



Children and the Internet:

How children use the internet

Nicola Brace

Could you tell me what attracted you to this area of research?

Sonia Livingstone

Well I've been doing research on children's media for quite some time, and the questions that have been asked have always been about television mainly, sometimes books, sometimes music. And when the internet became big in children's lives, what was interesting was that lots of researchers wanted to research the positives, the opportunities, how it helped their education, how it helped their civic engagement, what fun they had with it.

And surprisingly rather few, perhaps not surprisingly, rather few wanted to research the risks that the internet posed to them, and yet lots of policymakers wanted to know the answer, are there downsides to the internet? And so I felt there was a gap that needed some research.

Nicola Brace

Children's exposure to different forms of media has changed over the years. For example, are children watching more television or using the internet more?

Sonia Livingstone

Well, in the half-century since children have had television, they've pretty much watched about two to two and a half hours a day throughout. It reached that point very quickly. It's not really got less. People keep expecting that there'll be less television and more internet. Of course the internet they now spend a lot of time with, but not necessarily less time with television.

Some are watching television on the internet, sometimes they're watching television at the same time as they go online. The decline in television is just a little bit for teenagers. Internet – now they're spending an hour, two hours, sometimes many hours a day, and it's a bit of a puzzle how they find the time for it, but of course the internet is something that people use at the same time as other things.

Nicola Brace

What are children using the internet for?

Sonia Livingstone

Well, a few years ago the answer would have been looking for information, school work and looking for information for hobbies and interests. And the internet was, you know, a

sort of a passive medium that provided all kinds of things. Since chat rooms, especially instant messenger, and now social networking, communication has absolutely taken over.

So most of the time that they are on the internet, they are communicating in one form or another. And even if they're not actively in touch, you know, they're waiting for the messages to come in. So that's the number one thing. Otherwise they are using it as a source of music, television, films, yes, and still helping with their homework.