Childhood in the Digital Age

Socialising

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How is digital technology changing children's relationships and shaping their online identities?

With children's growing interest in social media, we consider the quality of children's online friendships and how they differ from more traditional face-to-face relationships.

Every week my son and I Skype his grandparents in Australia. Digital technology is very important in keeping our family connected.

As he gets older, my son will have more opportunities to connect with family, friends but also strangers online. Does having access to an online community mean that he will have more friends and a larger support network? Or does it open him up to predators and risks he doesn't yet appreciate?

Children's social networking has now moved into exciting virtual worlds where children as young as 3 can chat, play games and create their own avatars.

Psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists understand that traditional play and imaginary worlds allow children to practice the roles that they will take on as adults, learn social skills and experiment with different identities while working out who they are.

Can play in virtual worlds offer the same experiences and what is the right balance between real and virtual play?

This week we'll explore how research into digital technologies is leading us to re-think what we understand about how children play, socialize and forge their own identities.