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The Development of Young Children's Social Identity in an Era of Digital Tools

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The Development of Young Children's Social Identity in an Era of Digital Tools

A Dissertation Presented

By

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Approvals In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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Abstract

The advancement of innovative digital technologies has created a generation of digital natives (children) growing up in a diverse environment designed by a population of digital immigrants (adults). Consequently, this everyday experience has created some dissonance in their lifestyles, raising questions for educational leaders. The purpose of this mini-ethnographic case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how engaging with digital tools shapes the social interactions of young children, and to examine the various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning. Furthermore, this study explored whether digital technology influences the developing social identities of young children. This study reflects the voices, understandings, and beliefs of ten English-speaking kindergarten children studying in an International School in Jerusalem, Israel, gathered through participant observations, interviews, and field notes. Data analysis resulted in key findings related to how children: 1) engage in online social environments; 2) watch online movies alone or with family members; 3) utilize stories and characters portrayed in these movies as the common communication thread and basis for social classroom interactions; 4) engage in outdoor play grounded in traditional young children's games; and 5) experience the dominant role that parents play in bridging, moderating, and managing the lives of young children in a digital era. Implications for early childhood educators, educational leaders, and parents are discussed.

Key words: young children, social identity, digital tools, play, photo-elicitation

DEDICATION

For Alan, Jessica, Aharon, and Elisha

Who encourage me to go on every adventure especially this one,

Discover with me,

And make my explorations meaningful.

For Bev

Who explored with me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A digital culture denotes a lifestyle in which digital technologies significantly shape human behavior, interactions, thought processes, and communications within a societal setting (Turkle, 2011). As a matter of fact, contemporary youth experience their everyday lives surrounded by and engaging with computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, apps, and a myriad of other tools of this digital age. Actually, computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives (boyd, 2014; Prensky, 2001).

Young Children Socialize in a Digital Era

In reality, present-day young children interact with others using digital tools, producing their own peer culture including engaging with social media networking. Indeed, growing up within a technological environment and feeling comfortable within it has created a generation of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). Engaging with diverse digital tools forms a natural part of their play. Actually, young children's access to technologies has implications for their social relationships (Hutchby, 2001). Moreover, conventional wisdom suggests that digital play contributes to the acquisition of 21st century skills by preparing young children for future roles, developing communication and collaboration skills, nurturing creativity, and providing an opportunity for digital-literacy skills (Kulman, 2015).

Digital play

Digital play can be defined as a voluntary, stimulating activity involving the use of digital technologies (Kulman, 2015). Digital play includes activities related to video and computer games, Internet sites and search engines, electronic toys, mobile technologies, smart phones, tablets, and the creation of digital content. Actually, the technological affordance or specific

tasks users can perform with the particular digital technology at their disposal dictates the form of digital play. Hence, the material limitations of a technology and their specific applications, as well as their facilitating qualities (Hutchby, 2001) impact the nature of the child's play. Nevertheless, Marsh et al (2016) suggest that it is not so much the *types* of play that have changed as a result of new digital contexts as the *nature* of play. "Contemporary play draws on both the digital and non-digital properties of things and in doing so moves fluidly across boundaries of space and time in ways that were not possible in the pre-digital era" (p.8). Indeed, the findings of this study provide a counterpoint to those who seek to dichotomize digital and non-digital play, suggesting that play with digital technologies is not "real play" (Palmer, 2016). In addition, Marsh et al, (2016) propose that the dichotomy of online/offline worlds, together with the contrasts of the physical and virtual, shape the activities of young children, providing a means of classifying play types in a contemporary context.

Developing Social Skills

In discussions of digital play, the developing social skills of the young child have been a controversial issue. On the one hand, it is argued that engaging in digital play creates Parasocial or one-sided relationships (Brunick et al, 2016). In these relationships, one person extends emotional energy, interest, and time, and the other party, the persona, or digital tool, is completely unaware of the other's existence. Likewise, Parasocial relationships can refer to "one-sided emotionally tinged relationships that people develop with media characters (Calvert & Richards, 2014, as cited in Brunick et al, 2016). While young children outgrow their favorite media character (Brunick et al, 2015), encouraging young children to develop Parasocial relationships with media characters may increase the chance that these characters serve as educational resources. On the other hand, "the learning works for kids" (2015) contended that

digital or technology play is no longer solitary or Parasocial. In fact, approximately 70% of all digital engagement is social. Along the same lines, young children's collaboration on the computer with friends was seen to be greater than with acquaintances (Chen, 2016). Similarly, young children developing knowledge in digital contexts using a Tablet tend to talk and work together (Beschorner & Hutchison, 2013). Others even maintain that the need for technical support from parents or older siblings while using a Tablet creates opportunities for social interactions within the family. Indeed, Plowman and Stephen (2007) found that young children require support known as "guided interaction" until they reach a level of familiarity that permits independent use of digital tools. Ultimately, when supporting the child's play as a "technical expert," even for a short moment, parents and siblings receive unique opportunities to share, and scaffold (Vygotsky 1978, 1986), the child's digital play. Furthermore, it is seen to extend the space for collaborative activities in relation to young children's imaginative play, media characters and experiences. For instance, applying theories of play established in conventional play settings to young children's use of a Tablet in their home settings, Verenikina and Kervin (2011) claim that young children prefer engaging in online games involving their imagination, as well as developing play that extends beyond the screen. To put it another way, they observed that digital play blended in with the variety of young children's additional play contexts.

Admittedly, this research topic is of personal interest to me, since a few years ago I watched my young son, then a fourth grader, befriend a classmate through collaboratively playing an online game. Daily, after school hours, they would meet in cyberspace, chat on Skype, and play together. However, on the school playground, off line, their relationship floundered. Gradually, their friendship evolved and moved from cyberspace to the tennis court. Today, two seventh graders who study in different schools, maintain their weekly tennis game as

well as their online friendship. This very personal experience stimulated my desire to explore whether conditions and factors influencing the socio-emotional development of young children, who live in an ever evolving digital world, are changing.

Much has been written and studied about the influence of growing up within a digital culture in general, and social media networking platforms in particular on today's teenager (boyd, 2010; Turkle, 2013). Less has been written on the influence of the digital era; the ubiquitous environment of digital play, interactive media and virtual reality on the evolving social lives of young children (Marsh, 2016). Consequently, as an experienced early childhood educator and active early childhood education teacher- educator, I was interested in exploring whether engaging in digital tools shapes the social interactions of young children with one another. I was particularly curious to investigate the continuum of online-offline play, as well as the various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning. Additionally, I questioned whether digital technology as a social tool influences the developing social identities of young children.

Organization of Chapter One

This chapter provides an outline of the research conducted. The statement of the problem is introduced, and discusses the historical context, controversies, and consequences related to the problem statement. The purpose of the study presents the intended discoveries, along with the research questions that will organize and guide the study. In addition, the definition of terms section addresses terms and phrases that need clarification and reinforcement for the purpose of this study. The significance of the study indicates why this study is valuable to various stakeholders in the educational field. Delimitations, or limits consciously established in the study, will also be explored. The bodies of literature that will help define the context of the

problem address the questions that guide the study, examine implications for educational leadership, and synthesize how the literature will be presented, will also be described. A description and rationale for the proposed methodology is addressed. This section provides an explanation of how participants will be chosen for participation, details of the data collection procedures, an overview of data analysis procedures and tools, and efforts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. A chapter outline to briefly describe the five chapters of the dissertation is also included.

Statement of the problem

New technologies are changing how people of all ages learn, and play, socialize, exercise judgment, and engage in civic life (Davidson, 2010). Indeed, as an interactive communicating society, we have evolved since the 1800s -- from a society whose connectivity was grounded in a print culture to a 20th century electronic broadcast culture, and into a 21st century interactive digital society. This society is characterized by a culture of social media, big data, and online personalized, as well as networked, communicative media employing digital technology.

Actually, digital technologies evolved from mathematical concepts suggested by the seventeenth-century German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and were initially developed in the mid-twentieth century by American engineers (Ceruzzi, 2012). In short, digital technology is a base two process, recording digitized information using a binary code of combinations of the digits 0 and 1, also called bits, which represent words and images. Consequently, digitization quickens data transmission speeds, and enables immense amounts of information to be compressed on small storage devices that can be easily preserved and transported (Ceruzzi, 2012).

Accordingly, the evolution of digital technologies has provided 21st century civilization with innovative digital tools suitable for both learning and socializing. To be sure, these digital tools are influencing prevailing educational and socializing platforms. For instance, digital learning, or the process of learning with the aid of digital content, platform, or facilitators, illustrates how essential tools of learning have shifted increasingly from the printed page to digital media (Davidson et al, 2011).

Extending this phenomenon, the contemporary classroom is evolving into an environment that supports the interface between digital technologies as educational tools with digital technologies as social tools. Indeed, the current academic conversation around digital technologies and young children has moved away from whether or not technology should be used, and towards *how* technology should be used within early childhood environments (Beschorner & Hutchison, 2013; Yelland, 2011). For instance, using digital technologies -- such as computers or tablets-- young children's learning becomes collaborative, influencing their naturally developing social skills (Beschorner & Hutchison, 2013; Chen, 2016).

In truth, growing up and feeling comfortable within a technological environment has created a generation of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). To put it bluntly, contemporary young children interact with others using digital tools. Specifically, engaging with diverse digital tools in online virtual worlds forms a natural part of their play (Marsh, 2010, Plowman & McPake, 2013).Consequently, the digital era is creating a peer culture characterized by 21st century digital technologies such as online gaming and social media networking to enrich, as well as maintain, friendships. Marsh (2010) asserts a close relationship between online and offline play in young children, while Bird and Edwards (2015) claim that there is emerging evidence of hybrid play, where young children integrate traditional and digital activities to create bidirectional play

situations (Edwards, 2013; Goldstein, 2011; Marsh, 2010, as cited in Bird and Edwards, 2015). Furthermore, it appears that 21st century young children tend to prefer to use their media on the move (Gutnick et al, 2010). Consequently, young children's access to technologies has implications for their social relationships (Hutchby, 2001).

As a matter of fact, social relationships occupy both the daily conduct of young children, as well as their world of thought and fantasy, for a large portion of their waking hours. They tend to be the sources of young children's greatest pleasures, frustrations, and disappointments (Rubin, 1980). Young children's friendships are characterized by an ability to have fun together, a desire to being near to one another, and choosing to engage in play with one another. Corsaro (2003) asserts that "social participation and sharing are the heart of kids' peer culture" (p.2).

Indeed, young children create their own complex peer culture with precise routines and concerns, including specific rules and practices about which adults are often oblivious (Carter & Nutbrown, 2006). In fact, young children creatively take information from the adult world to produce their own unique childhood cultures. Hence, young children are constantly participating in and form a part of two intricately interwoven cultures -- adults and young children. Within this context young children are active agents in their own socialization. Furthermore, "friendship provides optimal contexts for social development because of the ongoing experiences of companionship, intimacy, and conflict" (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011, p. 84). Young children therefore need to learn how this social world functions and how they can conform to these social customs in order to be accepted and be successful in establishing and maintaining friendships.

