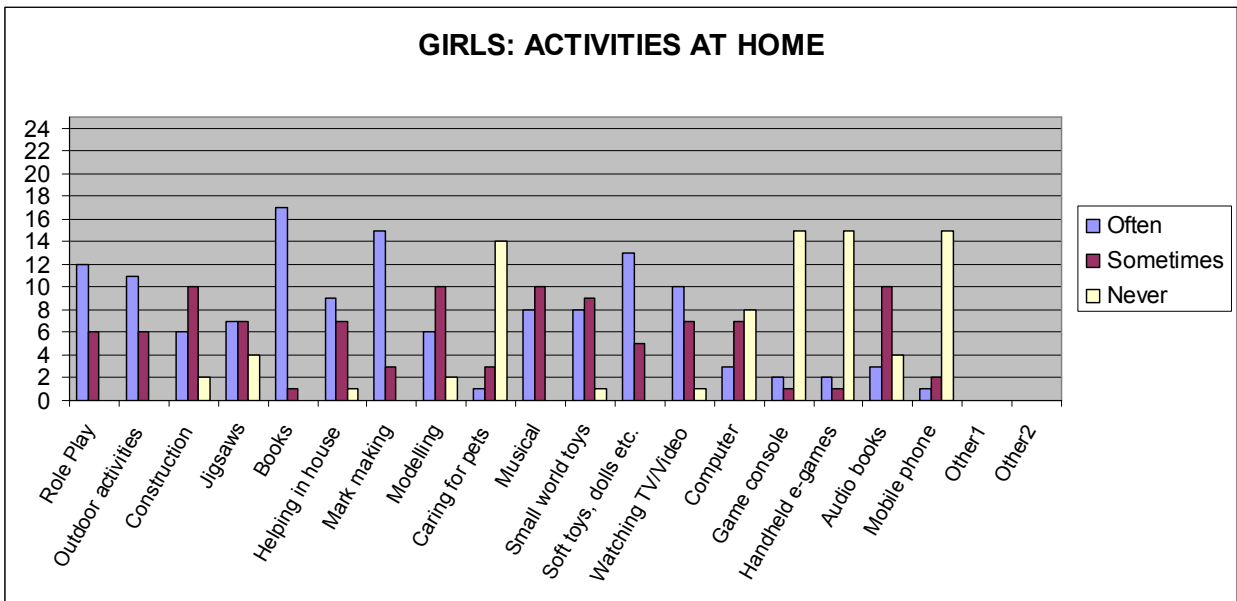


Figure 10



5.2 Adult views regarding traditional and new technologies

The parent and practitioner questionnaire and interview data all suggest that the majority of adult participants in this study strongly agree it is important for children’s literacy development and learning to experience traditional literacy resources such as sharing books, nursery rhymes, learning letters and sounds (see *Figures 11 and 12* below). By contrast, both practitioners and parents ‘agreed’ rather than ‘strongly agreed’ that it is important for young children to learn to use new technologies, and that new technologies help children to learn. Adult participant interview data gives deeper insights into these viewpoints, suggesting that although adults are aware of the potential importance of new

technologies in today's and tomorrow's world, they are less certain of exactly how they contribute to young children's literacy learning.

Whereas many parents strongly agreed that it is important to control the amount of time children spend with new technologies, practitioners tended to 'agree' rather than 'strongly agree' with this statement. Interview data adds more detail here, suggesting that children spending too much time with new technologies is perceived as a bigger issue at home than in the nursery, where staff ensure most children engage in a variety of activities. However, it must also be noted that the nursery setting has several mechanisms to control children's use of the computer, as mentioned in Section 4.2 above.

