

Lisa Kervin: Thank you for joining us for the first in our series of four podcasts on what high quality experiences and interactions look like in the context of digital technologies.

I'm Professor Lisa Kervin. I'm the Director of Research for Early Start at the University of Wollongong and one of the leads for educational research in Australia's Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child.

My research focuses on young children and how they engage with literate practices, particularly digital. I also focus on the importance of play and interactions.

Steven Howard: And I'm Professor Stephen Howard. I'm a researcher with Early Start and the Center of Excellence for the Digital Child. One of my areas of research focus has been what constitutes high quality interactions, particularly those that show evidence of influence for young children's development and outcomes.

Across the four podcasts of this series and the short but we think compelling resources we've curated to accompany each one will provide evidence based insights and practical suggestions about how we can engage in high quality digital interactions. About how we can use digital experiences for exploration and imagination.

And how we can set up children to become safe and productive digital citizens.

This first podcast in the series is going to focus on the role of children and adults in digital play. In addition to this podcast, the accompanying resources we've curated for you on this topic include Early Childhood Australia's statement on young children and digital technologies, as well as some of our own blog posts on this topic.

What we know is digital technologies are everywhere in and around children's lives. This From smart TVs with streaming services, smartphones and tablets, video calling, apps, games, and the internet, and even internet enabled toys. And children's digital childhoods are very different from our own. And what this means is that we sometimes don't know the best way to manage or engage in children's digital play.

Common questions that we get are, what should children be doing? And what shouldn't they be doing? Should I get involved in my child's digital play, and how do I do that? What sorts of digital experiences will most benefit my child?

And how do I manage it all? What do I need to know? We are also aware about debates regarding screen time, but the reality is that children are surrounded by digital technologies.

So we're more focused on what, why, and how we use technology to best support children's learning and development. That will be the focus of this podcast series.

Lisa Kervin: But first, why create digital opportunities and experiences for children at all? We know that children learn through play and demonstrate their understandings of the world through their play.

The benefits of traditional non digital play can be achieved through digital play too. Children don't have to miss out on play when they interact with technology. It just looks a little different. But when it is a good quality experience, there can be all sorts of benefits. Let's share some examples of things that we've seen.

When we play alongside our children, we get to know their interests and the ways they think about a problem that might be different to our own. We can use this information to create enriching experiences inside and outside of digital contexts. An example. In one of our recent playgroups, a grandfather and a child shared a love of fishing, and they spent a good deal of time poring over information about different types of fish and where to find them on a fishing app.

We also know that play supports children's language development through conversation and other forms of communication like physical gestures. Let's think about an example. Consider a FaceTime, Skype or Zoom conversation between a child and someone special, like a grandparent. Taking the time to see each other, talk with each other and show each other things that are happening can be valuable.

And I'm sure many of us have stories around the pandemic and how the videoconferencing really enabled those communications. We also know that children create a sense of security through close and meaningful relationships. When children feel safe and secure, they are more likely to try new and challenging things that contribute toward their growth and development.

An example, scrolling through old photos not only provides an opportunity for talk, but also engages the child's memories and allows them to think ahead to new adventures.

Steven Howard: Digital experiences also give us opportunities that aren't available without them. We might encounter a stick insect out in the yard and use digital resources to look up more information about stick insects.

Or something that appeared in a story. We can connect with interesting people and communities. We can create our own stories and films about the things that children are interested in. We can virtually visit places that we can't otherwise get to. Caregivers support children to regulate their emotions and behavior by co regulating them in moments of difficulty.

Talking about and demonstrating good digital practices and setting appropriate guardrails around this. This helps children work through challenges and increasingly become better equipped to meet those challenges themselves. We might think aloud, for example, about the rules we set for ourselves around our own digital technology use and why those rules, and then the strategies we use to keep to those rules.

Lisa Kervin: There are some key challenges to playing digitally with children as well. Digital devices are often used as activity to keep children entertained when we're busy. Now this isn't a bad thing in of itself, but it means we don't get to co play with our children as much as we may like to, or know fully what it is that they're doing on digital devices.

Many digital activities are not designed for co play, and children play with them alone. We argue that the best kinds of digital activities are the ones that do allow for co play and interaction. Often it's really hard to know what our role as educators, or even as parents is, in this new play space, where we don't always feel like the expert, and that our children know more than us.

And that's okay, but we are the experts in children, how they learn, how to bring their interests into learning situations, how to talk and interact with them, and what is likely to work for them, and how to move them into new understandings.

Steven Howard: This program is designed to provide early childhood educators with information and ideas to be able to leverage digital technologies for high quality interactions and experiences to support children's learning and development.

The example of a digital play experience we'll focus on this week is digital stories. We selected this because of its potential for learning and interaction, but also because it tends to require only a minimal modification to the things you're

already doing. Lots of children have a favorite story, a story they love to read over and over again.

Have you thought about making a digital version of that story? Children can choose what story, the scenes, the roles, and that can also include you. You can provide support to help children plan and remember aspects of the story. To think about scenes in the script and costumes, and help with filming and editing.

Although children can often do much of this too, and usually want to. It's important to keep in mind that the final product is not our focus here. But we instead focus on the process of making the video. One of the recent examples in our work is a digital version of Going on a Bear Hunt, which we supported children to create.

The children chose their favorite story, which ensured that the activity was based on their interests. It was child led. The children were given autonomy and choice. They owned the play. They decided the roles, the scenes that would be depicted, and where we could film those, and they contributed to editing ideas and decisions.

We followed the children's lead, supporting them to elaborate and realize their ideas. This included offering a few suggestions for where a scene could be filmed. When they were unsure, doing some of that filming and taking a lead on the editing in iMovie with the children's input and involvement.

Lisa Kervin: Or perhaps you've had the experience where your children have experienced something new and exciting.

Young Owen was excited about a healthy crop of lemongrass in the preschool garden. And his educators and the children in the room had many conversations about how to use the lemongrass. Owen wanted to document the process of making lemongrass tea so that he could share it with his mother and his brother.

With an educator, photos were taken at key moments in the process and Owen recorded his annotations for each of the photos. This was edited in iMovie to bring the photos and Owen's voiceover together to recount the experience of making lemongrass tea. Digital technologies can connect context together.

In this case, the early childhood education service and the child's home environment. And of course, the important learnings he made. Each of our examples show how the children moved from what they know, A favorite book

or a new experience to engage with digital technologies to create something. The children across the examples watched their creations many times over.

So did their peers. So did their educators and their families. While these are just examples of digital creations, you could create your own digital stories by taking new photographs that the children take and narrate, or film a movie on a topic of the children's interests. Other wonderful examples of children's digital creations that we have encountered include using apps like Play.

puppet pals to tell stories, having children photograph their favourite activities in the service and annotate these, documenting excursions through photos and video to revisit time and time again. In each of these cases, essential was that, one, digital technologies were used to pursue children's interests, two, children were able to take an active role in the digital aspects of the play.

Three, the digital technology enabled children to create or produce something. And finally, that digital technologies enabled conversations and high quality interactions between educators and children, and between and among the children. See what digital play experiences you could do with your children that allow creation, agency, and engagement.

interests and interactions between and among the children and you as educators. Make sure to check out the resources that we have curated for you and we'll chat to you again next time for the second podcast in the series. Thanks for listening.