Using tablets in free play: The implementation of the digital play framework in Greece

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## Sample

A total of 16 children participated in this study (eight boys and eight girls). Children were randomly selected to participate and their mean age was 4.8 years (SD 5 0.78).

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

# Abstract

The use of tablets in a Greek kindergarten class (16 children aged 4–5) under the digital play framework (Bird Edwards, 2015) is explored in this study. The Vygotskian framework was adapted with permission in the Greek language and socio-cultural context. The aim was to understand children’s use of new, touchscreen technologies, but also to identify a useful way to observe the progression of that engagement. The project lasted for 4 months and children were observed ten times (written and video recorded observations). Children were observed in pairs or small groups during their free play with the tablets. Findings suggest that the adapted framework was particularly helpful, when observing children, but could benefit from more flexibility and a less linear structure. Children went through the different stages of the framework using social scaffolding as their most dynamic strategy. This study is significant as it reports on an underexplored context going through a range of social and political transformations (Greece), but also because it provides further insights on how to more efficiently document and assess children’s play with technology.

# Outcome

With almost no help or scaffolding from the teacher, all of children involved in this study were able to solve problems and acquire the skills to operate the device and also to play with a range of different apps. (Hatzigianni et al. 2018: 938-9)

The children were able to “own” the device and use it for their own purposes. They recorded videos and took photos of their own play as well as their friends’ endeavours. (Hatzigianni et al. 2018: 939)

Technology was immersed in their play, making it more interesting but also more social and co-operative. Significantly, the device was not transformed into something else. It was not changed into an imaginary object as children often do in pretend or symbolic play, but rather was adjusted to the children’s social reality. The device was used as a medium to document important achievements, and became a social and cultural artefact of the pre-school room (Vygotsky, 1978, 2016) (Hatzigianni et al. 2018: 939-40)

In line with previous investigations from Fleer (2014) and Arnott (2016), the children’s play became more complex and reflective. The first vignette demonstrated that the children not only used the device for recording their friends’ show but were also in a position to “direct” the show so that it was recorded successfully. They revisited the videos to make sure they improved their skills (their own and their peers’). They improved not only the puppet show but also the way they used the tablet to record it. These reflective thoughts were a positive surprise (Hatzigianni et al. 2018: 940)

After only 6 hours of using the tablets, children made them a seamless part of their play. The second vignette showed how the children were able to incorporate the device into their physical play outside. The race only started when the tablet was ready to record it. The tablet was also used to examine fairness, to determine the outcome of the race and to see whether children were cheating. The tablet was also used to describe and comment (literacy, creativity) on the race, taking examples from other media (eg, TV commentators) (Hatzigianni et al. 2018: 940)

it is very important to note that the device did not isolate any of the children, it was used by them all without any arguments. Here using technology was clearly not the opposite of physical activity. The girl was able to hold the tablet, run and at the same time record her friends. Physical, social, technical and creative skills were all tied together and we were able to witness children’s development holistically and not in separate domains (Hatzigianni et al. 2018: 940)