# Children and Digital Media: a dialogue with researchers

**Carla Cristiane Loureiro**[I]
**Rita de Cássia Marchi**[II]

[I]Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis/ SC – Brazil
[II]Universidade Regional de Blumenau (FURB), Blumenau/SC – Brazil

**ABSTRACT – Children and Digital Media: a dialogue with researchers[1].** The article discusses the relationship of children with digital media, proposing a view, which is not allocated to it on the deterministic and polarized mode in which it has been done. The problem is presented from an unusual angle in the Brazilian literature, shifting from the view of risks to what children actually do with the media. Are in discussion the literature, excerpts of interviews with researcher Dr. Cristina Ponte (coordinator of the Portuguese team of EU Kids Online), and quantitative and qualitative data on the phenomenon. As a result, arises the importance of research done with children themselves in the construction and interpretation of data about their relationships with digital media in different and unequal social and cultural contexts.
Keywords: **Children. Childhood Social Studies. Digital Media.**

**RESUMO – Crianças e Mídias Digitais: um diálogo com pesquisadores.** O artigo debate a relação das crianças com as mídias digitais, propondo uma visão não alocada no modo determinista e polarizado no qual esta discussão vem sendo realizada. O problema é apresentado de ângulo não usual na literatura brasileira, deslocando o olhar dos riscos para aquilo que as crianças, efetivamente, fazem com as mídias. Estão em diálogo a literatura, trechos de entrevista com a pesquisadora Dra. Cristina Ponte (coordenadora da equipe portuguesa do EU Kids Online), e dados quantitativos e qualitativos sobre o fenômeno. Como resultado, surge a importância de pesquisas feitas com as próprias crianças na construção e interpretação dos dados sobre suas relações com as mídias digitais em diferentes e desiguais contextos sociais e culturais.
Palavras-chave: **Crianças. Estudos Sociais da Infância. Mídias Digitais.**

## Introduction

Nowadays, it seems to be no doubts that digital media affect children's life due to the great attraction and pleasure they feel in their experience with virtual, converging, mobile and interconnected technologies. Thus, the relationship between children and media have fostered the production of researches that analyze this complex theme. Yet, in the academic debate, position in favor of and against have mobilized paradoxical ideas about this two categories (children and digital media), showing the movement of different and polarized views in a wider social context.

It is important highlight that the academic debate surrounding the topic of children's relationship with media has been originated in the uncertainties and wider social transformations that, in the context of our late modernity, reach the different social institutions and, thus, also change the intergenerational relationships. According to Sarmento (2011), they are changes that occur in children and adults' social practices, as well as in the interaction patterns between them; changes in the childhood statute regarding to the families, the school and other social institutions, once the theorization about this phenomenon has been carried out, using, often, as starting point, the effects of the information and communication technologies *on* the children. Therefore, this a debate in the core of educational concerns.

The aim of this article is present and discuss the actual understandings in this debate, proposing a view not based in a deterministic form and polarized in dichotomies. Thus, the proposal is present de problem from an angle still quite unusual in the Brazilian literature, but that has been the innovative mode as English-speaking researches approach the topic, because they shift the view from the risks (the child *in danger* or *dangerous child*) to what, effectively, the children do with the media (cf. Buckingham, 2007, 2010; Livingstone, 2011, 2014, 2015, and others). That is, in these authors' opinion, in order to know what children really do with social media and vice-versa, researches empirically grounded are required to verify how this diversified group of social actors use these tools in different contexts.

To achieve the objective of this article some quantitative data, the literature area and excerpts of an interview (carried out by the authors of this article) with the researcher Prof. Dr. Cristina Ponte were performed[2]. This expert is vice-coordinator of the Group Children, Youth and Media, from the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) and, since 2006, coordinator of the Portuguese team of researchers of the EU Kids Online, which investigates the uses children make of the internet and the mediation of their families, gathering data from 33 European countries[3]. The decision of using excerpts from the interview carried out with the Portuguese researcher aims to instill a more dynamic profile in the bibliographic material usually used in academic articles and in the own interview material that, by not being presented in a monolithic form and in a whole, as always,

turns the discussion in this text more dynamic through reflections and updated data about the subject matter.

## The Academic Debate Terms – actual and made-up risks

At the debate, on the one hand the so-called utopians that celebrate the master, by children, of a technology that is seen as an important part of the future. This position is based on the assumption about the natural capabilities of children to learn technical skills. On the other hand, the so-called, pessimists argue that the children's ability to use digital media can put them in danger, as well as make them dangerous.

Both these contrasting interpretations are problematic. That is because they are based in an essentialist view of the childhood grounded in its alleged biological nature. In this sense, both the utopic comprehension and the pessimist's one is grounded on the idea of a natural childhood (it is, universal). That is, both positions, in spite of conceiving the childhood as a social and historical construction (therefore, susceptible to changes along the time) seem, at the same time, to disregard the phenomenon's relational and historical constructed character,   since they  appeal to – paradoxically – to the idea of a child essential to justify their arguments[4]. This essentialism, as known, is not new, but inherent to the idea of childhood as it was socially constructed in modern times and, that is why, it has been dominant in Western societies since the Enlightenment (Marchi, 2007).

Thus, the dominant discourses boost cultural and historical representations about the childhood, where the children are represented in different forms and, often, antagonistic: sometimes as naturally innocents and vulnerable, and sometimes as artful and needing control or, even as wise and empowered. Therefore, we agree with Buckingham (2007, p. 119) when he states that "[...] the debate terms are mistaken. Considering that children are media's passive victims or active consumers means, in fact, see them as isolated from the processes of wider social and cultural change".

The comprehensions of childhood and media that are, for instance, in the core of pessimists argument – the child in danger or the dangerous child – have a long genealogy in the western though, like Sarmento (2007), based on James, Jenks and Prout (1998), indicates:

> [...] the creation of successive representations of children over the History produced an invisibility effect of the childhood social reality. This childhood 'imagination' work has been structured according principles of reduction in complexity, of the abstraction of realities and of interpretation to normative purposes of the 'ideal' child [emphasis added] (Sarmento, 2007, p. 28).