Certainly, there are those who question whether technology facilitates or hinders the development of social relationships in early childhood. To put it succinctly, electronic technologies have garnered debate regarding their developmental appropriateness, with some

researchers considering them beneficial for young children (Bourke & Marsh, 2013 as cited in Vittrup et al, 2016), while others remain cautious due to potential negative impact (Van dewater et al., 2007 as cited in Vittrup et al, 2016), or the creation of a "toxic childhood" (Healy, 1999).

This study addressed the prevalent lack of understanding of whether the evolution of digital tools, as modes of interaction, influences the social relationships and peer formation of young children. Specifically, this study explored the development of young children's social identities in an era of digital socializing tools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of whether engaging with digital tools shapes the social interactions of young children with one another. It examined the various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning. Furthermore, this study explored whether digital technology, as a tool, influences the developing social identities of young children.

Guiding Questions

Three research questions directed at young children guide and focus this study:

- How does engaging with digital tools influence the social interactions of young children?
- Are there various ways online/offline social environments influence face to face social peer group formation and functioning?
- How does relating to others through digital tools influence the developing social identities of young children?

The questions above inform the choice of methodology and analysis of this research. The section that follows provides clarification that will contribute to the research study.

Definition of Terms

To achieve clarity in the discussion of this topic, the manner in which each of the following terms used throughout this study is described below.

Development

The term development in this study is understood as the process of growth and continuous advancement of an individual in a direction considered by the society as more beneficial than and superior to the previous stage.

Young Children

The term young children, for the purpose of this research, refer to five and six year old children.

Digital Culture

The term digital culture in this study refers to the shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that as a result of the ubiquitous existence and use of digital technologies have become characteristic features of everyday existence of 21st century society (boyd, 2010; Marsh, 2010; Plowman & McPake, 2013; Turkle, 2013).

Digital technology

Digital technology refers to the branch of scientific or engineering knowledge that deals with the creation and practical use of digital or computerized devices, methods, and systems. Additionally, it refers to the application of this knowledge for practical ends, as in digital communications and social media (Dictionary.com).

Digital tool

The term digital tool in this study refers to digital devices used for education, entertainment, and communication supporting learning, and socializing.

Virtual world

The term virtual world refers to a reality or world that is created, simulated, and engaged in by means of a technology device and system.

Online

The term online is used to refer to interaction that requires and occurs when connected to the Internet.

Social interaction

Social interaction refers to the manner in which people converse and behave with each other (Goffman, 1959).

Social identity

Social identity denotes the part of our self-concept that comes from our membership in social groups, the value we place on this membership, and what it means to us emotionally (Brewer, 2001; Tajfel, 1981).

21st century skills

For the purpose of this study the term 21st century skills refers to meta-knowledge skills; critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication together with technology literacy, and social-emotional development, as fundamental skills needed to thrive in contemporary society (The Glossary of Education Reform, https://www.edglossary.org/21st-century-skills; the partnership for 21st century learning , 2017).

Significance of the Study

Contemporary young children are growing up in a world saturated with digital technologies. In fact, within our digital culture two lines of argument seem to emerge: one embracing the new technology and the other rejecting it (Lindah & Folkesson, 2012). For instance, Bird and Edwards (2015) observe that the discourse surrounding young children's use

of digital technology tends to focus on technologies as negatively impacting the quality of young children's play (Singer & Singer, 2005; Smirnova, 2011) or works to identify newly emerging forms of play (Edwards, 2013; Goldstein, 2011; Marsh, 2010). Indeed, parents of young children express anxieties regarding the playful engagement with technology that seems to increasingly shape the lives of their young children (Marsh, 2010), and look towards those with whom they engage in respectful relationships (Wagner et-al, 2006) for knowledge and guidance on this crucial issue.

Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2009) suggests that "as educators, our challenge is to match the needs of our learners to a world that is changing with great rapidity" (p. 7). She advocates that we become "strategic learners ourselves by deliberately expanding our perspectives and updating our approaches" (p. 7).

Echoing Jacobs (2009), this study provided insight into the current debate surrounding the issue of digital technologies as a vehicle for young children's socializing. Specifically, this study explored the social norms of young children interacting in a digitally enriched environment. Furthermore, this study investigated whether within this environment, new social models are developing, social norms adapting or, mindsets transforming. Certainly, this study contributes to the discourse surrounding young children's use of digital technology. Particularly, it offers a scientific platform to foster dialogue between educational leaders and parents of young children. Hence, this study is of significant value to educational leaders, educational organizations, parents, and young children.

Delimitations of the Study

This study had seven (7) delimitations. First, all participants speak fluent English. In order to prevent the loss of language nuances in translation of data collected for this research

study, my choice of site was purposefully influenced by a preference for collecting data in an English speaking early childhood education environment. Second, the sample selected for participation in this research consisted of young children who attend an early childhood classroom that integrates digital tools into the learning environment. Third, all participants have access to digital tools in their home environment. Fourth, all participants live in the city of Jerusalem, Israel. Fifth, this research study observed the social interactions of the participating children in their learning environment. In other words it did not observe social interactions in the home environment. Sixth, this research study did not research interaction via social networking websites. It examined using digital tools and platforms for social purposes such as digital play or communication. Seventh, this research study was conducted during a 5-week time frame.

Literature Review

This study was supported by appropriate existent bodies of literature. An extensive literature review was included as chapter two of the dissertation, and addressed three main areas. First, the evolution of a digital culture supporting the development of 21st century technology tools, their integration into the educational environment, and implications for 21st century pedagogy was examined. In this context early childhood education learning approaches and environments were discussed. Second, the social development of the young child was explored. Topics such as social interactions, the development of social skills, the role of friendship, and peer culture were reviewed. Factors influencing the developing social identities of the child were reviewed. Within this context the role of play in the life of the young child was examined. Additionally, the use of technology tools within the contemporary social environment will be discussed. Finally, theories of educational leadership, especially the adaptive leadership approach, were reviewed. This served to frame the study as an adaptive leadership challenge.

A Digital Culture

This section addressed the evolution of a digital culture created by the development of 21st century technology tools. Indeed, Turkle (2011) describes a digital culture as a lifestyle characterized by the relationship between people and digital technologies, and attributes this phenomenon to the creation of a digital society. Echoing Turkle (2011) Davidson et al (2010), observe that "new technologies are changing how people of all ages learn, play, socialize, exercise judgment, and engage in civic life" (p.7). Influences of this digital lifestyle, such as the integration of digital technology into the educational environment, as well as implications on 21st century teaching and learning will be reviewed in this section.

The Social Development of the Young Child

This section considered factors influencing the developing social identity of the young child. Carter and Nutbrown (2016) suggest that young children perceive their friendships within the realm of three units of meaning: peer culture and friendship, making and maintaining friendship, and time and space for friendship. Corsaro (2003) describes the culture of young children as a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values and concerns that young children produce and share in interaction with each other. Accordingly, this section will also discuss the development of social skills, the role of friendship and peer culture. Furthermore, young children are engaging and growing with others within a peer culture that employs digital technologies to develop, maintain, and enrich friendships (Chen, 2016; Beschorner & Hutchison, 2013). Within this context the role of play in the life of the young child will be examined. Additionally, the use of technology tools within the contemporary social environment will be discussed.

Theories of Educational Leadership

This section looked at various theories of educational leadership serving as conceptual frameworks and processes to inform and lead change within a digital culture. Significant theorists and foundational ideas related to leadership that impact on the problem statement of this study will be discussed in detail. Ultimately, leadership theories guided this exploration of a current educational challenge bringing about a need for change. Indeed, in *Leadership Without Easy Answers,* Ronald Heifetz (1994) differentiates between the technical and adaptive work of a leader. Heifetz (1994) emphasizes that technical dilemmas are challenges that we already know how to respond to, while adaptive predicaments involve our assessment of reality together with the clarification of our values. Furthermore, Heifetz (1994) asserts that an adaptive challenge is one that demands a new solution to solve it. So too, Wagner and Kegan (2006) propose a *change leadership approach*, encouraging leaders to see the whole, and to think systemically about challenges and goals of change. The key elements of rigor, relevance, and respectful relationships in the change leadership approach (Wagner & Kegan, 2006) provide a useful framework for arranging conversations on teaching and learning. Likewise, they create a model to discuss the socialization of young children in a digital era.

Design of the Study

This study was designed as a qualitative inquiry focusing on the integration of digital tools into the social life of young children. Specifically, this study investigated the everyday social experiences of young children within a digital culture as viewed through an *ethnographic* approach. *Ethnographies* focus on developing a complex, complete description of the culture of a group or a *culture-sharing group* (Creswell, 2013). Indeed, Wolcott (2008a, as cited in Creswell, 2013) comments that ethnography is the study of the social behaviors of an identifiable group of people, for instance young children. Ultimately this study adopted a realist ethnographic

study approach (Creswell, 2013). This ethnographic form, "is an objective account of the situation, typically written in third- person point of view and reporting objectively on the information learned from participants at a site" (p.93). Additionally, in this ethnographic approach the researcher adopts the role of a well-informed reporter of the facts, crafting the participants' views through closely edited quotations but has the final word on how the culture is to be interpreted and presented (Creswell, 2013).

Participants in this study were young children aged five and six years. The participating sample of young children was chosen in a manner that ensured the sample reflected the characteristics of the population from which it was drawn employing the non-probability sampling framework of judgment sampling. This technique enabled me to select the sites and/or participants who seemed most suitable for this research study -- that is, young children who engage with digital technologies, who appeared to be cooperative, and whose parents consented to their participation in this study. To be sure, applying judgment sampling behooved me to examine my personal bias towards the specific group of child participants, their parents, as well as the learning environment within which the research was conducted.

Site selection should purposefully inform the study (Creswell, 2013). Hence, I proposed to observe and interview young children in natural settings that encourage their interactions with one another. I anticipated that these natural settings would be early childhood education centers. Actually, in order to prevent the loss of language nuances in translation of the data my choice of site was purposefully influenced by a preference to collecting data in an English speaking environment.

Consistent with ethnographic research tools, non- participant observations, interviews and field notes were employed to collect data (Shagrir, 2017). Specifically, photo elicitation

interviews were conducted with individuals, and groups of participants. Photo elicitation is based on the idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview, resulting in an interview inspired by images and text rather than by words alone. As a matter of fact, research shows that deeper elements of human consciousness can be provoked by the use of visual images. Consequently, the photo elicitation interview process seems to elicit a different kind of information than does the verbal interview (Harper, 2002). To put it succinctly, "photo elicitation evokes information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph's particular form of representation" (Harper, 2002, p.13). Accordingly, I asserted that the use of photo elicitation as a research tool when interviewing young children is in consonance with the young child's cognitive skills, making it a beneficial tool for this study. In fact, I proposed framing the semi-structured photo elicitation interview around an interview protocol inspired by visual thinking strategies (Housen, 1997).

An ethnographic study data analysis requires relying on the participants' views as an insider or *emic* perspective, synthesized through the researchers *etic* scientific perspective (the theory), in order to generate an overall *cultural interpretation*. This cultural interpretation should form a description of the group, in this case the young children, as well as themes related to the theoretical concepts being explored in this study (Creswell, 2013). Hence, data analysis employed descriptive and in vivo coding methods (Saldana, 2016).

