Toys or Tools? Tablet Applications to Support Literacy Learning
The Team

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Toys or Tools? Using Tablet Computers for Open-Ended Literacy Learning

- **Purpose:**
  - To understand educators’ comfort levels and experience using DT for literacy learning
  - To understand how young children use DT as a means of communicating their ideas
Toys or Tools? Using Tablet Computers for Open-Ended Literacy Learning

• **Purpose:**
  - To explore the value of DT for supporting young children’s literacy development
Theoretical Framework

- Literacy practices are undergoing dramatic changes due to digital tools (Kress, 2010)

- Young children are engaged with digital media in and out of school contexts (Burke, 2013; Clement, 2010)

- Educators are being asked to teach in ways that they did not learn as children or likely in pre-service (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Kirkwood, 2009)

- Educators need to carefully reflect on how best to incorporate DT approaches to teaching Radesky, Schumacher & Zimmerman, 2015)
Methodology and Data Sources

• Methods:
  • Sept 2015-June 2016 (phase 1)
  • Interviews with educators, focus groups, classroom observations, children’s slideshows
  • Three- to six- year-old children in 14 sites are using the app 30 Hands to document their experiences during play-based learning activities and their digital files are being archived and analyzed.
Data Analysis

• Qualitative, as defined by Merriam (2009) and Punch (2009)

• Interview sessions and focus groups were largely open-ended, and the themes emerged as the study progressed

• Children’s slideshows were analyzed in terms of their literacy and digital knowledge and skills.

• The emerging themes were continually modified through “constant comparison” with the data (Glaser, 1992).
Findings
Findings: Children

• Socio-emotional development (sharing, risk-taking, turn-taking, problem solving, confidence, independence)

• Literacy (greater linguistic output, experimenting with text, using home languages, narrative skills)

• Digital skills (learning the language of the iPad and the app, using drawing, video and audio features in combination)
Findings: Educators

- Educators gain new insight into children’s interests and abilities
- A tool to motivate students and empower learners with challenges
- Increased opportunities for documentation of children’s work
- Connections with parents
Findings: Schools

• Partnerships between educators (focus groups)

• Building digital capacity (hardware/software)

• Home-school connections

• Preparing children for a digital world
Two Case Studies

• Dylan and the “I love” story
Two Case Studies

• Josh and the spider web
Conclusions

- DT implementation takes time, patience and support

- The degree of implementation by the teachers ranged across the kindergarten classrooms

- A range of interest, engagement, and types of use by the children

- Use of the open-ended iPad app was beneficial to the children’s literacy and digital literacy development

- Teachers considered the app to be a useful tool in their pedagogy
Recommendations

• Be patient and flexible

• Have consistent routines

• Expect a range of interest

• Celebrate and showcase the children’s creations

• Have technical and pedagogical support available