In this sense, the concepts of childhood and child are the historical result of a complex network of interrelations among an ideology, the State, the biomedical science, the philosophy, the pedagogy and

the technology, in which each of these fields tends to reinforce the others, developing themselves in different forms and in different speeds in the distinct national contexts (Buckingham, 2007). Therefore, there is a plurality of childhoods and of discourses that define them. Yet, as far as the childlike experience is essentialized and delimited by the difference that keeps from the adult's experiences, in other words, insofar is limited to the generational bias, the implicit sense is the one of homogeneity. That happens when, for instance, it is said that all the children do like videogames and that they play better than adults do. These ideas "[...] reflect a sentimentalism about children and teenagers that do not recognize the variety of experiences lived in the childhood, as well as of the relations of children with medias" (Buckingham, 2007, p. 87).

This homogeneity, implicit in the utopic and pessimist discourses, hides the unequal children's social worlds[5] that are split by other variables besides the generational, as the class, gender and ethnic differences. Furthermore, the assumption that the children are "[...] ancillary components or means of the adults' society" (Sarmento; Pinto, 1997, p. 10), whose behavior dominated by natural trends needs to be molded, turns out denying them the status of social actors.

Another problem is that, these interpretations of the children's relationships with digital media are technologically deterministic, as, somewhat, assume that the technology is not controlled by the individuals, but the individuals are controlled by it, that is, it moulds the society according to the requirements of efficiency and progress. As a general rule, this deterministic thinking advocates that the technology reflects "[...] the advancement of the knowledge of the natural world to serve to the universal characteristics of the human nature, as the basic necessities and faculties" (Feenberg, 2003, p. 7). Those interpretations assume, therefore, that a technology is a stable entity that shall impact and change the society in – predetermined - positive or negative ways.

This debate seems to be synthetized in the sentence "[...] it looks like we do not know anymore where to find the childhood" (Buckingham, 2007, p. 15), insofar the idea of childhood has been relativized in the common sense as in the academic discourses. (Marchi, 2007). Notably, the discourse about the children's *natural abilities* to deal with digital media seems to reverse the traditional relations of power that define children as less able and less competent than the adults, that generates, in turn, displacements in the traditional comprehension that societies have over children and their place in society (Buckingham, 2007).

In this way, it is highlighted in researches, in general, an alarmist comprehension (a kind of *media panic* or *moral panic*)[6], a view that is also not new and has been repeated over the time and through different cultural contexts. This comprehension implies in a long history, being

> [...] at least as old as the Greek philosopher Plato, which proposed banish works of dramaturges of his ideal Republic, due to its pernicious influences about the impressible child's minds. Nowadays, the anxieties mix

> themselves to the more general concerns with the imminent collapse of the social order in range of the undisciplined 'masses'– and, particularly, with criminal trends attributed to young people from the urban working class, especially the male ones. Those arguments, as well as the general complaints related to the 'death of the childhood', they are, often, motivated by the nostalgia of an imaginary Golden Age that always seems to have happened two generations ago (Buckingham, 2007, p. 179-180).

Thus, a recurrent comprehension that appears in the pessimist discourse about the relationship of children with digital media is the risk of contact with violence and sex that, among the many experiences media can offer to children, has been seen as the only one, which needs be focused. This concern, is equally not new, because the television has already been accused of expose children to violent contents. The electronic games, especially, because of the graphic effects increasingly more realistic, have been accused, however, of causing a kind of imitative violence, because they would tend to encourage children to reproduce certain acts.

Therefore, as each new mean or cultural form emerges (radio, cinema, TV, internet, etc.) the same concerns (re)appear. In spite of each panic seems to be specific, the reoccurrence of similar anxieties can indicate a wider underlying continuity. The panic established in the reflection about the relationship of children with media seems to be, in this sense, always – and everywhere – the same: the corruption of the innocent being by the culture (Loureiro, 2017).

Considering the data of the research TIC Kids Online Brazil 2015 (CGI.br, 2016), carried out by the Regional Center on the Development of Information Society (Cetic.br)[7], it can be observed that 77% of the parents consider that the children will not be subjected to embarrassment and inconvenience at internet, or that think it unlikely to happen. This could indicate that they feel some confidence about what children and teenagers do on the network or that they do not perceive any potential danger on the fact of children playing online, even with people unknown. However, this data, according to the researches, can also indicate that the parents do not know a lot about their children experiences with games, since there are no qualitative data, which better construe this issue. To the researcher Cristina Ponte, this

> Is an old argument, but is still valid, and this has to do with the recurrent phenomenon of media panics. Especially in the United States, a country where an Association of Psychologists and an Association of Pediatricians are of great strength, there is a great tradition of studies performed, experimental studies, carried out in lab conditions. It is important do not contradict this methodology and see how the children use games with a certain degree of violence, what is the game to them and what real life is to them. When the questionnaire was applied, there was an open question on the internet: 'what bothers children of your age'. Among the answers, we have seen that a thing that bothers them a lot are violent contents based in true stories. The news bother more than a monster, which

kills another one, because they know that this is fiction. It is the same with adults, media's content is violent, but it does not mean that people who see these contents shoot everything that moves (Ponte, 2016).

When it comes to researches with children, the focus has been, therefore, on the effects of media over them and, in this sense, they are based on "[...] a form of behaviorism or 'social learning theory' [...] [which pursue] show casual connections between violent stimulus and aggressive responses" (Buckingham, 2007, p. 153-154). Thus, the academic researches about the impact of media on the audiences can be seen as a kind of pendulum between a *powerful media and powerful audiences* (Buckingham, 2007, p. 69).

With the support of researches and mediatic cases[8], the discourse of a direct connection between a *bad* media and criminality became integral part of the common sense hiding the discussion of violence as a complex phenomenon that involves, in a wider way, social, economic, cultural, politic and emotional issues. As a result, there is the pressure over legislators to create guidelines to producers, content rating, improvement of filtering tools and privacy configurations to assure that children are not exposed to inappropriate contents.

