

Children's virtual play interactions in offline spaces

Ashley Donkin & Donell Holloway

Virtual worlds have become popular places for kids to spend their leisure time; engaging in playing and creating their own worlds with their friends (Burke, 2013; Kafai, 2009; Marsh, 2010; 2014; Merchant, 2015; Tuukkanen, Iqbal & Kankaanranta, 2010; Wasko, 2010). Many of these online environments provide a variety of game spaces in which children can play and socialise with their friends. However, do these spaces really support children's friendships, and exactly how do children collaborate whilst playing both in the same (offline) physical and (online) virtual space at the same time? Social research is giving greater attention to the ways in which children collaborate with their friends in virtual worlds, and how offline interactions impact upon online playtime (Fields & Kafai, 2009; Kafai, 2009; Marsh, 2014). It does not at this stage, engage with the complexity of social play afforded by multiple mobile devices, where each child has access to their own device, and where children tend to simultaneously to the physical and/or virtual presence of their friends in a seamless manner.

This article adds to existing research through its analysis of a friendship group consisting of five girls aged 9-10 years old. These children participated in the authors' ethnographic research investigating how 5-12 year old Australian children use virtual worlds. These children play in a range of virtual worlds including: *Minecraft*, *Clash of Clans* and *Terraria*. This article examines the ways in which the five female participants collaborate, negotiate and maintain their friendships whilst playing online and offline commensurately. The various benefits children gain from socialising with their friends, and the risks they negotiate whilst playing in these online and offline spaces, are also identified and discussed. This article concludes that offline and online play influences how children play with their friends in virtual worlds, which can maintain and develop their friendship groups through collaborative play.