Figure 11

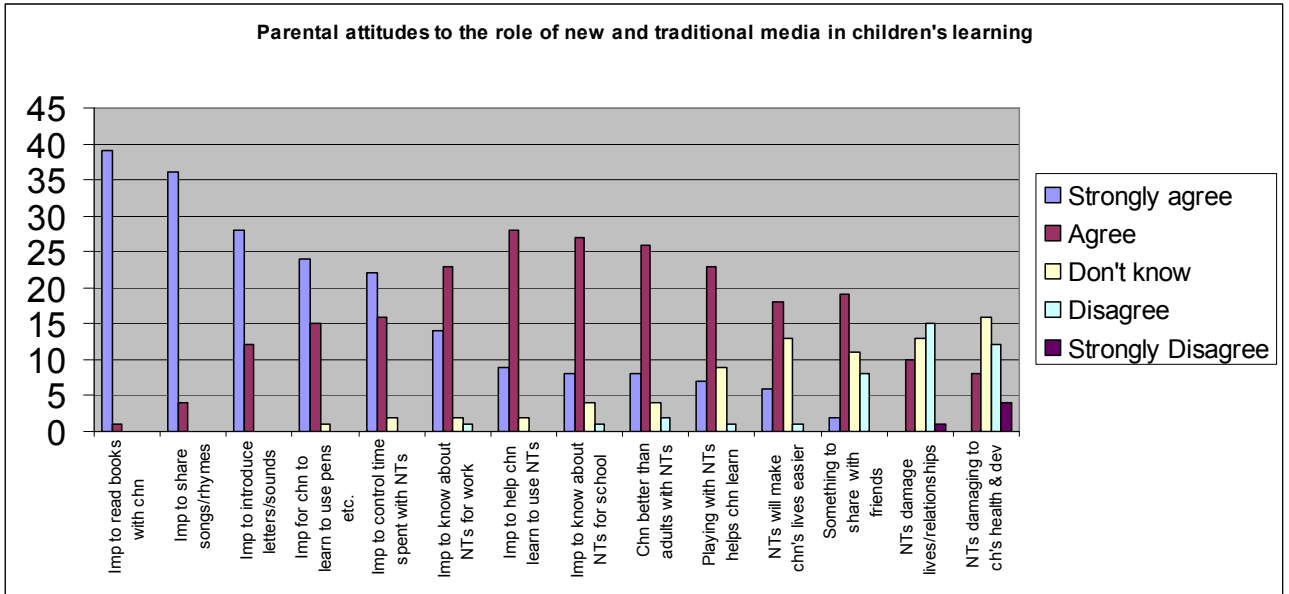
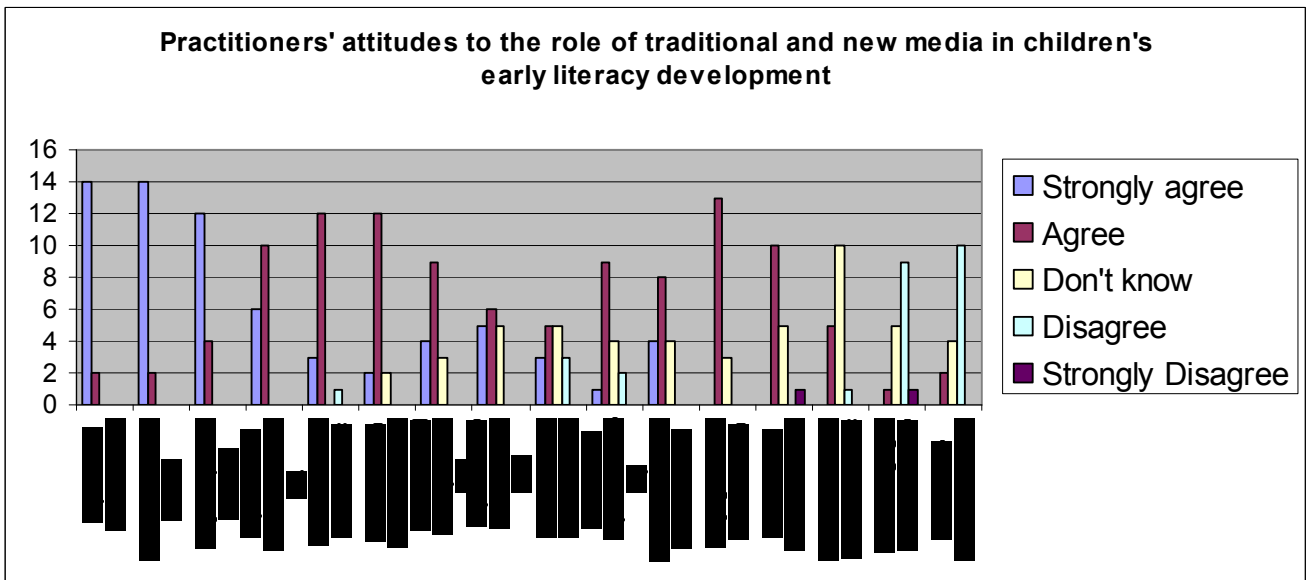