In the research carried out by the EU Kids Online team to mapping the children's concerns about the online environment, the violent content offered on the internet is a concern mentioned by boys (21%) and younger children, against 16% of girls. However, this kind of concern is only the third concern more mentioned, falling behind pornographic content and risk related to behavior. The violent contents that children assert to have access to, mostly, are graphic designs of decontextualized sequences of accidents, abuse or death, news about terrorist attacks, beside scenes of suffering and abuse of vulnerable victim like animals, disabled people and children (Livingstone; Kirwil; Ponte; Staksrud, 2014).

Buckingham (2007) highlights that, in his researches about television, despite children develop strategies (refuse themselves to watch, *prepare* themselves to watch violent content, *positive thinking*) to face their undesired feelings induced by fictional material, they usually consider more difficult to deal with reality, that is, with their daily life, "[...] exactly because there is no power to intervene in the matters related to them" (Buckingham, 2007, p. 197).

There are no doubts that some children can develop a not very healthy relationship with medias. However, analyzing this engagement solely by the potential risks ends up simplifying this relationship, bringing up old images resulting from psychologization discourse about what a *normal child* is, classifying the active presence at digital media as pathologic[9]. These images and narrative also suggest that medias have, in itself, the capacity to determinate social results, reinforcing what Sarmento (2007, p. 32) defined as "[...] the end of the negativity circle, the idea that the current children live, indefinitely, a process of early and irreversible adultization and, consequently, live the non-childhood age". Therefore,

> [...] the childhood is analyzed from its archetype image, conceptualized as a structured 'become', and not a social practice, nor a place to the self (no matter how much illusory the post-structuralism has turned this concept). The archetype of the child is supported in the professional language and discourses, of institutions and specializations that control the boarders established around the child as social statute. These boarders not only establish limits to the child, but also preclude a social space that, in turn and in other level, expresses the control component exercised in this social system scenario and a control variant that reveals interests that support its function (Sarmento, 2007, p. 32).

Therefore, the child that, in theory, is also active subject does not seem to occupy the same social place as the collaborative subject that experiences, by using technologies, new ways of authorship, of subjectification and of sociability. Thus,

> Somehow, the child's place in the culture became naturalized in the perspective of reception, even though its capabilities of active contemplation and resignification are recognized. On the other hand, it became naturalized that the adult is the one who produces e presents the culture to children. Paradoxically, when the perspective of immersion threatens denaturalize those vertical places, emerges a series of discourses about the child fragility and about the risks and dangers that involve the relative autonomy that the immersive experience proposes (Pereira, 2013, p. 324).

Furthermore, it can be highlighted that the researches that involve the relationship of children with medias and that discuss the types of games and the quantity of time children spend with them, revealed that, often, families, educators and other adults, present a romantic view of the virtual space as a free space, as well as a view equally idealized of the real space as more authentic or healthier to the children (Valentine; Holloway, 2002). In spite of, there are few works dedicated to understand how, effectively, the children use digital media (Loureiro, 2017).

## Paradigm Shift in Researches – what effectively the children do?

Attention paid to the displacement that some researchers inflict on the debate traditionally based on polarized views and permeated with essentialisms, works will be considered that provide clues of how children negotiate social relationships online (cf. Turkle, 1997). That is, studies dedicated to overcome the view centered only in risks and dangers to which children expose themselves and which they are exposed to when in contact with new medias will be considered.

Considering this issue, and the fact that the Convention about the Children's Rights, 1989, includes the communication and participation rights (articles 12º to 17º) beside the rights of provision and protection, it was asked to the researcher Cristina Ponte, how the data gathered in the projects Kids Online may contribute so that the children are not seen as *in risk* on the internet. To this question, she answered:

> [...] when the project [EU KidsOnline] started, it was funded by the European Commission in a program called Safer Internet Plus, so, the focus was on security, and this marked the first research. In the design of the research we are carrying out, without forgetting the issue of risk, we want also pay attention to the capabilities, to the children's creative activities, as well as how the experience with the internet impacts their well-being. [...] To cover these topics, qualitative research is also require. At this moment the discussion proposed has a theoretical framework focused on the perspective of digital rights and well-being, how the internet and digital experience affects the child's well-being? That is something we want to answer (Ponte, 2016).

So, it can be noted, without forgetting the issues related to the risk of the use of the internet by children, that the researchers of the project EU Kids Online have been redesigning the researches so that they also capture, in a qualitative way, capabilities, creative activities, and the ways how the internet experience impacts the children's well-being. That is, if in a first moment of the project the focus was on the children's security, without forgetting this aspect, the researchers now pay attention to children's capabilities and creative activities, trying to understand in which way the internet has impacted the well-being of this social group. Here it can be opposed that, the security is one of the essential components to the individual's well-being (no matter what their ages are), but what the researcher intends to highlight, in her answer above, is the enlargement of the studies' focus to aspects so far neglected in the researches and that, equally, constitute the so called children's well-being.

In this sense, use qualitative methodologies centered in children and prepared to recognize their voices and experiences with digital media is essential to the advancement of researches in the field, "[...] both because their concerns are different from the adults ones, and because the reports of children offer valuable comprehensions about the conditions of their anxieties" (Livingstone; Kirwil; Ponte; Staksrud, 2014, p. 93-94).

In Brazil, the researches carried out by Cetic, also provide good data for analysis, but usually these are performed with closed questions in areas of already established politic interest, as security on the internet or the consumption.

If some researches have been carried out of the school environment (Valentine; Holloway, 2002; Livinstone; Mascheroni; Dreier; Chaudron; Lagae, 2015), most of the studies about how children play in domestic context was mainly carried out through interviews and questionnaires with children and parents, as well as, to a large extent,

focused on the own computer games, highlighting the structures and rules and the learning possibilities (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2010). In other words, the focus of the studies was not centered in the children's voices and interpretations and about in which way they connect themselves with the different medias, neither in the ways of this relation.

