

Ethical and methodological challenges in EU Kids Online III – accessing the field

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Today...



- Reflections on **general guidelines** for researching the online activities of children: privacy, confidentiality, consent, enhancing participation (giving voice, allowing self-expression and representation, enhancing agency)
- Presentation of specific **ethical and methodological challenges** in the EU Kids Online III fieldwork – examples of addressing ethical issues and field-accessing issues in (cross-)national contexts

EU Kids Online III Project



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EU Kids Online

EU Kids Online is a multinational research network which seeks to enhance knowledge regarding European children's online opportunities, risks and safety. It employs multiple methods to map children's and parents' changing experience of the internet. It also sustains an active dialogue with national and European policy stakeholders. It has been funded by the EC's **Better Internet for Kids** programme.

[Infographic](#) -o- [What's on this site video](#)-o- [Book](#)

New reports and presentations

Children's online experiences in socially disadvantaged families: European evidence and policy recommendations ([June](#))

Presentation to the CEO Coalition with new risk findings ([June](#))

The meaning of online problematic situations for children: qualitative investigation in nine countries ([June](#))

Recently released

Policy influences and country clusters in internet safety ([May](#))

TEDx talk: How children engage with the internet ([May](#))

EC workshop on parental controls ([May](#))

Researching children's rights in the digital age ([April](#))

News for policy makers

[may help paedophiles to target 13-year-olds](#)

Reports and findings

[kids online](#) - children, risk and safety on the internet. TOWARDS A BETTER INTERNET FOR CHILDREN?

Hear from the researchers

YouTube: eu kids online

European evidence database

Map of Europe showing countries included in the project: BE, CZ, GR, MT, IT, PT, RO, ES, UK, AU.

Twitter

EUKIDSONLINE @EUKIDSONLINE 21h
A new study on children's wellbeing is available here bit.ly/1qLPgzp #childrenandtechnology

- **9 European countries** were included: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Malta, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom (and Australia).
- Fieldwork from February to September 2013, **57 focus groups** (N = 236) and **113 interviews** (N = 113), with children aged **9-16** (in each country 6 focus groups, 2 per age group 9-10, 11-13, 14-16, and 12 interviews, balanced gender distribution).
- Ethics approval from LSE Research Ethics Committee.

Ethical and field-accessing issues



- **UNCRC – children’s rights-focused agenda (emphasis on respects for persons, beneficence, and justice)**
- **Protection versus participation - inherent tension**
- Access and selection issues
- Consent – challenges to informed consent
- Confidentiality and anonymity - challenges
- Giving voice to young people (attention to power dynamics, creating a safe space)

Challenges for access: enlisting the cooperation of schools



- Research seen as an inferior activity (to educational ones)
- The constraint of having the interviews/ focus groups visible or in the presence of teachers
- Teachers exerting too much control over the selection process

Finding and convincing schools



Country	Alternative to access participants	Personal contact moment before data collection	School's cooperation in practical organization
Belgium	Yes – youth organization (Chiro)	Yes – parents	Acceptable – only children who had finished schoolwork were allowed to participate
Czech Republic	No	Yes – phone calls with principals	Acceptable – little interest, but schools willing to participate proved very cooperative
Greece	Yes – personal network of acquaintances	Yes – phone calls with principals	Acceptable – distributed consent forms
Italy	No	Yes – FtF meetings principals and/or teachers	Poor in the upper secondary schools (researchers did everything); Good in the primary and lower secondary schools, where teachers collected consent forms and scheduled the focus groups/interviews
Malta	Yes – personal networks	Yes – with parents and/or children recruited from personal networks	Acceptable – schools helped in organizing the groups, finding participants and distributing consent forms, but they did not always follow instructions about single-gender focus groups and the numbers of participants
Portugal	Yes – school librarians network	No	Good – distributed consent forms and arranged times and places for data collection
Romania	Yes – partnership with school inspectorate	No	Rather poor / acceptable in some cases– negative attitude towards research in schools
Spain	Yes – personal network of acquaintances and helpline	No	Good – no issues reported
UK	Yes – NGOs and personal network of acquaintances	Yes – FtF meetings principals and/or teachers	Good in most schools – schools helped at organizing consents, recruiting children and providing locations Poor in junior school , which did not allow individual interviews, and where focus groups had to be in visible, public space within the school
Australia	Yes, partnership with independent school – using personal contacts	Yes – with key decision makers in relevant independent school	Good – required a school-based champion

