NP³ Case Study 4

What is NP³

New Purposes – New Practices – New Pedagogy (NP³) is exploring the digital practices that children are engaging with outside school and the extent to which these are recognised, valued and influencing practices inside primary schools. We are concerned with issues to do with social justice and the institutional factors that impact on schools' responses to pupils' digital practices.
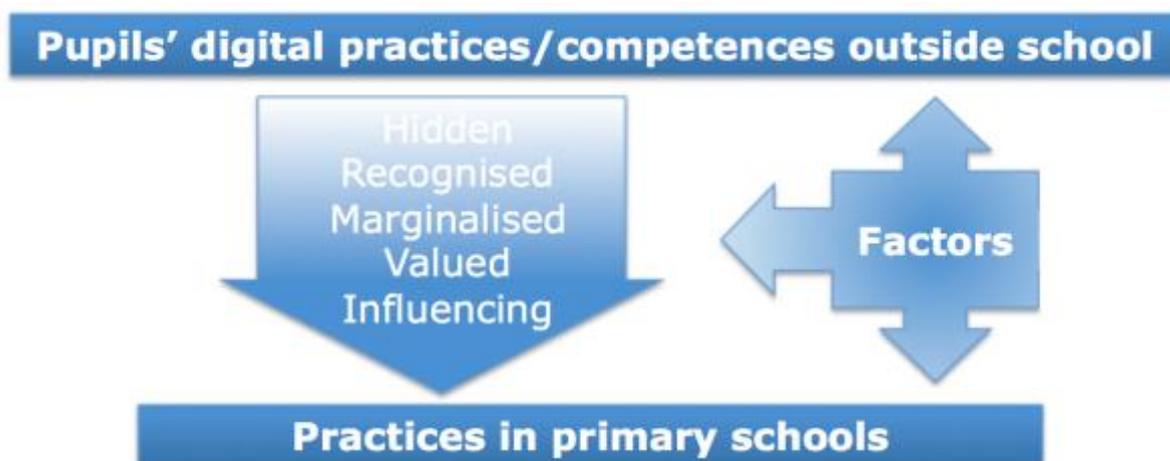
Our Research Questions (RQs) are:

RQ1   What are the digital practices that pupils bring to their learning in school?

RQ2   Across subject domains what do teachers' intended and enacted pedagogic practices indicate about their awareness of and the value accorded to pupils' digital competencies, and how do pupils' experience these pedagogic practices?

RQ3   What institutional circumstances and practices enable or undermine how pupils' digital competencies and practices are recognised (RQ1) and integrated into teachers' practice (RQ2)?

RQ4   What are the consequences of the answers to RQs 1-3 for learning in terms of social justice, and across and within subject domains?

RQ5   How does the research inform how to represent and model a participative pedagogy of mutuality (Bruner, 1996; Wenger, 1998; Alexander, 2000; Murphy & Wolfenden, 2013) and engage teachers with that pedagogy?

NP³ is a collaboration between the Open University, Lancaster University and Manchester Metropolitan University, which is funded by The Society for Educational Studies (SES) and led by Professor Peter Twining.

This brief report provides **a snapshot** of the digital practices evident in one of the Case Studies that we conducted between June and December 2016, with a summary of emerging findings from this Case Study.

For further details about NP³ go to **http://www.np3.org.uk**.

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Case Study Overview

Case Study 4 is an extension of Exploratory Study 9.

The school is a small Community school on the edge of a town in North East England, in a region with low density population. The school caters for children from nursery (2 years old) to Year 6 (11 years old), who live on a public housing estate around the school. It is constituted by a Foundation Unit, two classes at key stage 1 and five at key stage 2 that together hold just over 200 full time children and approximately 30 part time Nursery places. The school has a far higher than average proportion of children on Free School Meals and with Special Educational Needs and a far lower than average proportion of children with English as a Second Language.

The school's performance is generally well viewed: in 2012 Ofsted judged the school as good with outstanding features. In 2015 all children made expected or better progress in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 standard assessment tests.

The study took place across the whole school and involved observations, interviews and the examination of artefacts with participation of all year groups.

Emerging findings

- This school promotes children's digital practices through increasing their competencies at school.
- The school makes extensive efforts to make connections with children's home-based interests, including where these involve digital technologies.
- An ethos of designing activities shared across the whole school community is a significant aspect of encouraging children's self-confidence and willingness to expand their repertoires for learning.
- Leadership by the Head and Deputy Head is vital in giving direction to putting policies into practice including supporting the development of each child as an individual. They also show a lively interest in technological developments in educational and popular culture spheres of life.
- Collaborative problem-solving and experimenting in the face of difficulties are modelled by adults. This constructively promotes students' own strategies of coping with problems and developing resilience.

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# Pupils' digital practices outside school

Data is drawn from 2 sources:

- 6 Vlogs made by 4 children (1 by a Year 3 boy; 1 by a Year 4 girl; 2 by a Year 3 boy and 2 by a Year 6 girl). This was a voluntary activity introduced by the ICT coordinator; who shared the vlogs with the NP3 team. Informed consent was obtained.
- A discussion between a year 6 class, the researcher and ICT coordinator regarding their expected uses of digital technologies during the imminent Summer holidays.

The first Year 3 boy's vlog took the form of an interview of him by his mother. When asked what apps and programmes he used he replied, with spontaneity and confidence, "Telegram make, Google Earth, Subway Surfer, Candy Crush and of course I use WordPress which I've learned at school." He went on to explain that his main reason for going on the internet was to find music and watch videos of animated children's programmes. He also talked about how his interest in comic strip design [a whole school shared practice] was shared at home: "Daddy has started a dragon comic." He went on to discuss Puppet Pals, learnt at school and also enjoyed at home.

The Year 4 girl used her own equipment to record her vlog in which she described two mobile games she had been playing that day: a game within Netmarble [a games platform], which she played with her mum, and described as "like Monopoly"; and Sunken Secrets, which involved trading.

Another Year 3 boy described his use of YouTube to watch coaching videos about football skills. He explained how he watches these "a couple of times each" before going into the garden to practice. "If I can't do them I try again." He claimed that they helped his development "as a better footballer." A few days later he made another vlog about his enjoyment of playing a Fifa football game.

A Year 6 girl discussed her favourite app, Musical.ly, a music video social network. Her vlog was skilfully edited to include screenshots from the app which she used to demonstrate her practices. These included uploading her own short music videos. A few days later she made another video about her use of Pokémon GO; at this time the craze was just beginning in the UK and she was an early adopter. She described negative aspects of the game as propounded in media discourse and then demonstrated her own use of it, including through walk throughs; the image on the right is an extract from this, edited to conceal her player ID. "Your character moves where you actually are in the world….. with your Pokémon that you find – I've found all of these so far, you can battle with them, you can buy things for them….get eggs, I haven't got any eggs…I've dressed the character in blue, my favourite colour." She described how she was learning more about the game, including from online tips and her cousins. She suggested a benefit of the game was that it promotes exercise. Apart from the technical skills and confidence evident in creating the vlog, this student also demonstrated an understanding of the genre of YouTube videos, with friendly greetings and sign offs at the beginning and end of each vlog.
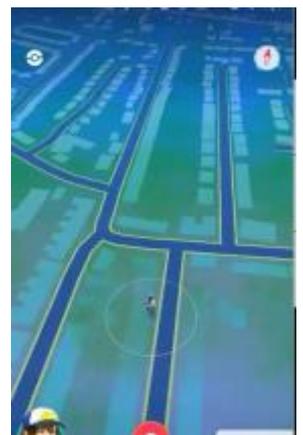
In the class discussion students shared their experiences of IT outside school. They mentioned AI assistants such as Siri (Apple) and Cortina (Microsoft) to find things out, both for serious reasons and for playful purposes such as finding jokes. They were aware of various restrictions on social media use for children under 13. They were mostly keen to play Pokémon GO, although they had experienced difficulties since at this point the servers were overwhelmed. They were aware of the risks being talked about in the media, principally regarding the possible danger of being distracted in public places. They were full of ideas regarding gadgets and games they would like to be able to pursue in the Summer holidays such as trying out an underwater camera or building a go kart. Also discussed was "Littergram" an app for identifying local litter, photographing it and sharing with the council. Children said they would like to use it over the Summer to promote a cleaner environment on their estate.