Another relevant factor is the growing of the connection via cell phones, which has been prominent in the last years. In 2012, 21% of the Brazilian children and adolescents accessed the internet through cell phones, in 2014 the number raised to 82% and in 2015 to 85%. One out of three youth (31%) uses exclusively the cell phone as a way of connection (CGI.br, 2016). In 2017, 93% of the Internet users from 9 to 17 years old, connected themselves via cell phone, which is equivalent to more than 23 million children and adolescents (CGI.br, 2018).

Those data about the access of children and adolescent to the internet almost exclusively through cell phones require deeper studies in order to verify how the children's knowledge acquired through media articulates to the formal educational process. This is because, researches in Brazil and in Portugal indicate that children and adolescents, frequently, use the cell phones in informal learning contexts, turning to different functions, producing several types of media, interacting with social media and this, frequently, in a collaborative way. However, the school remains as, maybe, one of the last redoubts in the resistance in the use of cell phones in the formal educational environment. Because as we know students and teachers use cell phones in and out the school environment, but activities carried out in classrooms using this technology are still less frequent (CGI.br, 2018). Furthermore, if, on one hand, the cell phones provide the children's access to services and information, beside working as a tool which reduces the distances between friends and family, on the other hand, the almost exclusive use of cell phones can mask the disparity of stimulus and opportunities when compared to data about children and adolescents who have access to different technological means.

Studies developed in the European context also indicate that the use of cell phones along with WiFi network, besides the 3G e 4G network, seem to provide children a sense of having Internet as an omnipresent and unlimited form, as the researcher highlights:

> Another thing that matters a lot is the pressure to be always 'on'. Other day, I saw a video of a North American researcher that build up with the children (from 11 and 12 years old) an identification of the problems they had on internet, to later find solutions; one the things they felt was the misunderstanding arising from the not immediate response to a message they have received. If someone does not answer immediately, the sender thinks: he/she does not want to answer! Nevertheless, sometimes, the person is not near to the telephone and incorrect interpretations, misunderstandings, false expectations are created. One of the things that intensively appeared in 2014, was the number of youth saying they had difficulties in not be looking to the mobile, suffering from anxiety: what I am missing if I am not...

There are no doubts that the technology leaves traces, but is not a singular effect to everyone; it is also necessary take into account if the child has a good self-esteem, if he/she is able to say: I do not want to be always connected. However, certainly the children nowadays, who have access to these means, are growing in conditions that are different from the conditions their parents grown up (Ponte, 2016).

The discourse of this researcher raises the question about one of the most important practices in children's life: be with their peers. Digital media strongly impact this practice, once, through them, children can be in touch (almost uninterrupted) with their friends through social media, messaging applications and online games. Thus, what happens when the access to social media and to instant messaging is made by cell phones, which are now, always at hand? The potential to contact or meet friends at any time, at any place has generated new concerns and anxieties about the fact and the possibility (or need) of being always *online*. Here, it is also the challenge of knowing to pursue a balance between the privacy and the exposure; reminding that that, in fact, is a challenge to which adults are also exposed to.

Researches carried out in Brazil and in Portugal indicate that the differences between the children (social, age and gender differences) also change significantly their relation with digital media, that is, ways of access and use. In terms of social issue, the increase of the number of children who have their own cell phone enhances the more intensive use of *online* games (Vincent, 2015). Furthermore, a *room culture* (Bovill; Livingstone, 2001) is supported and reinforced as the child does not longer need to get out of the room and of the comfort of his/her bed to watch TV, play, use the computer or even talk to someone in his/her home. However, the researcher C. Ponte clarifies that the increase in the number of children owning a cell phone has to be relativized:

This increase in the use of smartphones shows how the industries are fostering the access of young people to the internet via cell phone. Yet, if this is an impressive number, if we analyze in which conditions they have access, how the internet package is, if there is Wi-Fi or not, there we can be see restrictions. A youth that has only one cell phone, has few options, because having a laptop, or even having a desktop or tablet provides other possibilities of use [...].
Certainly, that issue of social status, even more in a country like Brazil, is huge and remarkable. When we asked: do you access the internet via smartphone? There is no big class difference, the point is that boys from upper classes have smartphone, have laptops, have PCs, have console… While the others have a cell phone or a smartphone that often, allows only access to Facebook and Instagram and is canalized to use only those. Often it does not have Wi-Fi, the access is through 3G that is more expensive and frequently limits the usage time (Ponte, 2016).

For this researcher, the issue of gender also stands out, being marked by the differences of the activities carried out by girls and boys on the internet, in the different countries. She communicates that, beyond the project EU Kids Online and Kids Online Latin America, there still are other countries participating of a project of UNICEF, the Global

Kids Online, which enables the expansion of data about social and cultural contexts not contemplated in the two first projects. Therefore, the researcher states that:

> The gender, especially, is very marked in the different activities that they do, in different countries (at the moment, besides EU Kids Online and Kids Online América Latina, there are other countries participating in a UNICEF project, the Global KidsOnline ).
> One thing that this contact with researches from different countries has shown is that if, in many countries there is no great gender differences in the way parents treat the boys and girls in terms of access to technology, in many other countries this difference is abyssal. For instance, in Turkey, in the 2010 study, when the researcher arrived at the homes and asked: how many children are there in this home? The parents answered: there are two. After a while, the interviewer noticed that, in fact, there were 5 children, two boys and three girls. The results in Brazil show that there are no differences in relation to the possession [of equipment], but there are differences in the use and a little in the parents mediation. However, this issue is one that, can be only well captured in qualitative research (Ponte, 2016).

In respect to games and to internet, in general, sex is treated as entertainment and the women as objects (for example, Lara Croft, with strong sex appeal, she is one of the few female protagonists in electronic games). At the same time, nowadays there is a discourse of women empowerment (widespread in social networking). Thus, the children and adolescents often realize contradictions between what they listen to and they observe in life in society. Thereby, we asked the researcher Cristina Ponte, how she perceives the senses that children build up in regard to sexuality and to gender relations in the midst of the potentially conflicting messages. She answered:

> A paradoxical example of a country with a strong conservative dimension are the child beauty pageants in the United States. These contest are live, are broadcasted through television, with over sensualized girls. The children' sexualization, especially of girls is a reality corresponding to drives, to patriarchy's desire, there is a whole patriarchal culture in which media is inserted. Thinking media is the only liable for that, is ignoring a whole context that is a context in which this issues, in a consumer, hedonist society, are much intensified. There are some programs and policies which intend to contradict the large gap between girls and the game programming, intensifying exactly programs which correspond to their interests and which enable them to programming (Ponte, 2016).