Selection of children: researchers versus teachers



Country	Role of the researcher	Actors (besides researchers) having an impact on the selection process
Belgium	Rather extensive – in one school only children who had finished schoolwork could be selected. For the focus groups with 14- to 16-year-olds, availability on a certain time and place determined participation	Teachers – selection of children
Czech Republic	Moderate – discuss basic selection criteria with principal or deputy/select children from a pool (e.g. those who had returned consent forms)	Principal and deputy – selection of classes Principal/deputy and teacher – asking for volunteers
Greece	Rather limited – priority to children who were regular internet users, media-savvy, open and cooperative	Principals and teachers – selection of children
Italy	Rather extensive in primary and lower secondary school – randomly selecting children among those with returned consents Rather limited in upper secondary school – rely on availability of 3 collaborating teachers	Principal (lower secondary school) – suggested leaving out a ‘problematic case’ and selecting another child Teachers (upper secondary school) – only those children who had a class with one of the collaborating teachers
Malta	Limited for focus groups – school management selected the children (but did not take into account EU Kids Online criteria); rather extensive for interviews	Teachers and assistant heads – selection of children
Portugal	Rather limited – school librarians and teachers decided who was best for the research in accordance with the researcher’s instructions for diversity	School librarians and teachers (head of class) – selection of children
Romania	Moderate – discussion of selection criteria with teachers	Teachers – selection of children
Spain	Moderate – discussion of selection criteria with principal	Principal – selection of children
UK	Rather limited – teacher supplied the children	Teachers – selection of children
Australia	Rather extensive – select children from a pool (those who had returned consent, which is about one-third)	Any of the children who consented and whose parents had consented could be selected

Challenges to obtaining informed consent



- **Usually sought from adults** (parents, guardians, teachers)
- **Children should be informed** (UNCRC art 12, consulting children in decisions affecting their own lives)
- **Consent should not be coerced / obtained under pressure**; should be re-negotiable (difficult to assess if the child feels pressured/ hard to control power dynamics, e.g. teacher/ pupil)

Consent in EU Kids Online III



- **Data collection –** through schools, consent was needed for access

In acest pliant dorim să îți oferim informații despre cercetarea noastră, care să te ajute să te hotărăști dacă vrei să participi.

Tine minte: Nu există răspunsuri corecte sau greșite. Suntem interesați de experiențele tale personale.

Pot să aflu mai multe?

Da, desigur. Sună la 0740191398 sau trimite un email la: moni.barbovski@gmail.com. Sau poți vorbi cu cercetătorul EU Kids la școală.

Pot să mă răzgândesc legat de participare?

Da, desigur. Dacă te-ai decis că nu mai vrei să participi, anunță-ne. Sau dacă nu te simți confortabil în timpul discuției, poți să părăsești sala.

Adulții au multe speranțe dar și temeri legate de internet. Acest proiect dorește să asculte copiii și tinerii pentru a afla ce gândesc. Vom discuta cu tineri și copii diferiți, de vârste și din școli diferite, nu doar din România, ci și din alte țări europene.

Rezultatele proiectului vor fi discutate cu polițienii, companii din industria IT și alții, iar opinia ta va ajuta la crearea unui internet mai plăcut și mai sigur pentru copiii și tineri.

Da, doresc să particip.

Dacă dorești să participi, te rugăm să completezi acest formular, să îl semnezi și să îl returnezi cercetătorului EU Kids.

