Toys or Tools? Tablet Applications to Support Literacy Learning

The Team

- Project Director: Dr. Monica McGlynn-Stewart, GBC

- Co-Applicant and School Board Site Manager: Dr. Tiffany MacKay, Peel District School Board

- Research Assistants: Brooke Gouweleeuw, Lisa Hobman, Nicola Maguire, Emma Mogyorodi, GBC

- Project Manager: Eva Aboagye, GBC

Toys or Tools? Using Tablet Computers for Open-Ended Literacy Learning

- **Purpose:**
- To understand educators' comfort levels and experience using DT for literacy learning

- To understand how young children use DT as a means of communicating their ideas

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- **Purpose:**
- To explore the value of DT for supporting young children's literacy development

Theoretical Framework

- Literacy practices are undergoing dramatic changes due to digital tools (Kress, 2010)

- Young children are engaged with digital media in and out of school contexts (Burke, 2013; Clement, 2010)

- Educators are being asked to teach in ways that they did not learn as children or likely in pre-service (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Kirkwood, 2009)

- Educators need to carefully reflect on how best to incorporate DT approaches to teaching Radesky, Schumacher & Zimmerman, 2015)

Methodology and Data Sources

- **Methods**:
- Sept 2015-June 2016 (phase 1)

- Interviews with educators, focus groups, classroom observations, children's slideshows

- Three- to six- year-old children in 14 sites are using the app 30 Hands to document their experiences during play-based learning activities and their digital files are being archived and analyzed.

Data Analysis

- Qualitative, as defined by Merriam (2009) and Punch (2009)

- Interview sessions and focus groups were largely open-ended, and the themes emerged as the study progressed

- Children's slideshows were analyzed in terms of their literacy and digital knowledge and skills.

- The emerging themes were continually modified through "constant comparison" with the data (Glaser, 1992).
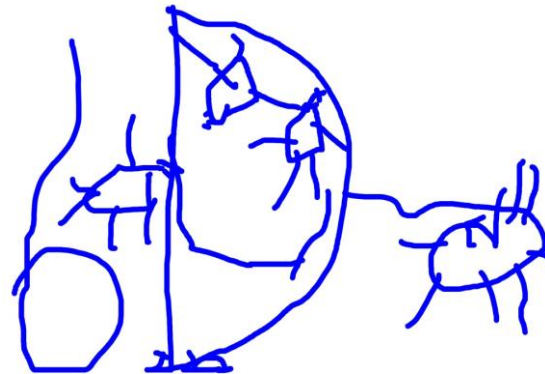
Findings
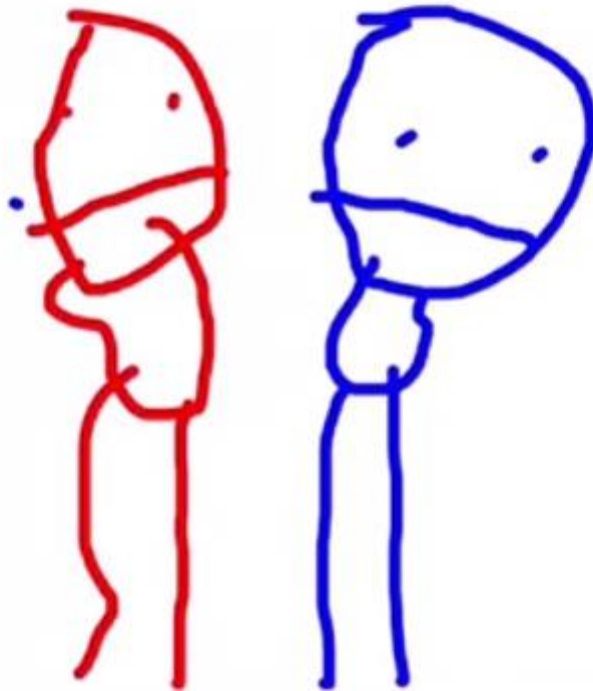
Findings: Children

- Socio-emotional development (sharing, risk-taking, turn-taking, problem solving, confidence, independence)

- Literacy (greater linguistic output, experimenting with text, using home languages, narrative skills)

- Digital skills (learning the language of the iPad and the app, using drawing, video and audio features in combination)
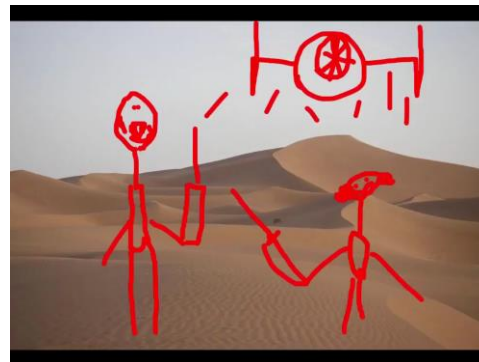
Findings: Educators

