

Childcare in the eye of a storm [GB] ^[1]

Focus, The Herald

Author: Williams, Martin

Source: The Herald

Format: Article

Publication Date: 28 Jan 2008

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Sixteen month-old Cameron Logan and five-month-old Zac Gallacher are rarities in Scotland. They are two of only a few children in Scotland whose progress at nursery can be monitored by their parents on the internet through webcams.

Cameron's mother, Donna, 28, has not just embraced the technology as a parent but also as a nursery nurse who knows the professional body is dead against the practice, fearing there are privacy issues for staff and children.

Mrs Logan works at the newly opened Ally Bally Bee day nursery in High Blantyre which is one of only a handful in Scotland currently providing the webcam service. In England, there are understood to be more than 400.

Experts believe child care providers have been scared off by security fears over the use of webcams, highlighted when the Care Commission raised concerns about Technotots in Dundee, the first in Scotland to use webcams to allow parents to keep an internet eye on their children and the staff who care for them.

The Technotots system was installed six years ago but the Commission initially claimed the webcam system raised major legal and human rights issues and that data protection laws, UN conventions and the European Convention on Human Rights could be breached.

Since the Care Commission decided in 2002 that the nursery did not to have its approval to have the webcam, the Dundee nursery now has a large waiting list of parents desperate for the service. That is despite opening a second nursery to cope with demand.

Some existing nurseries interested in installing webcams have had to scrap the idea knowing that one dissenting parent is enough to scupper the plans.

Many nursery nurses are also known to be unhappy at the thought that parents and managers will be watching their every move.

Britain's biggest webcam provider is NurseryCam which has about 90% of the market and provides nurseries with secure, password-protected systems for a few thousand pounds.

...

"The secondary consideration was that it meant our staff was protected. When we were looking into this a member of staff that we knew of was accused of hitting a child. With the cams we felt we could either back up an allegation or disprove it, which is an added protection for parents and us."

He rejected claims that privacy was an issue, saying secure systems are now in place.

"The cameras are nowhere near anywhere where you would have any nudity so nobody even if they were able to get access would see a child getting changed.

"The worst-case scenario is that someone without permission gets to see an image of a child in a room but they would see something much more provocative in a brochure from Marks & Spencer."

But established bodies representing nursery nurses and day nurseries are still against the idea.

The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), the representative body for day nurseries in the UK, is opposed to the use of webcams in nurseries, believing there remains security and privacy issues.

It says that reassurances for parents should come from face-to-face contact with nursery staff and managers.

Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of the NDNA, said: "There are issues regarding human rights and invasion of privacy for both Scottish children and nursery workers.

"While webcams are installed at the discretion of the nursery, there are preferable ways for parents to discover what their child is doing at nursery, such as updates from their child's keyworker and regular parent meetings to discuss their progress and any worries.

"In addition, we have concerns around the security of webcams and it may affect the natural interaction of staff and children if the nursery team feel self-conscious because they are being filmed.

"There are also usually additional costs involved, adding to the fees that parents pay.

"Although we are aware of a small number of nurseries in Scotland who have installed webcams, we would urge any nurseries who start to receive requests from parents for these to discuss the reasons and look for more effective ways to help parents learn more about nursery life, and consider investing the funds which would be spent on webcams back into equipment, staff training and the nursery itself."

The Professional Association of Nursery Nurses, which represents staff, said there was a "mishmash of worries" about webcam nurseries and that money spent on cam systems should be spent on better vetting of staff and proper training.

"We are not assured of the safety. We are not assured that everything is in place to protect the children," said Tricia Pritchard, professional officer for the association.

...

In the US, where daycare facilities with webcams have become popular in what is described as "high-end" early education programmes, official bodies are more cautious about being critical of webcam systems.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, a non-profit organisation that accredits daycare centres in the US, Canada, Puerto Rico and various military bases worldwide, said webcams have become very popular with middle and higher income parents who have a "high interest" in having the option of viewing and monitoring their children during the day.

"For some parents webcams represent peace of mind and for others it provides relief from the initial worry that every parent may feel when they are not able to spend time with their child because they must earn a living," said a spokesman.

"Parents of all backgrounds should note that it takes more than fancy video technology, new toys and a shiny building to have high-quality early learning.

"When it comes to quality, parents must still remember that it's the basics that count, such as teacher interactions with children, small student-teacher ratios, child-initiated, teacher-supported play that incorporates maths, language skills and health and safety." For Mrs Logan the fuss is much ado about nothing.

...

Joy McFarlane, who was a nursery nurse at a bank creche before developing Ally Bally Bee said: "There are people who are concerned about the use of mobile phones and computers and people are constantly worried about Big Brother but we look at technology used properly as the way forward.

"You cannot stop progress, can you?"

- reprinted from The Herald

Region: Europe [2]

Tags: children's rights [3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/08/02/childcare-eye-storm-gb>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/08/02/childcare-eye-storm-gb> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/childrens-rights>