

The digital literacy and multimodal practices of young children (DigiLitEY)

WG 2 Young children's digital literacy and multimodal practices in early years settings, schools and informal learning spaces

Summary of Meeting 4

7-8 November 2016, Prague, Czech Republic

During the 4th meeting of the DigiLitEY COST Action, members of the management committee and other interested delegates met in their respective working groups (WGs) over two sessions that took place on Monday, 7 November 2016. The two sessions of WG2 were organized in a way to reflect the objectives and actions of the group, as well as the interests of particular group members. In particular, with attention paid to considering young children's digital literacy and multimodal practices not only in official early years or school settings, but also in informal learning spaces, the first session was devoted to paper presentations on children's and teachers' beliefs and practices of informational literacy and digital learning in libraries. The second session focused on the presentation and discussion of the group's present and future activities. Details on the content of each session are presented below.

WG Session 1 – Paper presentations on digital literacy and informal learning spaces

The papers presented during the first WG session was the result of collaboration among MC members and particularly of Dr. Emmanouel Garoufallou and Dr. Sirje Virkus, whose work has been focusing on digital literacy, early years learners and information literacy. Dr. Garoufallou and Virkus presented the following papers, on behalf of their research teams:

- **“Information Seeking Behavior of Primary Teachers in Greece: A Pilot Study”**
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- **“Information Seeking Preferences (use of digital tools) of Preschool Children: Preliminary Results”**

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- **“Sharing classroom responsibility: the cases of informal learning environments”**

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The first presentation presented findings from a pilot study that examined teachers' perceptions of information literacy. Data were collected through questionnaires, which were completed by 72 teachers from 8 primary schools in Greece. The analysis of data indicated teachers' lack of knowledge and experience relating to information literacy, including digital skills and competence that are central to the identification, selection and critique of information. The authors concluded that there is an urgent need to support primary teachers' information literacy skills so that they can help their students to become information literate. It was also suggested that connecting schools to libraries is key to succeeding this goal. In the discussion that followed, WG2 participants highlighted the need to consider the ways different libraries (e.g., school libraries, city/public libraries) work and the ways they might support or not teachers' and others' information literacy skills. There was also much interest in the ways teachers understand themselves as professionals, given the finding that teachers were not engaged in scientific writing or did not consider doing research as part of their work. The audience emphasized the need to facilitate teachers' development not only as educators but also as educational researchers; a point that raised the issue of the types of knowledge attached to different professionals and the ways those are connected to premises of information literacy (and thus, findings from the study).

The second presentation drew on a study that examined children's use of digital tools by preschool children. The study was theoretically informed by notions of playful literacy as this connects to “digital natives”. The authors also acknowledged the disconnection of both playful and digital literacies from children's school literacy experiences and acknowledged a current tendency to expand early literacy practices to include digital media and tools. For the purposes of the study presented, sixty one children in private and public kindergarten schools were interviewed for their uses of digital media in different contexts. The interviews were analyzed in terms of the spaces where digital media were used (at school, at home, in

the library). It was found that, at schools, teachers were being resourceful in using their own devices and means to create meaningful learning spaces for children. At home, children reported a variety of practices that did include digital media but were not limited to those. Finally, children's practices in libraries were not connected to information literacy (e.g., the use of tablets or other digital devices to identify information). The authors concluded that children were familiar with digital tools and devices, but for this experience to be universal across spaces more is needed to be done. In the discussion that followed, the audience emphasized the need and explored the idea to expand such work in respective participating countries. They discussed the possibility to have research tools translated and to expand those to incorporate the perspectives of different groups and practitioners (e.g., children, parents, teachers, teacher educators, librarians).

