

Inclusive Design Participation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children's Digital Experiences

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An estimate of 150 million children in the world live with a disability (World Health Organization, 2011). For these children, opportunities for inclusion can sometimes be limited due to discrimination, lack of understanding, support and funding. Such limitations in opportunities violate their rights. In today's digital age, it is essential that children with a disability are included as digital citizens and have the opportunity for their rights to be heard. This can be achieved by considering ways for the children to progress from being a consumer to sharing the responsibility of being a producer. In the practice of digital interactive media, children have been previously engaged in various stages of design processes (Duysburgh, Slegers and Jacobs, 2012; Guha, Druin and Fails, 2008; Jones et al., 2003; Moraveji et al., 2007). Involving children in design practice presents a unique set of challenges and ethical considerations that require carefully planned management. However, when young children have a disability, these challenges and considerations for their participation are exacerbated and their direct involvement is diminished. A major ethical consideration when involving young children in design practices is continual assent. Ensuring each child understands their role in the design process and has opportunities to express their own perspectives, needs and wants requires commitment and effort. Design activities can often be tiring for young children and careful management of their involvement is required to maintain their participation, which affords them the power of influence.

Hearing loss is a prevalent disability in the world and an estimated 12,000 children in Australia alone are affected (Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, 2016). Communication amongst Australian individuals with a hearing loss can be complicated as there are different variations of sign language systems used in the different states of Australia. This paper reflects on how groups of Deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) Australian children, ages 6-9, were included as design partners. The paper discusses the challenges observed and identifies opportunities to better support these children in influencing future digital media experiences.

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