Figure 12



5.2.1 Some staff views regarding new technologies

Striking a balance of activities:

- ... new technologies are useful for children in today's society but cause speech and language problems if overused or unsupervised
- ... there are many ways children learn and it is important they have opportunities to be active and play alongside others. I would not want too much of the nursery session devoted to computers or sitting in front of the screen.
- ... there's a lot of erm you know language used on erm the computer games but you don't necessarily see a lot of written words and I think it's about having a balance of that

Need to limit use of new technologies, and recognise their negative impacts:

- ... computers have no valuable place in the nursery as they encourage isolation and addiction.
- Several staff members have expressed concern about the overuse of new technologies in today's world, and see a need to protect younger children from the overuse of new technologies. Some draw parallels with their teenage children's (mostly sons') overuse of computers at home but at the same time these staff members acknowledge the importance of computers in today's society
- Some staff appear to be caught in a dilemma. For example, several members of staff have been reading and discussing Sue Palmer's book *Toxic Childhood: How The Modern World Is Damaging Our Children And What We Can Do About It*. This has fuelled their concerns about the potential damage to 'childhood' of new technologies yet they continue to recognise that new technologies do offer young children valuable learning experiences.

The need to keep up with the fast-changing nature of learning in today's world:

- '... (the world is) very fast, you've got to think on your feet, you've got to think very fast – it's a very noisy world with lots going on around everybody all the time so there's – it's very busy, very busy. So keeping up with all that, I think that's got a lot to do with literacy, hasn't it – your thinking and responses and articulation ...'
- 'It (new technology) is there, whether you like it or not children have to learn to cope, to be able to deal with that – it's fast, high-powered... We all need literacy ... but keeping up is really hard... (To be literate today) children need lots of books ... they need to cut back on the TVs ... the children's cartoons are so fast –paced aren't they? Our cartoons when we were little were slow-paced like Scooby Doo and Watch with Mother and stuff like that ... slow and articulate now you have to listen to cartoons that are fast ... story lines ... shouty and aggressive - I think that is negative ... we need to step back you can't take it all in ... you miss bits out.'

Confusion about what children are actually learning:

- '[The] only thing that I struggle with is that I think children are using keyboards but they're learning more about the pattern of where the letters are on the keyboard and not necessarily knowing what those letters are ... and what they represent and that's not for every child ... but I think sometimes a child will learn to type their name but have no idea of the letters ... they just know that that's the letter'

Opportunities for linking home-school experiences:

- '(Children in the nursery are) using a lot of familiar games and ... talking about those and they're particularly talking about favourite stories and favourite characters ... that they've heard at the TV ... a lot of the characters that are on the telly that are important to them are ones that are going to come up on the CBeebies or going to have computer games related to them so if it's capturing their interest, they do talk about it and it is something that's important to them'