Consimt să iau parte la un interviu în proiectul EU Kids Online III.

Numele meu: _____

Data: _____

Semnătura: _____

- **Forms (all countries):** consent forms parent/child, information letter parent; information letter teachers/principal, consent form principal
- **Other forms** (approvals from ministries/ national educational boards)

- **Children's explicit consent:** legally required in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Malta, Australia
- **Child-centered approach to consent:** ensuring informed consent; challenges: teachers selecting children for participating



EU Kids Online III: un proiect de cercetare care ascultă vocea copiilor



Persoanele responsabile de proiectul EU Kids Online în România:
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Challenges to participation and giving voice



- **Disputed approach** within the research field – degrees of children’s participation
- **Power asymmetries** researchers- young people, teachers- young people
- **Choices, presence and interventions of other adults** (teachers/ principals): teachers choosing the “best children”; interruptions and interventions from teachers;
- **Settings** like schools might be inhibiting
- **Little time to build trust** - poor, socially desirable answers

Children's participation in research



Level of children's participation / Description (based on Hart's ladder of participation)

8 Children initiate the research, and share decision making with adults

7 Children initiate and direct the research

6 Adult-initiated, but shared decisions with children

5 Children are consulted and informed

4 Children are assigned an active role and are informed

3 Tokenism (sham participation)

2 Children are decoration

1 Children are manipulated

■ EU Kids Online III research – level 5

Presence and interventions from others



Country	Presence at focus groups	Type of intervention at focus groups	Presence at interviews	Type of intervention at interviews
Belgium	Youth mentors (focus groups, aged 14-16)	FG, girls: regular interventions by female mentor, giving her personal opinion FG, boys: mentor remained in the background, subtle encouragements to talk	Older brother (1-boy,9-10) Mother (2, girls, 12-13) Father (1, boy 12-13)	Older brother: encourages talk, sometimes gave more information Mother: occasional interventions, gave some additional information Father: no interventions, remained in background
Czech Republic	Teachers, headmasters	No interventions, just transited the space (very rare)	Teachers, headmasters	No interventions, just transited the space (very rare)
Greece	Teachers	Teachers occasionally entered the room and discussion resumed after they left	Teachers	Teachers occasionally entered the room and discussion resumed after they left
Italy	No others present	No interventions	No others present	No interventions
Malta	Head of school (one focus group)	In one FG: headmaster was present in final part of the FG/ participants sometimes involved him in the discussion Other FG: interrupted momentarily by a teacher asking or giving information and/or instruction, no involvement	Cousin and a friend (one interview)	No interventions, the family members were on the other side of the room
Portugal	Library users	No interventions, remained at a distance	No others present	No interventions
Romania	Teachers (three focus groups) School librarian (two focus groups),	FG, girls aged 9-10: teacher briefly entered the room, girls were not bothered; FG, boys: teacher entered and announced exam, discussion ended; FG teacher entered and stayed for 10 minutes, discussion was disrupted; Interview / School librarian: no interventions, stayed at convenient distance	School librarian (one interview); library users	No interventions, stayed at convenient distance; library users transiting the space
Spain	No others present	No interventions	No others present	No interventions
UK	Teachers and pupils	FG: people wandering and talking in the hall, no interventions FG, girls: several classes entered the hall, focus group ended because of too much noise	Teacher present in two interviews (9-10 years old)	No intervention, but teachers sat right next to the researcher and listened
Australia	Teachers	No interventions, just transited the space	Teachers	No interventions, just transited the space

Challenges to ensuring privacy and confidentiality



- **Limits to ensuring confidentiality** – children disclosing illegal activities, children reporting on harm (that no one can ignore) to themselves or others
- **Presence of teachers / other adults** – in itself a breach of privacy
- **Teachers themselves not trusting children** with ethical behaviour towards disclosing private information about their peers