In a research about contents intended for younger audiences, through *girls and boys g*ames sites, Felipe (2012) tried to observe what they broadcast in regard to narratives about gender relations and sexuality. The results pointed out that, in the event of *sites* targeted to girls, the emphasis is in activities focused in the cult of the body and its beautification, in housekeeping and in the looking for a perfect match. Yet, to the boys, the activities comprise action and speed games and the ones, which stimulate the logical and mathematical thinking. To the author, as cultural artifacts, the sites (re)produce an extremely binary view,

in which boys and girls, men and women, move along in completely separated worlds (Felipe, 2012). That is, a sexist language was detected, establishing heteronormative patterns. Here, therefore, we are in line with what the researcher Cristina Ponte states above: the media certainly reproduce the patriarchal system in which they are inserted, but attribute to them the structure of this system would be not only inappropriate, but also senseless.

Concluding her comprehension of the relation between children social status[10], gender and sociability, the researcher Cristina Ponte considers that:

> [...] this experience of being online all the time cannot be forgotten in regard to children's sociability. Inês Vitorino's team, from Fortaleza [CE, Brazil] did a research with focal groups with 11 and 12 years old children from middle, upper middle and low classes. This research showed how they live... and here, mostly, there is gender difference, especially in upper middle class girls, which remain all the time on the internet, all the time connected, doing all kinds of activities, watching movies, chatting. There is an expression for that: 'Gente, vamos madrugar!!!' ['Guys, let's remain awake late into the night], and what does 'remain awake late into the night' mean? It is at midnight everyone in their beds sending messages each other, jointly watching movies and commenting, and is a whole intensification of these sharing online. Another thing that also calls attention in the use in Brazil is an exposure, a cult of the body and of the presentation, also a cult of popularity, obtainment of more likes, the research shows a series of experiences of the intensification of exposure, of the self-presentation, and to analyze this the gaze of Erving Goffman is inspiring. As the children are always growing when they introduce themselves to each other, looking for a good performance (Ponte, 2016).

The issues pointed out by Cristina Ponte, in the texting above, indicate how the use of cell phones by children enabled an enlargement and/or creation and combination of their own practices or *communication repertories* (Haddon, 2004) with the peers, and also other coincidences (through social media and even through their YouTube channels). Thus, some more questions may be asked: are children developing new concepts of *friendship* and different kinds of privacy, from the communication and interaction form in social media, platforms and applications?

Observing the fact through the prism of age differences among the kids, it can be seen that the current discourses about the *digital native*[11] – with natural capability to deal with new media – do not rely on some children practices (younger and/or with limited access to technologies) which express afraid of making mistakes or even of do not master the digital culture codes, especially before their peers (Loureiro, 2017).

## Intra e Intergenerational Relations with Digital – the playing and learning

To understand the relations between adults/children and between children/children when related to the experiences with digital media, we should not observe only the changes in the generations over the time, but the

> [...] invisible, direct and indirect relations, through which the children strongly incorporate themselves into structured sets of wider social relations than their immediately local relations and potentially extensible to the global social system. (Alanen, 2001, p. 142, our own translation).

In other words, it must be taken in consideration the impacts of the concept of generation, once the childhood, as structural category of the society, "[...] changes continuously, *as well* is a permanent structural category through which all the children pass through" (Qvortrup, 2010, p. 637, italic in the original).

Research data from Cetic.br point out that between 11 to 17 years old adolescents, 46% asserted to know a lot of things about how to use the Internet and 70% believe to know more about Internet than their parents. In this case, the parental mediation deserves attention, especially when only 50% of the parents are users. From that perspective, we asked the researcher Cristina Ponte how she evaluates should be the parents' attitude in face of the ways their children use the digital devices:

> We ought not generalize. It is very different think about countries like Portugal and Brazil, where internet penetration among the parents is recent, and think about countries like Norway, where parents and grandparents already use, a lot the internet for many years.
> A North American researcher, Lynn Schofield Clark, has been working with the issue of how parents can be brought to the digital and how they can deal with the challenge of digital. She says that this situation of parents who do not use the internet can provide a joint learning environment. The children teaching their parents and the parents learning with their children the technical aspects; meanwhile the parents can realize certain situations the children are not aware, social issues, like, send a message that can offend the other. Here, it can be another joint learning, especially when children are 8, 9 and 10 years old, and still are not adolescents and have a good relationship with their parents. The parents can take this opportunity to do things along with their children and learn with them (Ponte, 2016).

In this sense, several products circulating in the media like *video-games*, for instance, seem to put in conflict the rhetoric of digital native (children) versus digital immigrant (parents), once they are products which attend the new forms of *generational addressing*, to the extent that attract the interest of different generations (Buckingham, 2007).

One the other hand, the access of children to digital media, especially to electronic games in familiar environments, is limited by

several restrictions (time to play, access limited by passwords, etc.). furthermore, computers at home are frequently seen as tools to help in learning, because even when the children play, the parents "[...] try to incorporate this activity in a discursive frame which conceptualizes the use of computers by children in regard to the acquisition of technological skills to be used in the future" (Facer; Furlong; Furlong; Sutherland, 2001, p. 102).

Buckingham (2007) points out that, in the last 50 years, the children's time and the leisure spaces have been privatized and increasingly subjected to adult supervision. Therefore, the main space for children's entertainment has been displaced from public spaces (streets, squares and parks) to homes (initially to the living room and, later to the rooms). The worries about the city violence and the fear of strangers lead the families to equip the children's rooms to be a safe place for entertainment.