- Educators gain new insight into children's interests and abilities

- A tool to motivate students and empower learners with challenges

- Increased opportunities for documentation of children's work
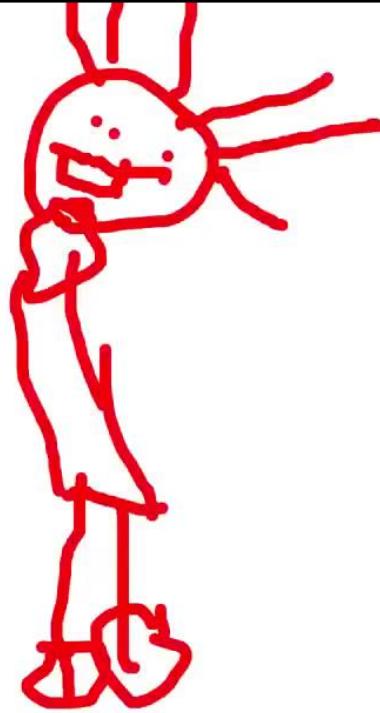
- Connections with parents

Findings: Schools

- Partnerships between educators (focus groups)

- Building digital capacity (hardware/software)

- Home-school connections

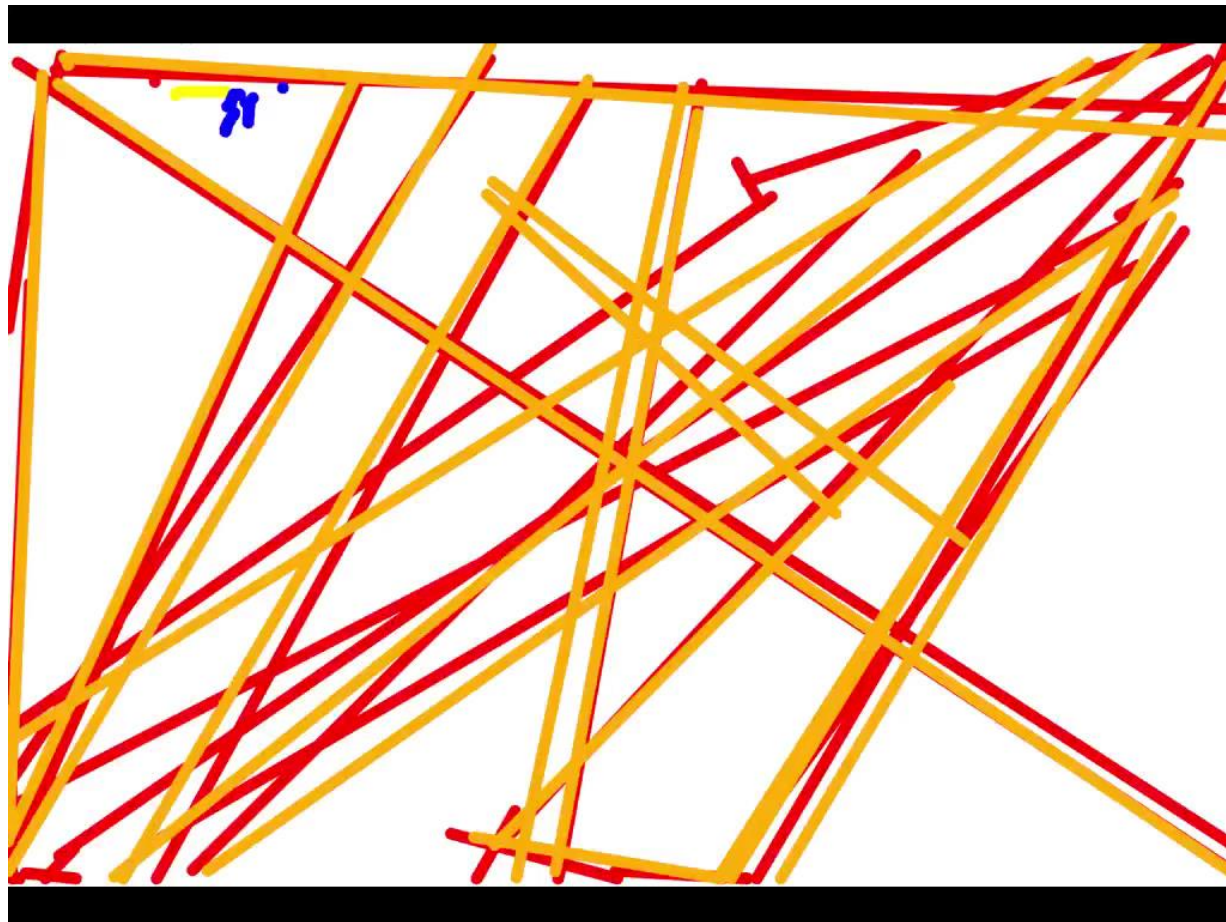- Preparing children for a digital world

Two Case Studies

- Dylan and the "I love" story

Two Case Studies

- Josh and the spider web

Conclusions

- DT implementation takes time, patience and support

- The degree of implementation by the teachers ranged across the kindergarten classrooms

- A range of interest, engagement, and types of use by the children

- Use of the open-ended iPad app was beneficial to the children's literacy and digital literacy development

- Teachers considered the app to be a useful tool in their pedagogy

Recommendations

- Be patient and flexible

- Have consistent routines

- Expect a range of interest

- Celebrate and showcase the children's creations

- Have technical and pedagogical support available