Concluding remarks



- **Challenges to cross-cultural qualitative research** – multifaceted and complex – a lot of what you will be able to obtain is already pre-determined by fieldwork conditions in national contexts (attitudes towards research, views on teachers and school's role, views on children's rights etc)
- **Ethical and methodological issues – closely linked** – ethical constraints limit methodological choices and vice-versa
- **Remarks from colleagues** directly involved in the data collection of EU Kids Online III



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Outputs



Innovative approaches for investigating how children understand risk in new media

Dealing with methodological and ethical challenges

September 2013

Barbovschi, M., Green, L. and Vandoninck, S. (eds) (2013). *Innovative approaches for investigating how children understand risk in new media. Dealing with methodological and ethical challenges*. London: EU Kids Online, London School of Economics and Political Science.

EuKidsOnline.net / reports

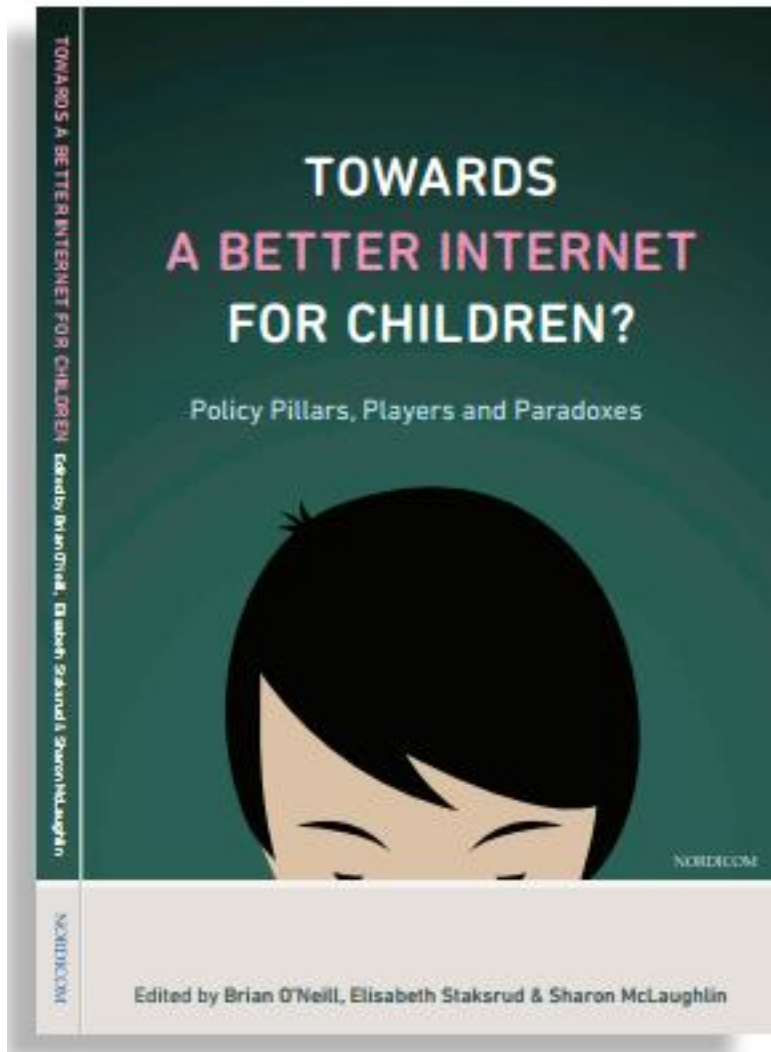


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www.eukidsonline.net

Outputs



- Barbovschi, M. & Marinescu, V. (2013). Youth. Revisiting Policy Dilemmas in Internet Safety in the Context of Children's Rights. In Brian O'Neil, Elisabeth Staksrud, Sharon McLaughlin (eds.). *Towards a Better Internet for Children? Policy Pillars, Players and Paradoxes*. Nordicom

Thank you!



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INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT