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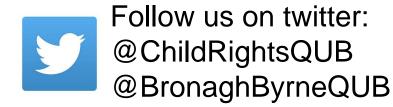
The Digital Environment and the Right to Education: The Views of Disabled Children and Young People

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http://bit.ly/CREID-seminar-autonomy-rights-sen-children

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The Great Potential of Digital Technology

"The dream behind the Web is of a common information space in which we communicate by sharing information… The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect"

(Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of WWW, 1997)

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1989: Birth of internet
1989: Adoption of UNCRC

Digital Society as a means to Social Inclusion

- Credited as 'opening up the world' to disabled people (Ellis and Kent 2011)

- Children's digital rights a priority (Livingstone 2014).

- Children's rights in the digital age (Articles 2, 3, 6, 12, 13, 17, 28, 29 UNCRC).

- But… limited data on experiences of disabled children and young people in digital world.

The Project

- Commissioned by Council of Europe.

- **Overall objective:** To examine disabled children's views and experiences of their rights in an online environment.

1. **Participation** - Do disabled children have equal access to the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and if not, what are the specific barriers?
2. **Protection** - Do disabled children encounter different risks through the use of ICT than non-disabled children?
3. **Provision:** What kind of support do disabled children need to be able to effectively enjoy their rights online?

Methods

1. Review of existing literature.

2. Children's research advisory groups (CRAGs) in Northern Ireland (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012a,b).

3. Data Collection: Belgium, Germany, Moldova, Portugal, Northern Ireland, Turkey.

4. Data analysis with advisory groups.

Role of CRAGs

- Four advisory groups

- Eighteen disabled young people in total, age 13-17 (7 M, 11 F)

- Mix of impairment and technological ability

- Capacity building and participatory activities

Feedback from Child Advisors

How digital technologies can enable the right to education

- Acts as an enabler and equalizer of their rights.

- Provides opportunities for learning via internet and accessing resources.

- Access to good quality technology in classroom.

- Communication apps/social media levels playing field with peers. These have 'opened up a space' for them.

How digital technologies can hinder the right to education

- Inconsistent provision – 'we tried our best' , 'don't worry about it'.

- Access to information online presumes competency with written language.

- Specialist equipment or software perceived as a 'marker' of difference.

- Some schools could be resistant to trying new things e.g. in exam settings.

Do disabled children experience additional risks online?

- Three groups (deaf, visual impairment, physical disabilities) felt they were no more or less safe online than their peers.

- One group – those with learning disabilities – felt the online world was 'scary' and 'dangerous'.

- Indirect risks identified in relation to peers rather than 'strangers'.

- E-safety training for children emphasised.

Stage 2: Focus Group Questions

Education related questions

- Are there devices/programmes/websites that help you to learn?

- Is there any digital technology that you cannot use in school because they are not accessible?

- Are your teachers and classroom assistants able to support you to use digital technology? If so, what would help them to help you?

- Are you allowed to use your smart phone in school?

- (If children attend a residential school, are there any issues there that affect their ability to use digital technology or smart phones?).

Summary

- Advisors indicate that views and experiences of rights online is complex.

- No one advisory group or impairment group indicated that this was completely positive or completely negative.

- Digital world clearly facilitates greater autonomy and independence for disabled young people in their learning environment but still mediated and potentially restricted by adult gatekeepers.

- Tension between participation rights and protection rights.

- A need for children's voices to be directly engaged in the digital debate.