Digitising Early Childhood: Conference Abstract

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'My role has drastically changed because our world's changed': The impact of digital technologies on the role of the early childhood teacher

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A prevailing discourse in society is that 'we live in rapidly changing times' (Gibbons, 2016) with these changing times bringing forth new challenges not previously faced by past generations. A significant challenge facing early childhood teachers is the emergence of information communication technologies (ICT) into the early childhood education and care landscape. This paper reports on a PhD study undertaken by the author to investigate how early childhood teachers understand and manage their changing role with regards to using ICT in the context of their kindergarten setting.

The methodology used to complete this study and to inductively derive theory about the phenomenon is grounded theory. Grounded theory moves beyond mere description, towards the development of a substantive theory, one which is discovered, rigorously developed and provisionally verified through the means of systematic data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The theories that emerge are grounded in data from the participants and this enables participants' voices to truly be represented in the findings. In order to hear the voices of early childhood teachers and to learn from their experiences, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were undertaken with twenty practising early childhood teachers from twenty different kindergartens.

Findings from this study reveal that the digitisation of early childhood education has considerably impacted upon the role of being an early childhood teacher. Participants perceived that the emergence of ICT brought with it rising expectations, greater accountability and made the role increasingly complex, as the competing needs and expectations of stakeholders had to be acknowledged, negotiated and met. It was the perception of some participants that it was their responsibility to provide children with opportunities to engage with ICT and to support the development of children's technological confidence and competences, whilst other participants viewed it as their role to protect children from further exposure to ICT and to provide an early learning environment free from digital technology. The findings from this research can be shared and utilised to gain greater understandings about the impact ICT has on the professional identity and pedagogical practices of early childhood teachers as they endeavour to manage their changing roles with ICT.

References

Gibbons, A. (2016). Do 'we' really live in rapidly changing times? Questions concerning time, childhood, technology and education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *17*(4), 367–376.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.