In this context, children's activities with  digital media work as a form of *eduteniment* or *creating a syllabus* of the familiar life, in which leisure is transformed in educative activities (Buckingham; Scanlon, 2004) and, thus, productive, what puts in action the discourse of the childhood as vulnerable and of the child as learner/student, even at home. In this way, the image of a child or adolescent alone, locked in the room, for hours, with her/his cell phone, console or compute, allows understand the apocalyptic discourse reverberated through the media and incur directly on parents' speeches and attitudes when the subject matter is digital media. However, actually research what children and youth are doing with their devices can bring new perspectives to this issue.

The limits established for use of the digital media at home, along with the appreciation of a rhetoric of addiction and violence, seem to preclude the analysis of media as also important in children's lives. These ideas only reproduce the opposing between playing and learning, positioning playing in the same place as leisure and the children present time and the learning at the same place as work and the aspirations for the future. Therefore, the possible learning and abilities of the children obtained through digital media are ignored because they are seen just as entertainment, once the game "[...] used in a semantic system as opposite of work and, therefore, of seriousness and of helpfulness, [...] cannot receive any of the values pertaining to the universe it is opposed to" (Brougère, 1998, p. 201).

Therefore, only the abilities restricted to the domain of socially undervalued activities are conferred to the children by these dichotomous discourses, like games, music and imaginative activities. Those abilities are "[...] considered as lower, without real value to the adults, when they are not envied in a nostalgic way" (Livingstone, 2011, p. 13). Hence, even when the children are understand as empowered, they are restricted to the characteristics and attributions conferred to the so-called *child task*[12].

In order to also highlight the trends present in the systemic production of knowledge about childhood, children and electronic games, now, we present a survey conducted in the magazines *Games and Culture*, *Children & Society* e *Childhood*[13], about the subject matter.

Except the magazine *Games and Culture* (which made available articles only after 2006), the other two magazines have published articles since the late 1980s; but, in spite of the electronic games being part of the children and adolescents' life for about 40 years, there is only one research located in the 1990s, while others only arose from the year 2000. That means that the academy just started to consider this thematic as relevant from the early XXI century. Questioned in this regard, the researcher interviewed considered that this shortage of researches must be analyzed taken into account also the way in which, historically, the Sociology of Childhood treated media and how Media Sociology dealt the children.

> I observe that these two magazines from the Sociology of Childhood field [Children & Society e Childhood, and for a long time the Sociology of Childhood paid little attention to the media. Themes like social conditions of the childhood, the child labor, the economy, health care and social assistance, so, the child in society, especially in Children & Society, is the main focus, or analysis a lot the childhood cultures, the playing. I would say that, maybe, we have already started, even though slowly, to consider that we cannot perceive the childhood without consider the media dimension, children are playing there. Yet, if the Sociology of Childhood does not discuss a lot media, the media sociology also almost does not speak about children. Therefore, it is important contradict these two trends, showing that the Sociology of Childhood has to consider media and the media sociology has to consider the children (Ponte, 2016).

In her answer, Cristina Ponte highlights the trend of this two subjects to ignore each other, in other words, highlights the lack of dialog between two fields that should already taking into account, in their researches, the massive presence of the children in digital media world. As the researcher points out, "*the childhood cannot be perceived without considering the media dimension,* [because] *they are playing there*".

## Final Considerations

The researches about children and childhood have recorded, in the last years, significant investments arose from a reconceptualization movement of these categories anchored, especially, in the principles of considering the children as social players and the childhood as a generational group with rights, creating and also highlighting, in this way, the need to develop search forms in which the children's voices shall be taken into account by construing their actions.

In face of the exposed in this article, it can be perceived, however, that researches are still being developed with epistemological conceptions that ignore the children's interpretation in order to the construction of a knowledge that shall not be only about them, but constructed

with their presence. It is important to highlight that it is not about a change in order to only socially emancipate the children from a role historically submissive, but it is about taking into account the fact that the political and ethical points about the children's right to be heard in the researches which consider children as their objects, are aligned to arguments about the epistemological advantages that this listening can bring to the investigations oriented in this way. This results directly from the comprehension that the children are in a better position to produce knowledge about themselves and about their peers and that, thus, an investigation has significant gains when the children's participation is requested in the process and their knowledge (points of view, perspectives, visions) is accepted as genuine and valid (Christensen; Allison, 2005; Fernandes; Marchi, 2020).

In this sense, and resuming the objective of this article, this epistemological change can be considered as an action which aims to shift the debate – about the relation between children and digital media – from the deterministic and polarized positions, whether in regard to the digital media, whether in regard to the view of the children as just victims in danger (passive receiver) or as possibly dangerous (because they are empowered by media).

To the extent we think that the massive use of the digital media is a social phenomenon relatively new, which has not been part of the childhood of most of the nowadays children's parents and teachers, it is understood that we are facing the challenge of articulate, in future researches, the symbolic production of children – which is reflected in their ways of playing in the contemporaneity – with the forms and different contents especially directed to them by the cultural industry at the present time (Sarmento, 2008). That is, if, actually, the researches, parents, teachers, legislators, wish to obtain knowledge about the relations and uses that children establish with digital media, if they wish to know what happens when they use them, it must be taken into account what the own children have to say about it.

Furthermore, we need to understand that digital media and the internet cannot be only considered as tools or ancillary resources for the education of children, but as *social spaces* (Pretto, 2017) where they circulate, often without know or take advantage of every possibility of this universe. A very current challenge in the school routine must be the fostering of collaborative activities with digital media in a way that the children may produce and disseminate contents; and this against the concerns about installing filters to block applications or about investing in the creation of educative programs or software, as has already be done with the book, for instance, that in school we call *didactic* or as the toy, that became *educational*.

Thus, researches empirically grounded are necessary to investigate the use of digital media by the children as diverse group (crossed by gender, class, age, etc. variables) and in the different and unequal social and cultural contexts. In this way, an important step towards the breach of homogeneous and polarized views about children and me-

dias, points of views centered just in risks and dangers – present in the pessimist discourse and in the optimistic one – to which the children are supposedly exposed or are exposed when in contact with medias, will be taken.