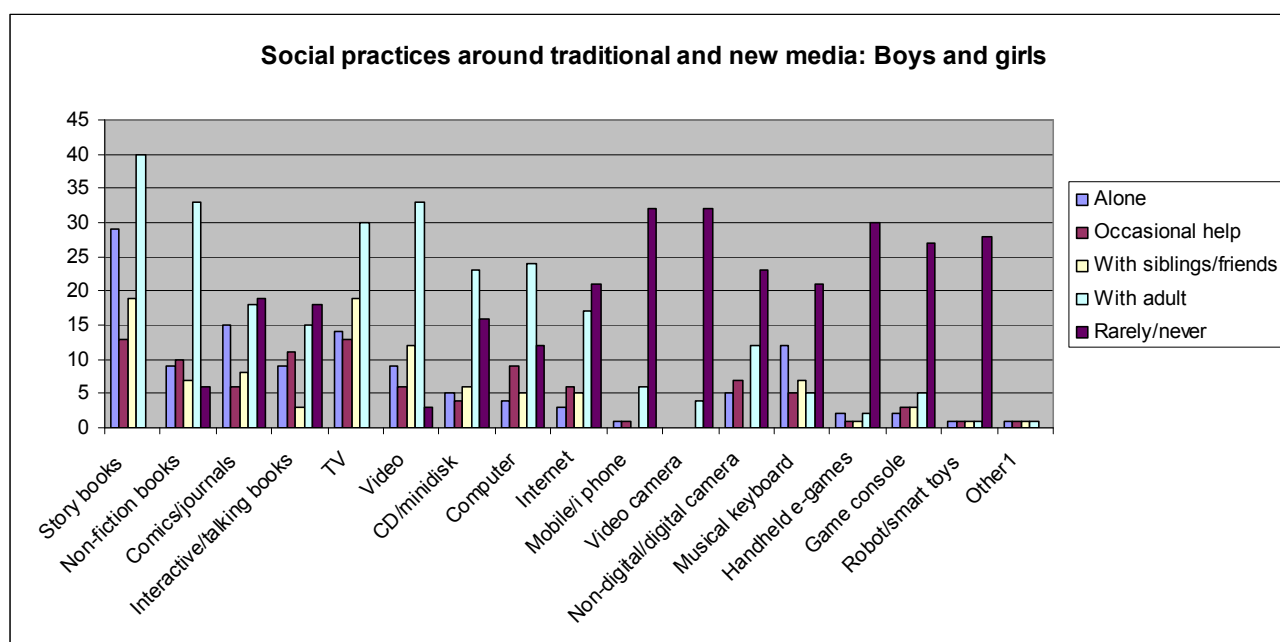
Curriculum guidelines:

- 'there's a lot more of an emphasis on books and I think one of the things there is about having a respect for books, being able to hold them correctly, understand the structure of stories ... when it comes to ICT there is mention of it but it, it's about showing an interest in ICT ... being able to complete a program, there's not the emphasis on it from a literature point of view at all, so a lot of what happens when we sit down and observe children at the computer, is looking that they can do hand, eye co-ordination ... that they understand what clicking the mouse means'

5.3 Children's uses of traditional literacy resources and new technologies

As mentioned above, the questionnaire and interview data suggest a certain anxiety felt by adult participants that if children spend extended periods involved with new technologies, then they may be 'missing out' on more traditional, and potentially more sociable, play activities. However, the project findings suggest that those children who often use new technologies at home also often enjoy a wide variety of other activities at home. In fact, some of the most frequent child users of computers seem to have the most varied play and social activities. Furthermore, rather than spending long hours in front of screens on their own, the data suggest that children most frequently use computers and watch TV/videos in the company of adults or siblings. They rarely appear to use computers on their own, although they are reported to often use story books and the TV/videos on their own (see Figure 13 below).

Figure 13



5.4 Staff time, skills and training

Existing research literature about the use of new technologies in classrooms suggests that their effective use is highly dependent on: an institutional commitment and strategy for their effective use; on how those strategic aims are negotiated and agreed within practitioner teams; and at an individual staff level, on staff confidence and familiarity with new technologies. The staff questionnaire and interview data in this study suggest that some members of staff feel they have high confidence and good skill levels with new technologies, whilst others lack confidence, and feel they need more time and/or training both to increase their own computer competence and to get to know the programmes available for children on the nursery computers.

6. THE STUDY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 For practitioners

Professional development and support are needed to increase practitioners' confidence and skills with new technologies, to integrate the strategic use of new media in literacy learning activities and to identify new media resources that offer productive literacy learning experiences.

Opportunities to share knowledge and resources with parents should be sought, such as using digital resources to document and share children's learning in preschool and at home, along with guidance on using both traditional and new technologies to support children's literacy.

6.2 For parents

Parents in this study said they would welcome guidance on good practice in supporting their children's use of new technologies, both to enhance recognition of their vital role in children's learning and to bridge the gap between children's home and school lives.

6.3 For early years policy

Local policy should coordinate training and resources to boost the effective use of new technologies in early literacy learning at home and in education.

Curriculum development The Early Years Foundation Stage should acknowledge the increasing role of new technologies in emergent literacy and provide explicit guidance on supporting children's critical awareness of the purposes and uses of new and traditional literacy resources. Reading and writing on screens are different from reading and producing traditional literacy texts. Theorised understandings of literacy learning in multiple modes and media are needed so all children can achieve their full potential as members of today's and tomorrow's world.