The third presentation featured the author's attempts to review existing literature and research on digital and information literacy in informal learning spaces. This was framed by the idea of learning environments as crossing on- and off-line spaces and formal/informal boundaries. While it was recognized that formal and informal education may have differences in their structures, goals and practices, they were also recognized to have similarities or work in supplementary way thus leading authors to posit that classroom responsibility should be shared between classroom teachers and librarians. The presentation thus focused informal learning environments (libraries, in particular) and the skills people may develop therein. After a general reference to those skills, the presentation focused on different cases-countries and guidelines or specific programs that featured best practices about libraries and information literacy for young children. The authors concluded that formal and informal learning environments need to intertwine to help children grow in a holistic way. In the discussion that followed, the audience raised the issue of whether informal learning that takes place in libraries foregrounds the reading of books (literary text) more than other skills that young children may develop. It was thus emphasized that information literacy should extend to the use of digital tools and resources that may facilitate children's engagement with different types of text and sources of information.

WG Session 2 - WG2 Objectives and Activities

The second session of the meeting centered on the presentation of the WG2 key objectives and activities. Before the presentation and relevant discussion, Rebecca Parry and Fiona Scott informed participants of a special issue they will co-edit for the journal *Media Learning and Engagement in Early Childhood*. The issue will feature examples of good practice in formal early years as well as children's practices in homes and informal learning. More details will be announced on the Action's website.

During the rest of the session, the main activities of the WG were presented. Those included the preparation of the review of literature (to be published as a white paper on the Action's

and WG2's website), the collection of data on teachers' beliefs and practices, and the compilation of reports on official policies on digital literacy in the early years, both in formal and informal settings. Because of given timelines, the review of research was prioritized as the one task that needs to be completed first. Discussion on this issue featured on both the content and process of the review: first, the organization of collected literature into three main thematic areas was presented (pedagogical practices and multimodality/multiliteracies in official learning spaces, practices in informal learning spaces, and teachers & teacher education) and updates were given in regards to how those have been reviewed. The discussion then focused on how more people could get involved in the process and the ways communication among those could be facilitated. Finally, the discussion addressed the organization of the review as a text. Main sections that were identified included the introduction and reference to previous reviews of research; a methodology section to outline the process and criteria that guided this review; main findings that will be organized as per thematic area; and, a concluding part that will end with recommendations for future research.

During the rest of the discussion, it was mentioned that the draft summary report on official policies will be revised twice during the Action's duration, with data being collected or expanded in February 2017 and February 2018. A final report will be developed during the last year of the Action.

Finally, in terms of eliciting teachers' views and practices through interviewing, participants were informed of the state of matter and possible plan of action, as that was realized among interested parties in Summer 2016. By then, a total of 10 pilot interviews were conducted in Cyprus and Portugal based on the protocol/survey questions that was circulated in December 2015, and in the national languages of participants (in Greek and Portuguese, respectively). Based on these, the interview protocol has been revised to include a section on general demographic information and information on the conditions under which the interview was conducted (see file attached to email). A possible timeline that was discussed in Summer 2016 included the conduct of interviews (25 from participating country) till December 2016 and the preparation of short summaries (~500 words) for each in English, to include information about the conditions under which each interview was conducted, the demographics and general information about the interviewee, and main points from the interview (as per the categories identified on the protocol). A dropbox folder would be created, for interview summaries to be uploaded as per participating country. During the spring 2017 semester, the plan included the development of a coding scheme, the translation of specific interview excerpts in English for the whole group to read and refine the coding scheme, the coding of data in respective national languages but with the provision of translating more excerpts in English, as need arises. Possible outputs will be discussed based on the participants' interests and motivations, while funding opportunities and publication venues will be sought.

WG2 members raised the issue of translation as key to the whole process, as well as of time that need to be factored in the conduct of interviews. After the audience's suggestion that a questionnaire is also developed for the purposes of this inquiry, it was decided to re-circulate the information on the protocol, and to work more decisively on this task after the completion of the review of literature in April 2017. However, members and other interested parties who wish to continue with the interviews will be invited to respond to a relevant email and follow an adapted timeline as this will be discussed among this smaller group.