Research investigating the behaviors of young children obligates the researcher to work within certain ethical boundaries. In fact, a study focusing on young children makes it incumbent upon the researcher to employ stringent ethical procedures throughout all stages of the research study (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, prior to conducting this study the consent of the participating young children, parents of the young children, and educators was obtained.

Actually, a consent form indicating that "participating in the study is voluntary and that it would not place the participants at undue risk" (Creswell, 2013, p.57), was utilized.

Chapter Outline

This study was presented in five chapters. Chapter One presented an introduction to the study. It included a description of the problem, the purpose of the study, three guiding questions, the significance of this study, an outline of the areas of literature from which this study arose, and a description of the method of the study. Chapter Two encompassed the literature review. Literature relevant to the evolution of a digital culture supporting the development of 21st century technology tools**,** the social development of the young child, and pertinent theories of leadership were discussed. Chapter Three included a detailed description of the method of the study. This section described the rationale for the type of study proposed, information on the participants and setting, instrumentation to be used, methodology instrumentation to be used for data collection, procedures for data analysis, and ethical and confidentiality considerations. Chapter Four described the presentation and analysis of data collected from observations and interviews. Findings, as they connect to the guiding research questions, were reported. Chapter Five included a summary of the study, discussion of implications and recommendations for educational leadership related to the study's findings, recommendations for future studies, and final reflections.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This research study investigates the experiences of young children growing up in a digital era. Specifically, it focuses on their interactions within a digital landscape. This review of the literature begins with an examination of the developing socio-emotional world of the young child, and continues to consider the digital culture establishing the contemporary context within which social interactions occur.

In essence, this study is supported by appropriate existent bodies of literature, and addresses three main areas. First the development of the young child, particularly the social aspect, is explored. Topics such as social interactions, the development of social skills, the role of friendship and peer culture are reviewed. Within this context, the role of play in the life of the young child is examined. Moreover, factors influencing the developing social identity of the child are reviewed. Second, the evolution of a digital culture supporting the development of digital technology tools, their integration into home and educational environments, as well as implications on 21st century pedagogy is examined. Indeed; the use of digital technology tools within the contemporary social environment is discussed. Finally, theories of educational leadership, especially the adaptive leadership approach are reviewed. This serves to frame the study as an adaptive leadership challenge.

Hence, in helping to define the problem the literature reviewed comes primarily from the field of education, as well as interdisciplinary fields of study, including developmental psychology, sociology, technology and leadership. These bodies of literature correspond to the following three research questions that guide and focus this study:

- How does engaging with digital tools influence the social interactions of young children?

- Are there various ways online/offline social environments influence face to face social peer group formation and functioning?
- How does relating to others through digital tools influence the developing social identities of young children?

Theories of Child Development

Theories of child development influence the manner in which humans understand, care for, and educate their children. In fact these theories form the foundations of our attitudes towards children, while reinforcing popular childrearing practices. So too, they inform and influence a myriad of popular approaches to early childhood education. Moreover, early childhood professionals look to child development theory to guide them in program design. Essentially, child development can be thought of as a progressive series or stages of changes occurring in a predictable pattern as a result of an interaction between biological and environmental factors (Salkind, 1985). Gonzalez-Mena (2011) notes that child development studies focus on how children change as they grow, from a qualitative as well as a quantitative standpoint, exploring in particular, the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development of children. In line with the questions guiding this study this review focuses on the social and emotional aspects of the development of young children. Emotional development relates to the development of a positive self-identity, feeling empathy, a sense of competence, and an ability to be emotionally intelligent (to recognize and name emotions), whereas social development concerns interacting and cooperating with others, developing a sense of community, and an ability to value diversity. For instance, in his theory of multiple intelligences or *frames of mind*, Howard Gardner (1983) asserts that intrapersonal intelligence is about being connected to who you are and how you feel, and knowing your limits and abilities whereas, interpersonal

intelligence is about social interaction and understanding the people around you their motives, emotions, perspectives, and moods (Gardner, 1983).

In truth, the growing child's experience, expression, and management of emotions influence their ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others. In other words, dealing with emotions is often a prerequisite to socializing with others. As a result of their interdependence this vital area of human growth is best captured by the joint term socio-emotional development or competence (Epstein, 2009). The following section relates to the socio-emotional development of young children, specifically the concept of friendship and the role of play in the life of the young child. It also includes a short examination of social identity.

Socio-emotional Development

Numerous theories examine the impact of social experiences on the developing individual. One of the earliest of these theories is attachment theory. First proposed by Bowlby (1982), attachment theory contends that children are born with an innate need to form attachments with other humans, especially with their caregivers. According to Bowlby (1982), such attachments aid in survival by ensuring that the child receives care and protection. Moreover, these attachments are both fundamental in the child's social development and influential in their social relationships throughout life. In accord with Bowlby (1982), Erikson (1950) observed that during their first stage of development infants must learn how to trust others, particularly those who care for their basic needs.

Erikson (1950) posits a psychosocial theory emphasizing the socio-emotional nature of human beings. Moreover, he emphasizes the critical influence that social interaction and relationships have in the development and growth of human beings. Erikson (1950) asserts that at various stages in their development humans encounter a *conflict* centered on either developing

a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. Additionally, these conflicts are social in their nature. To take a case in point, during the early school years by means of positive social interactions, the young child will resolve the conflict of *industry verse inferiority* (Erikson, 1950) leading to a feeling of competence and belief in their skills. During this stage, children become capable of performing increasingly complex tasks. As a result, they strive to master new skills. Children who are encouraged and commended by parents, teachers, and peers develop a feeling of competence and belief in their abilities. Children who receive little or no encouragement will doubt their ability to be successful, and may emerge from this stage with feelings of failure and inferiority. According to Erikson (1950), "this is socially a most decisive stage: since industry involves doing things beside and with others…a sense of the *technological ethos* of a culture, develops at this time" (p.260).

Along the same lines, this reciprocal relationship between the individual and the environment is fundamental to the social learning theory advanced by Bandura (1997). Asserting that by observing, imitating, or modeling the actions of others, including parents and peers, children acquire skills and information, Bandura emphasizes the role of internal mediational processes in development (Salkind, 1985). Accordingly, the individual contributes consciously to their behavior. That is, sensory input does not automatically produce behavior unaffected by the individual's conscious cognitive contribution.

Underscoring the social nature of cognition, cognitive developmental psychologists Piaget (1926, 1932) and Vygotsky (1978, 1986) emphasize the essential role social interaction plays in processes leading to cognitive growth. Specifically, Piaget (1929, 1932) claims that disequilibrium resulting from conflicts between a child's personal views and those of their peers, constitutes an essential process for cognitive growth. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) puts forward a

sociocultural approach highlighting the influence of peer collaboration on cognitive growth, specifically when this collaboration involves the creation of a common ground for interaction and communication as individual children come to a common perspective on a task. Furthermore, Vygotsky insisted that it was impossible to separate learning from its social context. He stated that: "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts…social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships" (Vygotsky, [1960]1981., as cited in Berk, 1995, p.12).

As a matter of fact, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory forms the basis of the social constructivist educational approach. This approach considers the child an active participant in the process of meaning making, knowledge construction, and skill enhancement through discovery, exploration, and communication within their environment. Also, proponents of social constructivist theory emphasize the essential role the social environment plays in supporting meaningful learning experiences. Likewise, a social constructivist perspective suggests that learning takes place during social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

Social Interactions

Social interaction refers to the manner in which people converse and behave with each other. In his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman (1956) proposed his dramaturgical analysis approach. Goffman (1959) observes that seemingly insignificant forms of social interaction such as cooperation, conflict, and coercion are of major importance in human

relationships and should not be overlooked. So too, young children's friendships are characterized by support, conflict, exclusivity or intimacy, and asymmetry (Sebanc, 2003). In line with this assertion, Bagwell and Schmidt (2011) state that "friendship provides optimal contexts for social development because of the ongoing experiences of companionship, intimacy, and conflict" (p. 84). Moreover, social relationships occupy in both the daily conduct of young children, as well as their world of thought and fantasy, a large portion of their waking hours. They tend to be the sources of children's greatest pleasures, frustrations and disappointments (Rubin, 1980).

Young Children's Friendships

Defined as a positive relationship between two children (Goldman & Buysse, 2007) , young children's friendships are characterized by an ability to have fun together, a desire to being near one another, as well as choosing to engage in play with one another. Consequently, friends serve central functions for young children shaping their social skills, providing one another with cognitive and emotional learning, companionship, intimacy, reliable alliances, affection, as well as influencing the young child's evolving positive sense of self (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016; Gleason & Hohmann, 2006; Goldman & Buysse, 2007; Rubin, 1980). Among the myriad existing definitions of friendship, the psychological perspective of friendship tends to focus on the developmental significance of friendship while the sociological perspective of friendship emphasizes friendship as "a collective and cultural process" (Corsaro, 1994, p. 2). This sociological approach focuses on how children construct their own peer culture (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011 as cited in Carter & Nutbrown, 2016, p.3), and how friendship functions for children in groups. According to Corsaro (2013 as cited in Carter and Nutbrown, 2016), children create their own complex peer culture with specific routines and concerns. Specifically, "social

participation and sharing are the heart of kids' peer culture" (Corsaro, 2003, p.2). Children therefore need to learn how this social world functions and how they can conform to these social customs in order to be accepted and be successful in establishing and maintaining friendships.

Establishing and Maintaining Friendships

Friends begin to dominate the social world of the young child during the preschool years; three to six years old. Gottman (1983, as cited by Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011) recognized processes occurring within preschool friendships, primarily during play, contributing to the establishment of a friendship between two children. For instance: the understanding of each other's communication and an openness to clarification when necessary; a willingness to ask and answer questions; engaging in common activities together with the extension and elaboration of each other's play, and specifically the sharing of feelings, and ability to resolve conflict. For young children, the children they are playing with are their friends, while those not playing are often seen as a threat to friendship. In reality, the term *friends*, when used by preschool children, usually refers to whomever they happen to be playing with at a specific time (Corsaro, 2003).

Granted, establishing and maintaining peer interactions are challenging tasks for children who are in the process of developing the linguistic and cognitive skills necessary for communication and social interaction. Furthermore, the social ecology (interaction between people and their environment) of most preschools increases the fragility of peer interaction (Corsaro, 1988). Since a preschool play area is a multiparty setting with many clusters of children playing together, young children tend to be protective of their shared play. Some preschool children use the idea of friendship to control other children (Corsaro, 2003).

Conversely, Bagwell and Schmidt (2011) suggest that collaboration among young children "occurs through verbal and non-verbal exchanges as friends suggest ideas for play, build

on one another's ideas , coordinate their perspectives, and create mutually agreed upon interactions and understandings" (p.79). In fact, Corsaro (2003) insists that children often collectively teach each other how to get along:

> "The kids are more concerned with 'playing' than 'making friends', and anyway, you make friends by playing with other kids- as many as you can" (p.1). By extension, "socialization is not something that happens to children; it is a process in which children, in interaction with others, produce their own peer cultures" (Corsaro, 1988, p.24).

Young Children's Peer Culture

Corsaro (2003) describes the peer culture of young children as a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children create and share in interaction with one another. He emphasizes that social participation and sharing are the heart of children's peer culture (Corsaro, 2003). Moreover, children want to gain control of their lives and they want to share that sense of control with each other. To put it succinctly, children develop peer cultures in preschool, take on behavioral patterns, and create social identities mediating between the individual, the group, and the institution, and this happens not least through play (Corsaro, 1988).

Play

Froebel (1887) asserted that "play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul…play is the purest intellectual production of the human being …specifically, the play of children is not recreation; it means earnest work." (Froebel, 1887, p. 54). Likewise, contemporary early childhood educator Vivian Paley (2009) emphasized that "play itself is the original source of sensitivity, sensibility, and knowledge about the human experience…it is, in fact, a complex occupation, requiring

practice in dialogue, exposition, detailed imagery, social engineering, literary allusion, and abstract thinking. Being both work and love for young children, play is absolutely essential for their health and welfare" (p.131). In fact, children's play types include cognitive and social play. Whereas, cognitive play describes the manner in which children play social play refers to those with whom children play.

Cognitive play. Initially interacting with the environment through the five senses, sensorimotor play facilitates the young child's discovery of their bodies and immediate surroundings. Known also as "practice" or "functional" play, both objects and people enable sensorimotor play. In contrast, symbolic play involves imagination and thought processes including the child's ability to use an entity to represent another, take on roles, act out situations and recreate past experiences that have captured their imagination and interest. Symbolic play includes dramatic play, constructive play, and playing games with rules (Gonzalez-Mena, 2011). Dramatic and constructive play may take place indoors or outdoors. They are dynamic, and active forms of play that include taking on a role, engaging in imitating behavior and creating constructions.

Social play. Social play includes solitary and interactive play. Actually, solitary play is characteristic of infants and toddlers, however children of all ages tend to enjoy playing alone even if other children are present. Similarly, two or more children may choose to play alone but within close proximity of each other. Indeed, parallel play is characterized by children playing physically next to, but not with, one another. Researchers believe that not only may their parallel play influence one another, but that children use parallel play as a tactic in order to gain entrance into group play (Corsaro 2003). To put it bluntly, children with advanced social skills use parallel play to enter into play with others (Gonzalez-Mena, 2011). Ultimately, play with others,

or interactive play, helps the young child set social experiences with peers in motion. After all, co-operative play involves a degree of organization and collaboration, while associative play occurs when children interact spontaneously with one another or conduct casual conversations. Indeed, the various ways in which children play "provides an excellent opportunity to try combinations of behavior that would, under functional pressure, never be tried" (Bruner, 1972, p. 693). Indeed, **y**oung children need social experiences with peers in order to develop the capacity to cooperate and collaborate.

Additionally, children depend on adults to facilitate and mediate their social interactions. For example, Yeong, Ostrosky, and Fowler (2011), observe that mothers who provide their young children with social opportunities in formal as well as informal venues supported their children's peer relationships and friendships. Hence, they consider that preschool parents' social networks influence their children's peer relationships, evolving friendships, and social identity.

Social Identity

Social identity is the part of our self-concept that comes from our membership in social groups, the value we place on this membership, and what it means to us emotionally (Tajfel, 1981). Social identity has many facets, such as gender, social class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. These numerous characteristics are thought to constitute who we are as social beings. Millen and Garran (2008) propose that social identities emerge at certain times under specific conditions; they are shaped by social and cultural contexts, public discourses, national myths, and intergroup relations (p. 4). According to Brewer (2001), social identity is how we see ourselves in relation to others. It reflects two social motives: our desire to be included and be part of a group, while simultaneously needing to develop our individuality and separateness.

In order to cultivate their social identity young children advance and perceive their own individuality within their peer group. Within this context they are active agents in their own socialization, gaining skills to communicate with other people and processing their actions. In fact, their developing social identities are grounded in their cultivating friendships and other relationships, as well as to handling conflict with their peers. Moreover, it has been asserted that many unique aspects of their peer culture, including specific rules, routines, concerns and practices are often oblivious to adults (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016).

In truth, children creatively take information from the adult world to produce their own unique childhood cultures. Hence, children are constantly participating in and form a part of two intricately interwoven cultures: adulthood and childhood. In reality, contemporary adult culture can be defined as a digital culture: - one in which digital technologies significantly shape human behavior, interactions, thought processes, and communications in a societal setting (digitalculturist.com).

A Digital Culture

A digital culture characterized by ubiquitous technologies and limitless access to information has resulted in disruptive technological innovation within our 21st century society (Christensen, 2015). Although it is true that American engineers began developing digital technology in the mid-twentieth century, this innovation has created a 21st century lifestyle characterized by the relationship between people and digital technologies. This is a phenomenon attributed to the creation of a digital society (Turkle, 2011).

Digital Technologies

In the mid-twentieth century, American engineers began developing digital technology. Grounded in mathematical concepts suggested by the seventeenth-century German

mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, digital technology is a base two process. Digitized information is recorded in binary code of combinations of the digits 0 and 1, also called bits, which represent words and images. Consequently, digital technology enables immense amounts of information to be compressed on small storage devices that can be easily preserved and transported. Additionally, digitization quickens data transmission speeds (Encyclopedia.com). In other words, the term "digital technology" refers to the branch of scientific or engineering knowledge dealing with the creation and practical use of digital or computerized devices, methods or systems, as well as to a digital device, method, or system created as a result of using this knowledge (Dictionary.com).

Digital Media

Actually, we have developed from a communicating society centered during the 19th century around a print culture to a 20th century electronic broadcast culture to a 21st century digital society characterized by a culture of social media, big data, and online personalized and networked communicative media, employing digital technology. Print media, together with broadcast media;-radio, formed the popular media platforms of the 1930s. The 1950s introduced television to broadcast media, while the 1970s saw the evolution of cable television. Home video game consoles, portable music players, VCRs and home computers revolutionized the media platforms of the 1980s. The introduction of the Internet during the 1990s facilitated the development of innovative digital media platforms such as electronic interactive toys, Internet connected smartphones, MP3 players, and tablet computers. Indeed, as the 21st century opened, children between the ages of 8 and 18 years old were exposed to media for just over 10 hours daily (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010).

Moreover, it appears that children born in the 21st century tend to prefer to consume their media on the move: "Not only do kids use the Internet or play a video game on home computers or consoles; they like to do these things on the go via a laptop or handheld device "(Gutnick et-al, 2010, p.15). Admittedly, media technologies are increasingly becoming communal and connected via online forums. Here children can engage with digital tools, along with other users, facilitating a sharing of information and participation in online discussions together with far and wide connections. Nevertheless, "this ability not only expands children's social networks but also leaves them vulnerable to predators and unintentional influences if parents and caregivers are not involved" (Vittrup, Snider, Rose & Rippy, 2016, p.52). To put it succinctly, electronic technologies have garnered debate regarding their developmental appropriateness, with some researchers considering them beneficial for young children (Bourke & Marsh, 2013 as cited in Vittrup et-al, 2016), while others remain cautious due to potential negative impact (Van dewater et-al., 2007 as cited in Vittrup et al, 2016).

Enthusiasts or Skeptics

In *Failure to Connect*, Healy (1999) warns against computer use, recommending little or no exposure before age seven, when the brain is able to comprehend abstract challenges. Recently, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2010) policy statement urges parents to avoid TV and video viewing for children younger than two years. Endorsing this claim, they insist that increasing amounts of research attribute healthy brain growth in infants and toddlers to direct interaction with parents and other regular caregivers. Howard-Jones (2011, as cited in Plowman & McPake, 2013) acknowledges that the young child's developing brain is more inclined to be influenced by environmental factors than the adult's. Judging that elements most likely to pose significant risk to children's development, such as, an increase in aggressive response from

playing violent video games, interference with psychosocial well-being and attention, and the potential for disrupted sleep are based on excessive use and exposure to violent content, he urges responsible adults in the environment to pay attention to these factors. On the other hand, he is clear that some forms of digital media may enhance learning of young children (Jones, 2011). Furthermore, in a 2016 study conducted by Vittrup et al, Scottish parents showed positive media attitudes, expressing a belief that media exposure is vital to their children's development. Moreover, many did not agree with recommendations from expert sources regarding age-appropriate screen time. To put it another way, digital technologies are thought of as essential tools enabling and enhancing the teaching and learning in the educational environment of the 21st Century. Besides, technology enthusiasts argue that in our rapidly altering world it is imperative to prepare students for integration into a 21st century professional work-force.

Digital Technology in Education

The myriad of digital technologies together with easy Internet access has impacted traditional educational concepts. After all, learning environments- including peers, family, and social institutions- are changing as well. In fact, Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2009) contends that "as educators, our challenge is to match the needs of our learners to a world that is changing with great rapidity. To meet this challenge, we need to become strategic learners ourselves by deliberately expanding our perspectives and updating our approaches" (p.7). Grounded in this idea that "new technologies are changing how people of all ages learn, play, socialize, exercise judgment, and engage in civic life" (Davidson et al., 2010, p.7), digital or participatory learning is evolving. Digital learning may refer to the process of learning with the aid of digital content, platform, or facilitators. Within this context, a participatory learning approach has been transformed and is sustained by digital technologies which enable learners to contribute to the

learning process, as well as allowing for digital learning outcomes to be customized by the learners. Moreover, digital tools allow for a cumulative range of responses with many learners contributing in diverse ways to individual and shared learning goals. According to Davidson (2010), "participatory learning includes the ways in which new technologies enable learners (of any age) to contribute in diverse ways to individual and shared learning goals."

Accordingly, 21st century learning is increasingly happening virtually, globally, and collaboratively. Indeed, contemporary educational discourse tends to focus on 21st century learning and how it differs from prior conceptions of learning. As a case in point, Mishra & Mehta (2017) contend that teachers and educators consider meta-knowledge (how to) such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication as the most important form of knowledge in the 21st century. Furthermore, teachers and educators consider foundational knowledge, that is core content knowledge and cross-disciplinary knowledge to be the least important knowledge form, with the exception of digital and technological literacy (Mishra and Mehta, 2017). Similarly, the partnership for 21st century learning (2017) describes these meta-knowledge skills; critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication together with technology literacy, and social-emotional development, as fundamental skills needed to thrive in contemporary society. Actually, they have been referred to as *21st century skills (*The Glossary of Education Reform, https://www.edglossary.org/21st-century-skills).

Refuting this supposition, Mishra and Mehta (2017) claim that digital tools and technologies have provided us with new and innovative ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge however, they do not fundamentally change the goals and purposes of education. After all, they believe, education is still about instilling in learners ways of thinking that are tightly connected to disciplinary ways of knowing embedded within a humanistic worldview.

They argue, "the mere presence of information and communication technology and the immediate availability of information do not mean that these forms of knowledge are obsolete" (Mishra & Mehta, 2017, p.16).

Nevertheless, prevailing essential tools of learning are shifting increasingly from the printed page to digital media (Davidson et-al, 2011). Moreover, in order to support, advance, and educate this global generation of young learners, the teacher or human capital must be equipped with suitable skills. Hence, supporting faculty in their exploration of new technologies to better understand the meaning of learning in a digital age has become a crucial condition of the educational organization.

Technological Pedagogic Content Knowledge

Mishra and Koehler (2006) note that it is about integrating technology into the teaching and learning as a pedagogic tool and not only about becoming knowledgeable about technology as a skill. A teacher must possess pedagogic content knowledge. A teacher must acquire technological content knowledge and skills. These bodies of knowledge must fuse and generate technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) that guides teaching and learning (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Moreover, researchers have determined that technology integration into teaching and learning moves through specific levels. The SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) model, created by Dr. Ruben Puentedura (2009), defines four levels of technology integration into the learning and teaching: starting with the employment of digital technology as a direct substitute for existing resources, to augmentation that allows for a functional improvement, then modification allows redesigning or modifying the task, eventually redefining the assignment using digital technologies, and creating a previously impossible learning task.

Consequently, digital technologies are being integrated as a pedagogical tool into the traditional school system. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that "in conventional learning institutions, the lines of authorship and authority are clearly delineated, and the place of teacher, student, and technology are well known. With digital learning, these conventional modes of authority break down" (Davidson, 2010, p.7). After all, no longer is the classroom teacher seen as the expert, the knower of all knowledge, but as the facilitator of discovering and creating new knowledge. Also, digital technology lessens the need to know content details yourself. As long as you know how to find the information and help you are seeking; you can successfully complete a task (Collins & Halverson, 2009).

Young Children learn in a Digital Era

The current academic conversation around digital technologies and young children has moved away from whether or not technology should be used in educational environments, and towards how technology should be used within these environments of young children's learning (Beschorner & Hutchison, 2013). In line with this contemporary approach, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that the impact of technology is mediated by the use teachers make of the same developmentally appropriate principles and practices that presently guide the use of printed materials, as well as other learning tools and content matter for young children in early childhood education classrooms (NAEYC, 2012).

Actually, these principles of practice reaffirm the assertion of developmentally appropriate practice methodology that "all teaching practices should be appropriate to children's ages and developmental status, attuned to them as unique individuals, and responsive to the social and cultural contexts in which they live"(NAEYC, 2009, p.).

Young Children Socialize in a Digital Era

To be sure, the social and cultural contexts within which contemporary young children interact with others include the use of digital tools. Consequently, young children produce their own peer culture including engaging with interactive digital games, and social media. Growing up within a technological environment and feeling comfortable within it has created a generation of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). Engaging with diverse digital tools forms a natural part of their play and, young children's access to technologies has implications for their social relationships (Hutchby, 2001). Moreover, conventional wisdom suggests that digital play contributes to the acquisition of 21st century skills by preparing children for future roles, developing communication and collaboration skills, nurturing creativity, and providing an opportunity for digital-literacy skills (Kulman, 2015).

Digital play

Digital play can be defined as a voluntary, stimulating activity involving the use of digital technologies (Kulman, 2015). Digital play includes activities related to video and computer games, Internet sites and search engines, electronic toys, mobile technologies, cell phones, tablets, and the creation of digital content. Actually, the technological affordance or specific tasks users can perform with the particular digital technology at their disposal dictates the form of digital play. Hence, the material limitations of a technology and their specific applications, as well as their facilitating qualities (Hutchby, 2001) impact the nature of the child's play. Nevertheless, Marsh et al (2016) suggest that it is not so much the types of play that have changed as a result of new digital contexts as the nature of play: "contemporary play draws on both the digital and non-digital properties of things and in doing so moves fluidly across boundaries of space and time in ways that were not possible in the pre-digital era" (p. 8). Their

findings provide a counterpoint to those who seek to dichotomize digital and non-digital play, suggesting that play with digital technologies is not 'real play' (Palmer, 2016). In addition, Marsh et al (2016), propose that the dichotomy of online/offline worlds, together with the contrasts of the physical and virtual shape the social activities of young children, provides a means of classifying play types in a contemporary context.

Emerging Social Skills

In discussions about digital play, one controversial issue has been the developing social skills of young children. On the one hand, it is argued that engaging in digital play creates para-social or one-sided relationships (Brunick et al, 2016). On the other hand, researchers contend that approximately 70% of all digital engagement is no longer solitary but social in nature, supporting reciprocal relationships (the learning works for kids, 2015).

Parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships refer to "one-sided emotionally tinged relationships that people develop with mass media characters (Calvert & Richards, 2014, as cited in Brunick et al, 2016), particularly with characters viewed on television. In forming such a relationship, the viewer feels that they know the character's personality, behaviors, tastes and relationships with others, and cares about the character as if they were friends. Indeed, the viewer may seek advice from the character, wish to be a part of the character's social world, and engage in a close friendly relationship with the character. Moreover, para-social relationships may provide a sense of personal and social satisfaction, encouraging loyalty to the program or movie featuring the character (Lemish, 2015). For example, young children may share the same perspective as a television character they admire, consequently, identifying with and living vicariously via the character's experiences. In this way the character serves to reaffirm the children's sense of self-worth, manifest similar beliefs, attitudes, and world view, and serves as a

role model for possible behaviors in situations relevant to their life (Lemish, 2015). Hence, while young children tend to outgrow their favorite media character (Brunick et al, 2015), encouraging them to develop para-social relationships with media characters may increase the chance that these characters serve as educational resources. Admittedly, digital media in general and television in particular provide young children a means of contact with characters and information beyond their everyday lives. In addition to serving as role models for identification and imitation, media characters can be a resource for learning about the world.

Reciprocal relationships. Digital play is seen to extend the space for collaborative activities in relation to children's imaginative play, media characters and experiences. Along the same lines, young children's collaboration on the computer with friends can be seen as greater than with acquaintances (Chen, 2016). Similarly, young children developing knowledge in digital contexts using an iPad tend to talk and work together (Beschorner & Hutchison, 2013). Others even maintain that the need for technical support from parents or older siblings while using a tablet creates opportunities for social interactions within the family. Indeed, Plowman and Stephen (2007) found that children require support known as "guided interaction" until they reach a level of familiarity that permits independent use of digital tools. Ultimately, when supporting the child's play as a "technical expert," even for a short moment, parents and siblings receive unique opportunities to share, and scaffold, the child's digital play. Additionally, Plowman and McPake (2013) note that digital media, with the correct support, opens up avenues of communication over time and distance, providing new and intriguing possibilities for the development of children's communicative skills. Illustrating that thoughtful employment of technology can enhance rather than hinder social interaction, this new form of social play, involving the use of digital media in conjunction with others has recently been given the term

"joint media engagement" (Joan Ganz Cooney Foundation, as cited in http://learningworksforkids.com).

Similarly, applying theories of play established in conventional (offline) play settings to children's use of tablets in their home settings, Verenikina and Kervin (2011) observed digital play blending into a variety of children's play contexts. They suggest that young children prefer engaging in online games involving their imagination, as well as developing play that extends beyond the screen. Likewise, Lemish (2015) acknowledges that "media contents were found to leave *media traces* in children's stories, play, and artwork. They were used by children to construct their make-believe worlds and in doing so to express their desires through imagined play within these worlds"(p.63).Moreover, children tend to integrate media settings, objects, and characters, together with rituals, anecdotes, and specific information such as a name, into their imagined or desired personal narratives.

In short, the integration of digital technologies into 21st century society has resulted in the emergence and development of a digital culture. This culture, characterized by the relationship between people and technology, significantly shapes the way people interact, behave, and think. People are using digital technology to enhance or alter their quality of education, entertainment, and communication with one another in a societal setting. Consequently, as their lives become more and more entwined with digital technologies, and their "lives become more and more fast paced, we innovate to adapt" (d'Arnault, 2015).

Connections to Educational Leadership

Considering this need to innovate, adapt and change our lifestyle as a response to the rapidly evolving digital society, the theories of adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994), together with change leadership (Wagner & Kegan, 2006) support this study. This section considers theories of

educational leadership as conceptual frameworks and processes to inform and lead change within a dynamic digital culture.

In *Leadership Without Easy Answers,* Ronald Heifetz (1994) differentiates between the technical and adaptive work of a leader. Heifetz (1994) emphasizes that technical dilemmas are challenges that we already know how to respond to, while adaptive predicaments involve our assessment of reality together with the clarification of our values. Furthermore, Heifetz (1994) asserts that an adaptive challenge is one that demands a new solution to solve it. So too, Wagner and Kegan (2006) propose a *change leadership approach*, encouraging leaders to see the whole, and to think systemically about challenges and goals of change. This theory espouses key elements of competency, conditions, culture and context, (Wagner & Kegan, 2006) providing a useful framework for initiating conversations on the social interactions of young children in a digital culture.

Adaptive Leadership

As stated, Heifetz (1994) asserts that an adaptive challenge is one that demands a new solution to solve it. Differentiating between the technical and adaptive work of a leader, Heifetz (1994) emphasizes that technical dilemmas are challenges that we already know how to respond to, while adaptive predicaments involve our assessment of reality together with the clarification of our values. Ultimately, solutions to technical problems lie in the head and solving them requires intellect and logic, whereas solutions to adaptive problems lie in the stomach and the heart, relying on changing people's beliefs, habits, ways of working, and/or ways of life (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). After all, by definition, adaptive challenges involve a disparity between values and circumstances. In other words, adaptive challenges necessitate the creation of new models

and approaches experimenting, evaluating, redesigning, as well as adjusting to new mindsets by those experiencing perplexing dilemmas.

Moreover, in resolving an adaptive challenge it is essential that leaders demonstrate an ability to manage and yet sustain personal stresses that come with leading. For instance, Heifetz (1994) advocates that adaptive leaders "get on the balcony, distinguish self from role, externalize the conflict, use partners, listen-using oneself as data, find a sanctuary and preserve a sense of purpose"(p.252).Thus, Heifetz (1994) encourages adaptive leaders to move beyond positional authority when attempting to identify, determine, and implement a collective focus for adaptive changes.

Certainly, leaders can and should use their authority as a tool to help foster dialogue and debate around an adaptive issue (Heifetz, 1994). Ultimately, facilitating and supporting this ongoing dialogue, leaders provide the framework for conversations, and when necessary mediate conflicts in order to generate a participatory dialogue necessary for adaptive change. The dynamic world of digital technologies is creating unfamiliar situations leading to adaptive challenges that demand innovative solutions to solve them. However, people are exhibiting a resistance or immunity, to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2002).

Immunity to Change

Human beings tend to resist personal or organizational change due to the existence of an internal human element or an immune system. Specifically, natural forces maintaining a dynamic equilibrium play a larger role in the human ability to change than is commonly understood. These forces, rooted in nature, obstruct an individual's chance to learn and grow, ultimately preventing the manifestation of change or personal transformation. Indeed, forms of speaking regulate forms of thinking, feeling, and meaning making. After all, social settings are language

communities. The kind of language leaders choose to use influences the culture and climate of the organization. Furthermore, it affects the ability of the people to contend with contextual factors impacting on the organization (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). For instance, young children tend to be "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet, while their grandparents, parents, and many educators may be immigrants to this culture, communicating in their new language with an accent (Prensky, 2001). In fact this language disparity illustrates the paralyzing effect of contrasting lifestyle commitments and its resulting in an immunity to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2002). Specifically, contrasting commitments can present themselves as online/offline socializing, real play versus virtual play, or para-social verses reciprocal relationships.

Additionally, Kegan and Lahey (2002) note that contrasting commitments are grounded in big assumptions or deeply rooted beliefs people hold about themselves and the world around them. As most big assumptions are formed in times gone by and are rarely critically examined, people tend to be unaware of their personal big assumptions. Moreover, since big assumptions are held as fact, they actually inform what people see, leading them to instinctively pay attention to certain data whilst ignoring other data. Indeed, these notions are "woven into the very fabric of people's existence" (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p.56). For instance, the assumption that exposure to the omnipresence of digital media, together with changes in the nature of play, is creating a "toxic environment" affecting the emotional, social, and cognitive growth of our children, thereby causing a "toxic childhood" (Palmer, 2006), is contrary to the assumption that mobile phones have become fundamental to the maintenance and management of social relationships in children's lives. Children view their mobile phones as fulfilling both emotional and functional needs (Bond, 2010).

Hence, illuminating big assumptions sometimes results in people challenging these assumptions. This process brings about an appreciation of their engaging in seemingly contradictory behavior. Once people have identified their competing commitments, and the big assumptions that sustain them, they may be prepared to embark on overcoming their immunity to change.

Change Leadership

Wagner and Kegan (2006) propose a change leadership approach, encouraging leaders to see the whole, and to think systemically about challenges and goals of change. This approach, grounded in the components of competency, conditions, culture and context, is referred to as the "4Cs". Whereas competencies are described as the internal repertoire of skills and knowledge a person possesses and develops, conditions refer to the external architecture surrounding the learning such as time, space and resources. Even though the culture component of this approach refers to the unseen but powerful mindsets held individually or collectively throughout the system, it is necessary to be aware of the contextual component or the specific worlds within which individuals involved with the organization live. For instance, young children growing up in the 21st century possess and develop an internal repertoire of digital technological skills evolving within an environment of ubiquitous technologies. Computer games, email, social media networks, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives. Indeed, the digital culture reaffirms individual or collective attitudes endorsing the integration of digital technologies into the social world of children.

To sum up, insights from a change leadership approach together with those proposed by an adaptive leadership mindset may facilitate dialogue and debate, illuminating how technology facilitates and hinders the social interactions of young children. After all, the key elements of

competency, conditions, culture and context, (4Cs) (Wagner & Kegan, 2006) provide a useful framework for arranging conversations on the social interactions of young children in a digital culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the advancement of innovative digital technologies has created a generation of digital natives growing up in a diverse environment characterized by a population of digital immigrants integrating with digital natives. Consequently, this everyday experience has disrupted the social environment of many, creating a dissonance in their lifestyle Contemporary young children interact with others using digital tools, producing their own peer culture including engaging with social media. Family value systems are being challenged, as are the norms and etiquette put to use in 21st Century socializing. I propose that changes taking place in the current digital culture have created an adaptive challenge for contemporary society in general, and families in particular. Digital immigrants must internalize these changes in order to embrace and integrate this new reality into their lifestyles, while digital natives must develop technological skills and maintain a presence in an "online/offline" social world. Ultimately, innovative, new models must be developed, norms adapted to, and mindsets transformed. In short, a successful adaption to the use of meaningful technologies will enable our social system to take the best from our history of socializing customs and values into our future.

The chapter that follows describes the study design and details how it was conducted. Selection of participants, the development of the research instrumentation, data collection and data analysis procedures are discussed. Information on coding procedures, the validity, limitations and the delimitations of the study are presented.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter details how the study was designed and conducted. It addresses and justifies the choice of research methods. Selection of participants, including the procedures for selection, demographic information, and ethical considerations are explained. The development of the research instrumentation is also described. Data collection and data analysis procedures are discussed, and include information on how coding procedures were employed. Finally, this chapter includes information about the validity, limitations and the delimitations of the study.

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how engaging with digital tools shapes the social interactions of young children. It examined the various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning. Furthermore, this study explored whether digital technology, as a social tool, influences the developing social identities of young children.

Ethnographic research was identified as being a particularly applicable research approach for this study, since it offers a unique method to investigate children's cultural knowledge and practices in naturalistic settings (Worthington & Van Oer, 2017). Specifically, ethnographic research affords the researcher an opportunity to investigate the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013). as, an ethnographic research approach promoted the exploration of the participating children's interactions in their natural learning environment, allowing the researcher to capture their spontaneous social interactions in their daily learning activities, it was the research approach initially chosen for this study.

However, time frame and cost constraints made it essential that I structured explicit boundaries for my study relating to time and place. Consequently, a Mini-Ethnographic Case Study research design was chosen for this dissertation. This mini-ethnographic case study design enjoys an ethnographic approach that is bounded within a case study protocol (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). Case study design is characterized by a definition of the inquiry within specific parameters such as place and time (Creswell, 2013). Hence, adopting case study procedure for this study offered an appropriate modus operandi to direct my choice of an ethnographic approach.

The following three research questions guided and focused this study:

1. How does engaging with digital tools influence the social interactions of young children?
2. Are there various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning?
3. How does relating to others through digital tools influence the developing social identities of young children?

Throughout this chapter, the different elements of this research study will be discussed with the intention of providing information about the chosen research design.

Researcher Bias

Qualitative researchers collect data themselves. A researcher's socio-cultural perspective of the world can both intentionally and unintentionally affect the research process. This behooves the researcher to recognize their researcher bias. For instance, in ethnographic studies the researcher filters the participants' views (*emic* perspective) through the researcher's *etic* or scientific perspective to develop an overall cultural interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

Educational Approach

I am an early childhood educator as well as an experienced early childhood education teacher educator. As an educator I identify with the social constructivist approaches to teaching and learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). This approach considers the child an active participant in the process of meaning making, knowledge construction, and skill enhancement through discovery, exploration, and communication within their environs. Also, social constructivist theory emphasizes the essential role the social environment plays in supporting meaningful learning experiences. Likewise, a social constructivist perspective suggests, that learning takes place during social interactions. Hence, I view knowledge as socially constructed.

In line with this, at the heart of my educational belief lies the conviction that it is the early childhood educator who sows the seeds for children's developing socio-emotional skills. Indeed, educators – along with families – play an important role in supporting young children's discoveries as they develop their personal and social identities. Naturally, this personal credo influenced my research interest, my guiding questions, and my choices in research design. Selecting a mini- ethnographic research design was an obvious choice to me as I believe that in their natural environment children behave in a genuinely spontaneous and sincere manner.

Experience has taught me that young children are naturally honest, curious, adventurous, and social beings. Moreover, my teaching approach affirms the principles that play is the language and work of children (Paley, 1992). During my classroom visits, in the role of pedagogic mentor to early childhood educators, I watched with fascination and delight the spontaneous imaginary play of the children. Grounded in these experiences, I began to wonder about the interface between conventional imaginary play and digital play in the social interactions of the diverse, large number of children I observed from the sidelines.

It is important to note that the early childhood education classrooms within which I mentor my students identify with a developmentally appropriate approach to early childhood education. That means, without exception, that the kindergarten classrooms into which I choose to integrate my students include a large space dedicated to socio-dramatic play. Specifically, this typically includes a visually appealing "housekeeping" area and invested blocks building area. This actuality influenced my research design, and especially the three guiding questions formulated to guide the study.

Teacher-researcher Role

Aware of my researcher role and the attempt to keep this distinct from the teacher role, once in the field and embedded in the classroom culture I consciously took the following steps:

- On a daily basis I ensured that I physically separated myself from the teaching staff, observing classroom interactions from the side or even a far corner in the classroom.
- During snack and lunch times, while the kindergarten teacher and one or two subject teachers chatted at the teacher's desk, I sat alone, generally observing and noting the children's spontaneous conversations.
- During outdoor playtime I did not sit or chat with the nursery and kindergarten teachers who accompanied and watched over the youngsters on the playground. Instead, I sat alone on a wooden bench under the trees separated by the monkey bars climbing apparatus; I consciously placed myself opposite the gathering point of the teachers.
- On other occasions, when the children's play was gravitating towards the climbing-sliding equipment, I sat on the ground close to this apparatus. In addition, I would abstain from the casual conversation of the teaching staff, involving myself in scrupulous note taking and isolating myself while I focused on my researcher role.

Another example of this self-awareness can be illustrated through my decision to not be present in the school environment on a day when the kindergarten teacher called in ill and a replacement teacher substituted for her. This decision stemmed from my cognizance that in this situation I would be the familiar, experienced adult and the probability of the children looking to me for teacher guidance was high. Thus, I chose not to attend class on those days, in an attempt to prioritize and protect my researcher status.

Overview of Research Design

This study was designed as a qualitative enquiry focusing on the integration of digital tools into the social life of young children. Specifically, this study investigated the everyday social experiences of young children within a digital culture, as viewed through an *ethnographic* lens. *Ethnographies* focus on developing a complex, complete description of the culture of a group or a *culture-sharing group* (Creswell, 2013). Indeed, Wolcott (2008a, as cited in Creswell, 2013) comments that ethnography is the study of the social behaviors of an identifiable group of people, such as young children. Specifically, this study adopted a mini ethnographic case study approach, which is an ethnographic approach that is bounded within a case study protocol (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). Actually, "traditional ethnography can take a great deal of time to accomplish, which is why it is not encouraged as a design choice for doctoral students…mini-ethnographies can be conducted within a week, a month, or up to a year" (Storesund & McMurray, 2009, as cited in Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017, p. 926).

Case study researchers examine groups of individuals participating in a group activity or an organization (Creswell, 2013) and involve researcher immersion into programs or events. Furthermore, a case study has been described as a spatially delimited phenomenon observed at a single point in time or over a certain period of time (Yin, 2007).

Qualitative research supports an emergent research process allowing for changes and adaptations to occur once the researcher enters the field and embarks on data collection (Creswell, 2013). In line with this, adapting my research approach to my evolving study resulted in a research study grounded in a mini-ethnographic case study approach. I will now explain the emergence of this research design.

Adaptation of Research Approach to Evolving Study

As an ethnographic research approach promoted the exploration of the children's interactions in their natural learning environment, allowing the researcher to capture their spontaneous social interactions in their daily learning activities, it was the research approach initially chosen for this study. Hence, in line with ethnographic methodology the researcher became immersed in the field. However, it soon became apparent that for the purposes of this dissertation research project it was necessary to limit or bind the study in time and place.

Understanding the importance of such boundaries, Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2017), assert that "one can blend study designs to be able to use the best of each design that can mitigate the limitations of each as well. Blended designs use the best of both worlds" (p. 926). Employing ethnographic research techniques therefore enabled me to observe and document in field notes the genuine interactions among the children, with their peers and with adults in their natural settings. Consequently, this enriched my understanding of their motivations, behaviors, and influence of the context within which they interact with one another. Details of these understandings will be shared in Chapter four.

A case study protocol allowed me to select "clearly identifiable cases with boundaries" (Creswell, 2013, p.100), focusing my study on a particular group of children. The design decisions were validated by the work of Fusch & Ness (2015), who assert that the novice

researcher should choose a research design that assists the researcher in reaching data saturation, as well as allowing one to complete the study within a reasonable time frame with minimal cost.

Data Saturation

The idea of data saturation comes from grounded theory and suggests that one stops collecting data once fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties (Creswell, 2013). In other words, the researcher functions within a framework that asks, "given the theory that is evolving in this study do we have enough data to illustrate it while avoiding 'informational redundancy'?" (Sandelowski, 2008, p.875). Data saturation is somewhat relative, with an ethnographic design depending on the length of the study because the study is typically ongoing for a number of years (Fusch, 2013). However, with a mini-ethnography, data saturation can be reached much sooner because the research is bounded in time and space by a case study design (Fusch, 2013).

Being embedded

Researcher immersion into the culture being investigated is a key characteristic of an ethnographic research design. Moreover, it is the opportunity to become a member of the culture that facilitates ethnographic data collection (Fusch, 2013, as cited in Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). Although a mini-ethnographic case study results in time constraints, being embedded in the study is not essentially connected to the length of time spent at the research site but rather to explicit and implicit indications (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). Ultimately, the researcher must be mindful of these indications in order to diminish the effect of this limitation on the holistic research project.

Setting

The research setting can be seen as the physical, social, and cultural site in which the study is conducted (Given, 2008). Creswell (2013) asserts that a characteristic of qualitative research is the collection of data in the natural setting where the participants experience the problem under study, rather than in a laboratory or artificial location. For this reason, the setting establishes an important consideration for a qualitative research study. For example, in an ethnographic study, place plays a prominent and distinctive role (Wolcott, 2008) . Also, Malinowski (1922, as cited in Wolcott, 2008) urges the ethnographic researcher to report field work in context. Grounded in these notions of place and context, I will discuss the neighborhood setting, as well as the focal setting of this research study. For the sake of confidentiality and anonymity, I have given the school a fictitious name.

Neighborhood Setting

The Kulanu School is located on the grounds of a Youth Village in Jerusalem, Israel. It is a 40-acre gated, shared campus covered with trees. This wooded campus currently houses six other schools – an Israeli high school, a French high school, a boarding school, youth movement offices, a school for young men on the Autism spectrum, a music school, and a sports academy. These schools share facilities such as the gym, Olympic-size swimming pool, and an auditorium. Within this campus Kulanu is housed in two adjacent buildings that resemble small, 2-story apartment buildings. These two buildings house 16 classrooms, administrative offices, a small health room, computer lab, music room, and a library. Adjacent to these buildings, an outdoor playground and grassy areas provide open-air environments for the children's recreation and recess. The campus has 24-hour security and can only be accessed with prior permission gained at the security kiosk or by contacting the school office.

A small school of 90 pupils, Kulanu is known for its warm, safe, nurturing, family environment, and serves students from preschool (age three) through grade eight. Kulanu is a branch of an English Language International School in Israel. The main school is located in a city north of Tel Aviv. Both schools are accredited by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges (MSA). These schools tend to serve the transient international population working in Israel. They are private schools, which is a bit of an anomaly in the Israeli society where state schools provide a free education for all children aged three to 18 years. Additionally, in a country where Hebrew serves as the official language of communication and instruction, these schools educate students in the English language.

A truly international school, with 90% of its pupils from outside of Israel, the school supports a diverse population. The families come from a range of professional backgrounds, consulates, NGOs, news organizations, and international business networks. Within this school community it is not unusual to find a parent at home with their children. Admittedly, this is influenced by the possibility that one spouse did not receiving a work permit to work in Israel. Nonetheless, choosing to be a "hands-on," involved parent allows their children to spend after school hours in the company of a parent, generally the mother, and influences the involvement of the parents in the community life of the school.

Indeed, within this school community, volunteer work for the benefit of the school is highly valued. Depending upon a parent's availability and interests, they may read a book to a class, work as a library aide, be a classroom speaker on a specific topic of interest, or become a class liaison between the teacher and class parent population. Essentially, the school recognizes its individuality pursuing an educational approach based on culturally sensitive teaching in order to nurture a community based on diversity and mutual respect. Additionally, the school aims to

foster individual excellence through critical thinking, creativity, and initiative encouraging the students to become active and accountable global citizens.

Focal setting: the Kindergarten Classroom

The kindergarten classroom is located on the ground floor of the school building. It is accessed via a long internal corridor inside the school building or via an external door leading to the outdoor play area, the library, and administration building. The classroom is clearly divided into learning centers or interest areas offering the children well-defined activity choices. Low book shelves separate the learning centers from one another. Each center is visibly marked with a sign describing what the child learns in the center, along with rules of conduct to be followed in the particular area. In addition, a table for four children creates a focused work space within the different centers. Materials are displayed at a height accessible to the kindergarten children and the teacher is able to view all interest areas without obstruction. The following learning centers are found in the kindergarten classroom: Fine Motor center; Computer center; Puzzle center; Writing center including a Stamp center; Math center; and an Art center that includes a Play-Doh center. Against the far end of the classroom a small kitchenette can be found. Against one of the adjacent walls, is the Library/Book center. In addition, a Train and Lego center dominates the kitchen floor space during the daily center time.

As one enters the classroom from the kitchenette, a blue carpet and low book shelves demarcate the designated listening and gathering area. Additionally, the adjacent walls serve to communicate the purpose of this space; bulletin boards including a weather chart and Helping Hands bulletin board assigning daily classroom chores to various children communicate the classroom climate of independent involvement and responsibility in the daily classroom routine. Hanging on the opposite wall, a Smart Board known as the Smart Board center is evidence of the

digital learning integrated into this classroom environment. Standing open and continuously online, a laptop computer sits on a small teacher's table below the Smart Board. Additionally, the student sign-in instructions for *Seesaw* are attached to the back panel of the dividing bookshelf. *Seesaw* a digital portfolio platform allows the children to independently create digital portfolios of their work, and share with their parents in real time their daily classroom activities. The two classroom iPads used by the children to upload photographs of their work in real time onto *Seesaw* can be found in the book center.

While the physical learning environment supports the learning of the child, it also expresses the teaching philosophy of the educator who creates this environment. Thus for the purpose of this research study, it is important to note that this particular kindergarten classroom has neither a housekeeping center nor a block center. In other words, the kindergarten classroom that served as the context for this research study did not support socio-dramatic play in the traditional manner found in most kindergarten classes in Israel, which was alluded to in the Researcher Bias section above. Additionally, this kindergarten classroom contains elements of an academic approach to early childhood education. In particular, the kindergarten teacher leads the children in their daily activities, planning most of the activities and guiding the children in doing them.

The outdoor playground. An elongated, fenced naturally wooded space serves as the outdoor playground. A variety of playground equipment enriches the area, including a climbing-sliding apparatus, including stepladders, short sliding poles, platforms, and a long slide. This elongated area flows into a larger square area that features a sandbox, wooden playhouse, wooden barrel, an arched ladder, as well as a larger climbing apparatus supporting monkey bars.

One enters the playground via a gate located opposite the monkey bar apparatus. Opposite the gate, under the trees, is a wooden bench.

Climate and culture. This physical learning environment – the kindergarten classroom and outdoor play area – promotes a specific culture and climate unique to this particular site that purposefully informs this study (Creswell, 2013). For instance, the children follow a well-defined daily schedule. As a matter of fact, the daily schedule is built around a core curriculum, which is taught by the kindergarten teacher in the Kindergarten classroom. Moreover, when participating in the range of activities that fill this schedule the children display an understanding of the rules and procedures they are expected to follow when working in the specific learning centers. Indeed, their interactions with one another display an understanding of how they are expected to behave each day and how they are to go about it. Furthermore, they listen to their teacher and follow her instructions precisely. Ultimately, the work habits the children have developed in order to support their learning contribute to the culture and climate of the classroom.

In addition, enrichment subjects taught by specialization teachers who work with the children in their specialization classroom are integrated into the kindergarten weekly class schedule. These include subjects such as modern language (e.g., Spanish), music, art and physical education, as well as swimming and yoga sessions. Each period of instruction lasts for 45 minutes. Escorting the children to and from the specialty subject classrooms is the responsibility of the kindergarten teacher.

Participants

Qualitative researchers do not bring preconceived ideas from existing literature to their studies. Instead, qualitative research is grounded in gathering and understanding meanings participants hold about the problem or issue being explored. This qualitative study is supported by a

triad of researcher, kindergarten classroom teacher *(gatekeeper),* and kindergarten children making up the formal unit from which information was gathered and analyzed.

Gatekeeper

The early childhood educator in the research classroom context served as a *gatekeeper*, or the individual allowing this researcher into the field (Creswell, 2013). Moreover the classroom educator participated in the research project as a key informant, seeking the consent of the parents of each participating child, taking part in a semi-structured interview, and casually sharing information regarding the learning environment with the researcher during the school day.

Children

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select the 10 kindergarten children who are all five years old (turning six during the school year), who participated in the inquiry. These participants "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 125). Specifically, the participants were chosen using stratified sampling, which means that they were selected by identifying a relevant stratum or sub division of the population. For example, the children are English language speakers, learning in an English language environment. They are mainly international students whose families currently reside in Jerusalem. Furthermore, they are exposed to digital tools in the home and learning environments.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation refers to the tools or means by which researchers attempt to measure variables or items of interest in the data-collection process. The instrument is the specific apparatus used by researchers for collecting data. This study utilized photographs as a research instrument facilitating photo elicitation interviews (PEI). Photo elicitation is based on the idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview, resulting in an interview inspired by images and

text rather than by words alone. Research indicates that deeper elements of human consciousness can be provoked by the use of visual images. Consequently, the photo elicitation interview process elicits a different kind of information than a verbal interview (Harper, 2002). Put succinctly, "photo elicitation evokes information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph's particular form of representation" (Harper, 2002, p.13).

The use of photographs to promote a focused conversation is consistent with the ideas espoused in various approaches to early childhood education. For example, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) espouses the use of tangible materials, encouraging hands-on activity when working with young children; educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy encourage the use of materials or *manipulatives* – physical artifacts that can be concretely held by the child, offering a sensory experience (Edwards, 1993) while social constructivists (Lock, 2010) urge the social nature of language and communication as a meaning-making tool in childhood. These philosophical ideas translate into classroom practices with young children in which their ideas are solicited and documented.

Development of the researcher-selected photo-elicitation instrument

This research project used 6, colored, 10 cm x 15 cm pre-selected photographs of young children (who were not research participants) in order to provide a conversational focus to a semi-structured group interview (Yan, Yuejuan, & Hongfens, 2005, as cited in Pyle, 2013). Specifically, the photographs included pictures of children in various play contexts, such as playing outdoors in a heap of dirt, playing indoors on telephones, and children playing on an iPad(Appendix E). Indeed, the content matter of the photographs was intended to contextualize and align the research instrument with the guiding questions. Consistent with Weinger (1998, as cited in Epstein et-al, 2006) the collection of photographs selected for the PEI comprised

photographs containing opposite features. In this case, these features include online play and offline play. Also, it is vital to note that the choice of photographs was influenced and dictated by their user license. Aware of confidentiality and privacy factors, I scrupulously used photographs with a creative commons license, available for the free use of the public, and retrievable via the Google images website.