It is understood that the issues highlighted in this article show that the studies about the intersection of children with digital media still represents a non-consensual and quite fragmented field. Furthermore, indicate, as also the researcher Cristina Ponte pointed out in her interview, that the meeting and constant dialog between the Sociology of Childhood and the Media Sociology is necessary, which so far, has been kept relatively away or with few dialog about this as current as crucial subject matter, in the children's life.

## Notes

1 The authors thank CAPES the financing of this article though scholarship granted to them (Doctoral scholarship Sandwich- PSDE and Postdoctoral Research scholarship Abroad). Furthermore, they thank the financing of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – UFSC and of Universidade Regional de Blumenau – FURB.

2 Professor of the Communication Science Department of the FCSH, New University of Lisbon, Portugal.

3 Some years ago, non-EU countries were also included in the research like Brazil, Chile, Australia, among others and expanded the objectives of the project due to the increase of access to digital means and the emergence of new platforms and contents. Therefore, in 2015 and 2018 the project deepened the knowledge about the childhood conditions in the contemporary societies through the arrangements of a pan-European research that would integrate the new digital ecology. Cf. Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx>.

4 Marchi (2007) points out the maintenance of the essentialist and naturalized view of the childhood, even on the part of authors, which consider the phenomenon as social and historical construction. In this article, we started from the same comprehension

5 *Childhood social worlds or childhood cultures* are concepts generated by childhood social studies and define the children capabilities to construct, among peers, significance modes of the world by means of actions that are different from the adult's ones.

6 Giddens and Sutton (2016) define *moral panic* as the exaggerated reaction of the society to a sort of behavior assumed as symptomatic of a discomfort that can be social or moral.

7 Cetic.br, created in 2015 with the mission of monitor the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), is a department of the Núcleo de Informação e Coordenação do Ponto BR (Nic.br) that implements decisions and project of the Comitê Gestor da Internet do Brasil (Cgi.br). Available at: <https://www.cetic.br>.

8  The major example of the *Columbine massacre* is mentioned, where two youths from a school in Colorado (USA), hypothetically inspired by the game *Doom*, killed 12 colleagues and a teacher, hurting 21 people.

9  This view is clear when calls attention to the fact that, in a more recent review (2018) of the International Classification of Diseases of WHO, the *gaming disorder* was classified as a disease.

10 Due to the limits established to this text, the relation among the digital media use and children and social status will not be covered.

11 The categories *digital native* and *digital immigrants* are use in order to define, respectively, the ones that were born already immersed in the technologies and the ones not born in the digital age (Prensky, 2001).

12 The concepts of *child task* and *student task* (intrinsically related) shall be understood in an interpretative frame of the childhood/child paradigm as social constructions. The meeting of these two concepts happened in the same space (the school), both make reference to the *invention processes* and to the molding of programs, rules, instruments and pedagogic practices which turn the school into the place,  par excellence, of the child (Marchi, 2007).

13 Survey carried out by Loureiro (2017), in a Doctoral Theses in Education.

## References

ALANEN, Leena. Childhood as a Generational Condition: children's daily life in a central Finlandtown. In: ALANEN, Leena; MAYALL, Berry (Org.). **Conceptualizing Child-Adult Relations**. Londres: Falmer, 2001.

BOVILL, Moira.; LIVINGSTONE, Sonia. **Bedroom Culture and the Privatization of Media Use**. Londres: LSE Research Online, 2001. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000672>. Access on: Jul. 6, 2018.

BROUGÈRE, Giles. **Jogo e Educação**. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas, 1998.

BUCKINGHAM, David. **Crescer na Era das Mídias Eletrônicas**. São Paulo: Loyola, 2007.

BUCKINGHAM, David; SCANLON, Margaret. **Connecting the Family? 'Edutainment' Websites and Learning in the Home**. Education, Communication and Information, v. 4, n. 2/3, p. 271-291, 2004. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1463631042000288282>. Access on: Aug 25. 2018.

BUCKINGHAM, David. Cultura Digital, Educação Midiática e o Lugar da Escolarização. **Educação & Realidade**, Porto Alegre, v. 35, n. 3, p. 37-58, set./dez. 2010. Available at: http://seer.ufrgs.br/educacaoerealidade/article/view/13077. Access on: Aug 10, 2018.

COMITÊ GESTOR DA INTERNET NO BRASIL. **TIC Kids Online Brasil 2017**: pesquisa sobre o uso da internet por crianças e adolescentes. São Paulo: Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil, 2018. Disponível em: <http://www.cetic.br>. Access on: Sep 1, 2019.

COMITÊ GESTOR DA INTERNET NO BRASIL. **TIC Kids Online Brasil 2015**: pesquisa sobre o uso da internet por crianças e adolescentes. São Paulo: Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil, 2016. Disponível em: <http://www.cetic.br>. Access on: Sep 1, 2018.

CHRISTENSEN, Pia; ALLISON, James (Org.). **Investigação com Crianças** – perspectivas e práticas. Porto: Paula Frassinetti, 2005.

FACER, Keri; FURLONG, John; FURLONG, Ruth; SUTHERLAND, Rosamund. Constructing the Child Computer User: from public policy to private practices. **British Journal of Sociology of Education**, v. 22, n. 1, p. 91-108, 2001. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425690123324>. Access on: Jul 10, 2018.

FEENBERG, Andrew. O Que é a Filosofia da Tecnologia? In: CONFERÊNCIA PARA ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS DE KOMAMBA. jun. 2003, 'What is philosophy of technology?. **Anais...** Tradução de Agustín Apaza, com revisão de Newton Ramos de Oliveira, 2003. Available at: <http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/Feenberg_OQueEFilosofiaDaTecnologia.pdf>. Access on: Sep 1, 2018.

