Digital media in a family day care setting

The use of digital media in early childhood settings, including family day care (FDC), is a current topic of conversation for many educators and families. We Belong FDC's **Kerry Smith** and **Beverley Egan** participated in an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project entitled 'Young Children in Digital Society'. The content area they focused on for this project was relationships, with a view to providing support for educators and families on how relationships can be built through guided use of digital technology.

The EYLF V2.0 recognises that 'children live in a digital world [and] digital technologies offer possibilities for learning, engagement, wellbeing and social connection' (AGDE, 2022a, p. 57). The ARC project we have been involved in is well aligned with Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators—children use digital technologies and media to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking (AGDE, 2022a, p. 63).

Over a period of two years, five educators and children aged two to three years took part in a research-based project where the children were presented with a range of technologies including YouTube videos, FaceTime, photographs and age-appropriate apps. Our participation in the project was a significant learning opportunity, and incorporating more technology use into their daily programming has altered the everyday practices of our educators.

'Technology' refers not only to computers and other digital technologies used for information, communication and entertainment. More broadly, it involves 'the development of new objects or tools by people that help them in their lives. Three broad types of technology are mechanical technology (e.g. wheels, blocks, levers, gears); analogue technology (e.g. film-based photography, drawing, painting); and digital technology (e.g. mobile phones and computers)' (ECA, 2018, p. 24).

Educator reflections

Here we will relate the reflections of three educators responding to questions about their use of digital media and technologies, and how this has changed daily practices over the past year.

Can you give one example of how the use of digital media through this project has affected the relationships between children?		
Educator 1	**Educator 2**	**Educator 3**
Overall children have experienced positive interactions in the use of digital media, for example utilising YouTube to share ideas about what rhyme/storybook to dance/sing/listen to ... Using the camera function, children watched themselves at mealtimes. [Children also used] FaceTime [to connect with] children who were away from the group for extended periods.	I had a new girl [who] just came to care ... She [found it] quite hard ... to interact with other children. I use an app called Osmo (numbers, letters and shapes) for children working as a group ... I noticed after sharing the same interests in solving shape puzzles, the new child is more comfortable and confident in interacting with other children. They were also sharing a sense of humour when they did some drawing, making videos and recording their voices.	When I took the children outdoors, we used mobile devices to take pictures of trees, grass and other natural elements ... The children were much more actively engaged in the outdoor experience compared to when digital devices were not involved. [They] would say things like, 'What are you going to photograph? I will take a picture of this tree'; 'After you're done, let me borrow it'; and 'What did you take a picture of? Shall we look at them together?' After the children had taken their photos, we discussed and shared the pictures together. The children even supplied brief explanations of the photos they had taken.
Analysis (quotations from AGDE, 2022a, p. 63)		
This reflection provides examples of how the young children utilised the available technologies to collaborate on stories and songs and connect with other children, which helped them to make sense of their world. • '[Children] use digital technologies to access images and information, explore diverse perspectives and make sense of their world.' • '[Children] engage with technologies and media for fun and social connection.'	The use of digital technologies provided opportunities for the child to find her place in the service. • '[Children] engage with technologies and media for fun and social connection.' • '[Children] adopt collaborative approaches in their learning about and with digital technologies.'	Our educators have demonstrated that technology can be used to encourage physical activity, facilitate communication with others and enable access to educational technologies for a range of relational purposes. • '[Children] develop simple skills to operate digital devices, such as turning on and taking a photo with a tablet.' • '[Children] adopt collaborative approaches in their learning about and with digital technologies.'

Can you give one example of how the use of digital media through this project has affected your approach to using digital technologies in your program and in your relationships with families?		
Educator 1	**Educator 2**	**Educator 3**
I have changed my view of using technology with children as I now program technology as a valuable resource in aiding my ability to help children's learning and development and relationships; for example, taking turns/making own choices and listening and sharing within a small group.	I find myself [becoming] more comfortable when allowing children [to use] technology in care, [such as] using [tablets] for solving puzzles, creating videos and recording their voices. Discussion with families about how we let children access technology in a safe way has supported families with their knowledge of how technology can be used safely.	Using digital devices has enabled more proactive communication with parents about the child's growth, development and noteworthy events. Currently, at my day care, I upload some of the photos and videos that the children have taken. When discussing children's actions or behaviours without the use of digital devices, there was some difficulty in clear communication between the parents and me. However, when discussing using the photos and videos together, we were able to have more precise conversations about the child's development and specific events.
Analysis (quotations from AGDE, 2022a, p. 63)		
Through the use of digital technologies, the educator has developed her understanding and gained new knowledge of digital technologies. • '[Educators] integrate technologies across the curriculum.'	The educator has built her skills surrounding the use of digital technologies in a variety of ways and has become more confident in supporting families. • 'Educators … develop their own knowledge and understanding of appropriate digital technology use and safety with children and families.'	The educator has involved the children in technology use and digital documentation to communicate children's development to their families. • '[Educators] provide opportunities for children to have access to different forms of communication technologies.'

Conclusion

All children benefit from the chance to explore their world using technologies and to develop their confidence in using digital technologies and media (Nolan et al., 2022). Greater use of digital media has contributed to relationship-building between children, and between children and educators, and has enhanced educator practices as they have further developed their knowledge and understanding of appropriate technology use in early childhood education. These daily practices described by a cross-section of educators from We Belong FDC reflect some of the revised pedagogies that have come about upon implementation of the EYLF V2.0.

References

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