

Title: Early Childhood Educators' Play-based Experiences to Support Pre-schoolers' Learning about the Internet and Cybersafety

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Presentation type:

Individual paper

Abstract:

International research shows young children are now online in rapidly increasing numbers. Children's participation in online environments can provide rich opportunities for learning, communication and enjoyment but being online also exposes children to potential risks. As a result, the importance of cyber-safety education has long been recognised (Third, et al., 2014). However, the available resources, initiatives, curriculum outcomes and pedagogical approaches towards cyber-safety education are orientated towards the learning of older children. Consequently, young children do not yet have access to age appropriate cyber-safety education.

To address this dilemma, we conducted a pilot study that considered the specific provision of cyber-safety education within kindergarten settings. The study was conducted as a controlled trial involving two groups of educators (n=4) and children (n=70): an intervention group and a control group. Educators in the intervention group were supported and asked to develop play-based learning experiences to teach the children about the Internet and cyber-safety. They documented the planning and implementation of these experiences and participated in a focus group interview at the end of the intervention. This paper reports preliminary findings from the analysis of the intervention educators' data.

We use the Vygotskian understanding of the role of double stimulation in informing the educators' response to the invitation to develop cyber-safety play-based learning experiences for young children. This understanding suggests that the educators first faced a problem situation in not knowing how to make cyber-safety education play-based. The problem situation was followed by the educators' response in which they used a puppet to represent play-based learning with the children. The puppet enabled the educators to engage children in awareness building about cyber-safety education. This awareness building prompted the teachers' own conceptual development regarding the children's understandings of the internet and the increased necessity for education about the internet to be enacted in early childhood education settings. These findings contribute new knowledge to the early childhood education sector regarding: a) educators' understanding of the role of internet education in early childhood as a platform for cyber-safety and b) the provision of play-based cyber-safety education that is age appropriate for young children.

References

Third, A., Bellerose, D., Dawkins, U., Keltie, E., & Pihl, K. (2014). *Children's rights in the digital age: A download from children around the world*. Melbourne, Australia: Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre.