Pedagogical approaches surrounding the touchscreen: The child and practitioner perspective

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13 children aged 3–4 years

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# Abstract

This article reports on the findings of a mixed-methods, interpretive study identifying practitioners’ pedagogical approaches when children aged 3–4 years use touchscreen devices in early years settings in the West Midlands, UK. A multi-site case study approach was adopted involving interviews with 12 practitioners to identify their rationale for using these devices. Coupled with 160 observations of touchscreen practice, this allowed the opportunity to critique intentions with practice, to determine children’s opportunities to play with, and potentially learn from, touchscreen technologies. Capturing child voice was an integral aspect of this study. By providing the opportunity for children to express their views through four focus-group interviews, the study found that there was a distinct difference between children’s and practitioners’ intentions regarding touchscreen play. As a result, practitioners overlooked opportunities to strengthen children’s learning by following their interests. The data were analysed using activity theory as a central theoretical framework. From this analysis, it is argued that pedagogical approaches surrounding touchscreen use in early years settings need to be developed in order to incorporate the child’s voice in decisions which impact on the ways in which they play with these devices.

# Outcome

"The data revealed that practitioners sought for children to gain access to technology at an early age
so that they would not be disadvantaged against their peers when attending primary school... Of the pedagogical approaches implemented, there was a heavy reliance on restrictive mediation techniques (Coyne et al., 2017), such as supervising children’s play and the wide range of
rules which practitioners reinforced. These limited children’s opportunities for exploration and
engagement in activities of interest to them, but were outside of the apps available on the devices.
There were many missed opportunities where children’s learning could have been extended, but were prevented from the restrictions imposed on them to keep them safe... There were clear contradictions between the rules established by practitioners and the
ways that children played, such as accessing the Internet to follow their interests." (Ludgate, 2019: 328-9). "Exploring the nature of their touchscreen play through focus-group interviews, children revealed that they sought a balance between solitary and shared play, and input from practitioners during their free-play time. Nine out of 13 children expressed preference in playing on their own when using touchscreens... Discussions with children revealed that they sought for practitioners to be more involved in their play when they used touchscreens, rather than practitioners being present just to mediate touchscreen play." (Ludgate, 2019: 327)