FELIPE, Jane. 'Vinde a mim as criancinhas': pedofilização e a construção de gênero nas mídias contemporâneas. In: PELÚCIO, Larissa; SOUZA, Luis Antonio Francisco; MAGALHÃES, Bóris Ribeiro; SABATINE, Thiago Teixeira (Org.). **Olhares Plurais para o Cotidiano**: gênero, sexualidade e mídia. Marília: Oficina Universitária; São Paulo: Cultura Acadêmica, 2012.

FERNANDES; Natália; MARCHI, Rita de Cássia. **A Participação das Crianças nas Pesquisas**: nuances a partir da etnografia e na investigação participativa. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**, v. 25, Rio de Janeiro, 2020. Available at <http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1413-24782020000100600&lng=pt&nrm=iso>. Access on: Aug 20, 2020

GEE, James. **What Videogames Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy**. Nova York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

GIDDENS, Anthony; SUTTON, Philip. **Conceitos Essenciais da Sociologia**. São Paulo: Editora da Unesp, 2016.

HADDON, Leslie. **Information and Communication Technologies in Everyday Life**. Oxford: Berg, 2004.

JAMES, Allison; JENKS, Chris; PROUT, Alan. **Theorising Childhood**. Cambridge: Polity, 1998.

LIVINGSTONE, Sonia. Internet Literacy: a negociação dos jovens com as novas oportunidades *on-line*. **Matrizes**, v. 4, n. 2, p. 11-42, 2011. Available at: <http://www.revistas.usp.br/matrizes/article/view/38290/41112>. Access on: Oct 10, 2016.

LIVINGSTONE, Sonia; KIRWIL, Lucyna; PONTE, Cristina; STAKSRUD, Elisabeth. Em suas Próprias Palavras: o que preocupa as crianças *on-line*? In: MACEDO, Xavier Nunes; PIRES, David Ulisses Brasil Simões; ANJOS, Fernanda Alves (Org.). **Classificação Indicativa e Novas Mídias**. Brasília: Ministério da Justiça/Secretaria Nacional de Justiça, 2014.

LIVINGSTONE, Sonia; MASCHERONI, Giovanna; DREIER, Michael; CHAUDRON, Sthephane; LAGAE, Kaat. **How Parentes of Young Children Manage Digital Devices at Home**: the role of income, educationand parental style. Londres: EU Kids Online, LSE, 2015. Available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EUKidsIV/PDF/Parentalmediation.pdf>. Access on: Mar 2, 2017.

LOUREIRO, Carla Cristiane. **'Eu aprendo a brincar de mais coisas que eu não sabia!'**: crianças e videogames numa brinquedoteca escolar. 2017. 250 p. Tese (Doutorado em Educação). Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC. Florianópolis, 2017.

MARCHI, Rita de Cássia. **Os sentidos (paradoxais) da infância nas Ciências Sociais**: um estudo de sociologia da infância crítica sobre a 'não-criança' no Brasil. 2007. 308 p. Tese (Doutorado em Sociologia Política). Programa de Pós Graduação em Sociologia Política, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis, 2007

PEREIRA, Rita Ribes. Entre o (En)canto e o Silêncio das Sereias: sobre o (não) lugar da criança na cibercultura. **Childhood & Philosophy**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 9, n. 18, p. 319-343, jul./dez. 2013. Available at: <http://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/childhood/article/view/20660>. Access on: Aug 2, 2018.

PONTE, Cristina. **Lisboa (Portugal)**. Entrevista. May 19, 2016.

PRENSKY, Marc. **Não me Atrapalhe, Mãe** – *Eu estou aprendendo!* São Paulo: Phorte, 2010.

PRETTO, Nelson De Luca. **Educações, Culturas e Hackers**: escritos e reflexões. Salvador, Bahia: Edufba, 2017.

QVORTRUP, James. A Infância Enquanto Categoria Estrutural. **Educação e Pesquisa**, São Paulo, v. 36, n. 2, p. 631-644, ago. 2010. Available at: <http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1517-97022010000200014&lng=en&nrm=iso>. Access on: Jun 10, 2018.

SARMENTO, Manuel; PINTO, Manuel. **As Crianças**: contextos e identidades. Braga: Centro de Estudos da Criança/ Universidade do Minho, 1997.

SARMENTO, Manuel. Visibilidade Social e Estudo da Infância. In: VASCONCELLOS, Vera; SARMENTO, Manuel (Org.). **Infância (In)visível**. Araraquara: Junqueira & Marin, 2007. P. 25-49.

SARMENTO, Manuel. A Reinvenção do Ofício de Criança e de Aluno. **Atos de Pesquisa em Educação**, FURB, Blumenau, v. 6, n. 3, p. 581-602, set./dez., 2011. Available at: <www.furb.br>. Access on: Aug 25, 2018.

SARMENTO, Manuel. Radicalização da Infância na Segunda Modernidade. Para uma sociologia da infância crítica. **Configurações**, Porto, n. 4, p. 91-113, 2008. Available at: <https://configuracoes.revues.org/498>. Access on: Aug 2, 2018.

TURKLE, Sherry. **A Vida no Ecrã**: a identidade na era da internet. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, 1997.

VALENTINE, Gil; HOLLOWAY, Sarah. Cyberkids? Exploring children's identities and social networks in on-line and off-line worlds. Annals of the In: ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS, 2002. **Anais...** v. 92, n. 2. P. 302-319. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8306.00292/abstract>. Access on: Aug 2, 2018.

VINCENT, Jane. **Mobile Opportunities**: exploring positive mobile opportunities for European children. Londres: POLIS, LSE, 2015. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/61015/>. Access on: Jul 6, 2018.

**Carla Cristiane Loureiro** holds a Master's degree in Education. Teacher at the lower Elementary School at the Colégio de Aplicação da UFSC (CA/UFSC).
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8958-7503
E-mail: carlacrisloureiro@gmail.com

**Rita de Cássia Marchi** holds a Doctoral degree in Political Sociology (UFSC-PARIS V) and Postdoctoral degree in Child Social Studies. Research Professor of the Master and Doctorate's courses in Education e of Social Science and Philosophy Department of the Universidade Regional de Blumenau (FURB).
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3408-2732
E-mail: rt.mc@bol.com.br