



Childhood in the Digital Age

Course trailer

Nathalia Gjersoe:

How is technology changing childhood in the digital age? The media has claimed that digital technology is making children lonelier, fatter, more aggressive and less capable of deep thought but research suggests that it could offer opportunities for children to be happier, better educated and more connected to others.

As a new parent I worry that technology is changing so fast it might outstrip my ability to support my son's learning over the coming years. How can I ensure that he benefits from the advantages of technology but shield him from the dangers? What games should I let him play? How should he communicate with friends? How much screen time is too much and why?

Decades of research in child psychology and childhood studies has helped to find what shapes modern childhood. We'll draw on this research to try and make sense of competing claims made by the media, technology companies and new research in this exciting but controversial area. We'll explore how technology is changing the way that three to fourteen year olds socialise, think, and learn. Are childrens' lives today significantly different from our own, or is technology simply solving old problems in new ways? If you are a parent, a teacher, or simply interested in this past moving debate then get involved in the discussion as we explore the real impact of technology on children in the digital age.

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Technology

Nathalia Gjersoe:

How is digital technology changing childhood - and how can adults keep up? The entertainment and interactivity of tablets and smartphones has made them attractive to children. Touch-screen interfaces mean that digital technologies are now accessible for children as young as 3. But do children find digital technologies exciting for reasons beyond simple entertainment?

The amount of digital technology available to my young son is massively different to that in my own childhood. As both a parent and a psychologist, I've found it difficult to make sense of media reports and research findings in this controversial area. Is technology beneficial or detrimental to child development? Does screen time lead to increased distractibility, obesity and loneliness? Or does it offer opportunities for autonomy and experimentation beyond anything imagined when I was growing up?

As the generation gap widens between adults and children's understanding of new technologies, how will we protect them from the risks while allowing them to benefit from the opportunities new technologies offer? Join in the discussion as we explore the different sides of this heated debate.

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Socialising

Nathalia Gjersoe:

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.

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Thinking

Nathalia Gjersoe:

Young children learn about the world in a number of different ways. Sometimes they think through a problem and work it out, sometimes they try out different solutions until they find something that works and sometimes they learn best by watching and talking to the people around them. How will technology affect these different but overlapping forms of learning?

When children memorise facts, reason, and solve problems they are involved in 'cognitive learning'. They are deliberately thinking about the task and learning from that reflection. In the digital age children are often carrying out several tasks at once such as texting, listening to music and surfing the net. There is some concern that this routine multitasking so early in life will compromise children's ability to focus deeply on any one task in the future. Does using digital technologies rewire children's brains for better or for worse?

Often children learn simply by trying things out and seeing what works and what doesn't. Many computer games rely on this type of trial-and-error learning. Regular rewards and reinforcements are built in, which encourage the player to work out how to progress. Some critics consider computer games a time-consuming distraction. But might they actually nurture skills that are useful in the real world, such as fine motor control and hand-eye coordination?

Children learn a huge amount from the people around them through observation, interacting, and exchanging ideas. A new way of writing and speaking has evolved through digital communication technologies such as social networks and text messaging. Is this new text 'slang' damaging children's literacy skills or is it the sign of a creative new genesis of language?

Get involved in the discussion as we explore some of these key topics and investigate what new research tells us about technology's influence on children's learning in the digital age.

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Learning

Nathalia Gjersoe:

Does education need re-thinking with the advances in digital tools? Most classrooms today look much the same as when I was a child: there are textbooks, desks, paper and the teacher at the front. How will digital technologies change what the classroom of the future looks like?

Teachers often struggle to support the needs of children in classes that are growing in number. Innovators have demonstrated how technology can help address this problem by tailoring learning to individual children's interests and needs. In this educational 'revolution,' technology can make learning more entertaining and engaging, allowing each child's progress to be closely monitored and offering regular rewards to maintain their attention.

Traditional skills taught at school, such as reading and writing, also need to be refreshed to prepare children for working and thinking digitally. The new UK national curriculum includes computer coding lessons for children as young as 5 – it's hoped that this will prepare them to create their own digital content, rather than just consume it. iPads and digital apps are now offering powerful resources for teaching even basic numeracy and literacy skills.

As we examine these new teaching and learning innovations, we also explore the role of teachers and adults. How will classroom teachers adapt to make room for digital technology in education? And what about my role as a parent - how will I support my son as technology advances beyond my own level of understanding?