In School

Context

The school has a strong ethos of making connections across all classes and age groups in school wherever possible. This is instantiated in varies ways across the school's organisation, policies and practices. For example, whole school cross-curricular topics are designed, with differential goals according to age and stage. All children and teachers belong to small "houses" with membership across ages and activities that ensure social connections. This sense of local identity is cemented through names for the houses that are familiar to all children, derived from local street names. At the same time, there is an emphasis on the importance of supporting children in their aspirations and indeed encouraging them to consider future identities that might not otherwise appear obvious to them in their local surroundings. Therefore there is an emphasis on school trips, not only as resources for learning but as experientially and emotionally significant rites of passage. The school's annual visit to London by Year 6 children is looked forward to throughout their school career.

Vision and digital spaces

Leadership is vital to the permeation of practices with digital technologies throughout the school. The senior management team recognise that just as access to digital technologies and experience with them varies among the children, so it does among adults in the school. Our analysis foregounded three themes as particularly salient to the leadership of practices with digital technologies across the school:
   A. A conscious decision that a suite of several specific apps and programmes will be emphasised and shared across the school. This means that expertise in these can be shared, expectations are clear and it connects with the school ethos of whole school practices.
   B. A willingness to encourage and model collaborative approaches to problem solving and learning. All teachers, learning assistants and children are encouraged to share issues they experience as they arise, for example through technical compatibility problems or new challenges.
   C. A perception that e-safety is part of a holistic approach to wellbeing. Although specific dimensions to online interactions and risks are recognised, there is a belief that pre-emptive and responsive reactions are best located in general principles and practices that permeate across all human interactions.

The school is well supplied with digital technologies. It retains a spacious IT suite which is used for appropriate activities and computer clubs. There are also some individual PCs in other areas of the school and a supply of tablets which are booked out to specific groups. Classrooms also possess Interactive Whiteboards which are mainly used by teachers to orchestrate plenary activities. However, children are also involved in using them in self-generated activities from Foundation upwards. Images below are from observations of a Foundation class.

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Example 1: Year 2 games testers

This year 2 class took place in the ICT suite. It was led by a teaching assistant who was also the ICT manager. She was accustomed to working with teachers across the curriculum. The children were writing reviews of games that a distant English school has put on their website. The children had previously had experience with the game building software, Scratch; they had created a "sprite" and written simple algorithms. Thus they were building on some understanding of how games are built. They had previously reviewed some iPad games and games that others have written with Scratch. In this lesson they

were reviewing games using a template with the prompts: How much do you like the game? What do you like about it? What would you do to improve it? The overall learning objective was expressed as becoming a games tester.

Example 2: Year 6 Draw My Life

This session took place very near the end of term, in a Year 6 class, so composed of students who would shortly be leaving the school. The teacher, the Deputy Head, explained the inspiration for the activity, the "Draw My Life" channel on YouTube in which celebrities narrate brief accounts of their lives which are illustrated by professional graphic artists working with marker pens on small whiteboards. The students used "Explain Everything" software which he explained the pupils could use working individually with iPads. The students produced multimodal texts about their lives in primary school; the observed session was their second spent on this task. Students had a range of resources including pictures and texts the teacher had sent them. Students talked about what they were producing, including through their own drawings they videoed, and speeded up to bring into the product. Their texts included from family lore that they were actually too young to remember, memorable events in primary school and images that were representative in some way of their current identities. Pupils talked confidently to the researcher about their topics, technical choices and memories. "In year 4 we moved [here]. I was a bit sad at the time but soon got used to it." "In Year 6 we had our trip to London." During the lesson the teacher occasionally screencast somebody's work onto the main Interactive Whiteboard to enable a plenary discussion.