The photo-elicitation interview process was chosen to achieve a comfortable and relaxed method for interviewing children. Specifically, it created a research context in which the photographs, or the content matter depicted in the photographs became the focus of the interview-discussion encouraging a participatory research role for the children (Pyle, 2013; Cappello, 2005). The semi-structured photo elicitation interview was framed around an interview protocol (Appendix D) inspired by visual thinking strategies (Housen, 1997). Visual thinking strategies is a teaching method initiated by teacher-facilitated discussions of art images in order to develop thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy in young people (Yenawine, 2013).

The Visual Thinking Strategy curriculum (Housen, 2001) guides the viewing of artistic pictures by asking three questions:

What's going on in this picture?

What do you see that makes you say that?

What else can we find?

This protocol encourages the development of an interpretive, open mode of dialogue about a specific work of art or photograph. Additionally, to encourage curiosity and inquiry the interviewer (researcher) spontaneously integrated into the evolving conversations with the children, the notions of "see, think, and wonder" adapted from the Visible Thinking project

(http://pz.harvard.edu/resources/see-think-wonder). Each of the interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure that the children's wording was captured verbatim.

Development of the participant-selected photo-elicitation instrument

A number of photo-elicitation studies have been based on photographs taken by the participating child. For instance, researchers have provided a single camera to a group of children to document their lives (Morrow, 2001), others have taken photographs with the children together on "neighborhood walks" (Bryant, 1985), yet most researchers provide a camera to each child participating in the research study (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Jackson, 2005; Rasmussen, 2004 as cited in 2006 Epstein et al.).

The specific request of a child to share a photograph of themselves playing at home with the researcher influenced the design of this study, incorporating child-selected photographs into a *second stage* of research. Specifically, the participating children took 4 photographs of their views of play, or initiated having a parent take a picture of them while engaged in what they considered to be play. These photographs were printed by the researcher, who interviewed the children individually to discuss the content of the pictures, and their reasons for taking these particular photos (Einarsdottir, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2003). Once again, each of the interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure that the children's verbatim wording was captured.

Despite the ethical challenges of identification of the individual children and locations of the photographs they chose to submit (Lodge, 2009; Pyle, 2013), the inclusion of these personalized photographs in the research study strengthened the role of the child as an active participant in the data-collection process, and provided additional insights into the social-interactions of the participating children in their home environments. Pyle (2013) acknowledges

that when children are invited to create the images used during interviews, this can increase ownership for the children (Meo, 2010) by putting them in charge of an element of the data collection (Einarsdottir, 2005) and allowing them to guide the interview (Cappello, 2005). This not only increases the comfort levels of the participants (Cappello, 2005, as cited in Pyle, 2013) but allows for the emergence of unexpected topics that serve to enrich the data (Meo, 2010, as cited in Pyle, 2013). Ultimately, encouraging the children to take photos of their everyday play allowed them to make decisions about what to include in or exclude from the photographic records of their lives, thus letting them control the images that constituted a salient part of the research study data.

In sum, this research study employed researcher-produced and child-produced photographs as elements of a research instrument to facilitate photo-elicitation interviews. As part of the overall process of data collection this research instrument contributed to the data collecting approach reflecting a research study conducted with children and not on children.

Data Collection Procedures

This research study was based on data gathered from 10 five-year-old participants, who were observed for a daily period of 5 hours, during the month of February 2018. During this bounded timeframe, 3 semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed. These interviews took place in the classroom while the children interacted in the different learning centers. In addition, 6 individual semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed in a second stage of data collection. Throughout the month of February, spontaneous casual conversations occurred and were recorded in my field notes. Observations, thoughts, and reflections were also simultaneously recorded in my journal. In line with ethnographic methodology, the gathering of

information/data incorporated the experiencing, enquiring, and examining (Wolcott, 2008) of the classroom culture into the data collection process.

Experiencing

"Experiencing includes, of course, information that comes directly through all the senses…participant observation is founded on firsthand experience in naturally occurring events" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 53). The design of this study included awareness of the importance of this firsthand experience. Consequently, as addressed in the section on researcher bias, the researcher was situated as a teacher-researcher.

Participant observations. Utilized by both mini-ethnographers and case study researchers, this research project used participant observation as a means of data collection. Aware that firsthand experience through participant observation is both the starting point and the filter through which everything else is screened as we make sense of all that we have observed (Wolcott, 2008), I observed, interacted, and studied the daily actions and interactions of members of this classroom culture. My observations included classroom time, outdoor play time, snack time, lunch time, and weekly library visits. Aware that as a direct observer the lens with which I observed the culture affected my interpretations of the culture and presents a limitation to this method, I have addressed my personal biases in the Researcher Bias section found earlier in this chapter.

Field notes. Consistent with Geertz's (1973) idea that "ethnography is thick description" (p. 217), the voices, emotions, behaviors and meanings "of interacting individuals are heard" (Denzin, 2001, p.100) in the copious field notes of the researcher. Accordingly, I kept a notebook in hand, continuously recording my observations, comments made by the children, and descriptions of their work habits. Indeed, the children's spontaneous conversations were of great

interest to me, and formed the core of the data recorded in my field notes. Hence, together with my thoughts and observations of the classroom environment, the presence of abundant field notes was included as part of the research design. These notes would assist in identifying key themes and ideas to enhance the validity of the research (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). Indeed, copious field notes were gathered over a short time span, thus making them a particularly useful tool for mini-ethnographies and case study design (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017).

Enquiring

"Enquiring requires a different approach to fieldwork. It poses a dilemma for a field researcher: whether to intrude by interjecting one's own agenda into a setting, or to remain silent in the hope that what one wants to know may (eventually) be revealed in some naturally occurring way" (Wolcott, 2008, p.54).

Photo-Elicitation Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were created to scaffold the conversations with the children. These interviews took place during the daily center time of the class schedule. During this time period I was assigned by the kindergarten teacher a table in the back corner of the classroom. The choice of participating in the interviews was given to the children. In fact the choice to work in Ms. Sharon's center was offered to the children by the teacher who during the transition into center time explained that in Ms. Sharon's center we will be looking at photographs. This center activity was offered to the children on three consecutive days therefore, interviews were conducted on three separate occasions with three different groups of participating children.

Furthermore, Ms. Sharon's center became a distinct research space within the kindergarten classroom, providing familiarity and safety for the young participants to share and express their ideas.

Reflective Journal. Reflecting on the daily occurrences I had observed in the company of the children, as well as casual conversations with their kindergarten teacher, my journal provided a quiet space to contemplate, ruminate, and wonder about contextual and cultural observations. Naturally, recording the subjective view of my daily experiences illuminated questions and exposed insights into the culture of this classroom community guiding the progression of my data collection.

Examining

"Examining…points to an activity in which the researcher turns attention to what already has been produced by others" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 47).

Documentation. Documents created by the Kindergarten teacher, such as emails sent to the parents and worksheets given to the children, were examined. In particular the daily journal kept by each child was considered and appraised as an important source of data.

The Journal. The kindergarteners' morning commenced with a daily, short journal entry. The entry was in response to a prompt the teacher wrote up on the whiteboard and written on a prepared worksheet encouraging a large illustration accompanied by a few lines of text. Their journal entries revealed personal likes and dislikes, activities and home life. Monday morning's entries were of special interest to me as the weekly prompt repeated itself "what did you do on the weekend?" This question created a document that gave me insight into the leisure time of the children. I examined these journal entries hoping to find clues as to how the children spent time at home, how they kept themselves occupied and whether they interacted with children from their class during these days away from school.

Photographs. Although the personal photographs that the children chose to photograph themselves were intended to scaffold photo-elicitation interviews, these pictures resulted in a

rich collection of photographic documentation. These pictures enriched the data analysis process, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

In short, concurring with ethnographic and case study designs this mini-ethnographic case study used diverse sources of data such as interviews, observations, symbols, and artifacts (Fetterman, 2010, as cited in Creswell, 2013) together with engaging in extensive fieldwork within the participating kindergarten setting to collect data.

Data Analysis Procedures

In the same way that ethnographic study data analysis requires relying on the participants' views as an insider or *emic* perspective, synthesized through the researcher's *etic* scientific perspective (the theory), so too does a mini-ethnographic study in order to generate an overall *cultural interpretation*. Ultimately, this cultural interpretation forms a description of the group, in this case the children, as well as themes related to the theoretical concepts being explored in this study (Creswell, 2013).

Coding

Coding is a way of analyzing qualitative data. It employs codes or researcher-generated constructs that symbolize or translate data (Vogt et-al, 2014 as cited in Saldana, 2016) attributing meaning to individual datum. Accordingly, data analysis in this study used focused emergent coding approaches. These enabled the researcher to identify significant patterns within the data corpus relating to the three research questions.

Ethnographic research analysis relies on the participants' ideas and understandings and tends to report these views in verbatim quotes. Thus, in vivo coding, referring to a word or short phrase from the actual language of the children found in the data corpus, or terms used by the participating children (Strauss, 1987) was chosen for first cycle coding of the interview

transcripts. Transcriptions of the photo-elicitation interviews were read and analyzed in chronological order reflecting the sequence in which they had been conducted in the classroom.

Additionally, in line with ethnographic data analysis procedure field notes, reflective journal entries and all documents collected was analyzed using descriptive coding. Saldana (2016) endorses descriptive coding as an "approach to documenting from rich field notes the tangible products that participants create, handle, work with, and experience on a daily basis" (p.104).

During the process of first cycle coding I discovered that I was simultaneously coding the data corpus, constructing possible categories, and writing analytic memos; frequent or significant codes were identified whilst concurrently salient categories in the data corpus were identified. However, the transition from first cycle coding to the next stage of analysis became a disruptive and disjoined process. Thus, tabletop categories as suggested by Saldana (2016, p.203) were employed. This exercise involved moving around various coded index cards to create a visual template on a table. Indeed, "touching the data" (Saldana, 2016, p. 231) gave rise to a new sense of precision and insight into the codes. Indeed, grouping similarly coded data reduced the number of initial codes and sorted them into conceptual categories. Moreover, sharpening frequent or significant codes to achieve the best fit, triangulation of data sources was pursued. Ultimately, this procedure led to the emergence of strong and valid themes.

Triangulation

In order to mitigate bias through data collection methods, as well as to assure the validity of the research, this study employed triangulation (Creswell, 2013, 2014). Triangulation refers to the use of more than one method to collect data on the same topic. Moreover, triangulation allows the researcher to encapsulate different dimensions of the same phenomenon adding depth

to the collected data (Fusch et-al, 2017). This research study utilized methodological triangulation for correlating data from multiple data collection methods that is: observations, interviews, and documentation produced by the participating children. As an illustration, data analysis revealed the code *Star Wars* appeared in three different types of data; a child wrote a journal entry detailing watching the movie star wars with their family over the week-end; a child brought in a self-selected photograph of play showing the child playing with a lightsaber from the star wars movies, and during a literature arts session focusing on the letter "d" a child brought in a toy of the star wars character Darth Vader (Figure 1).

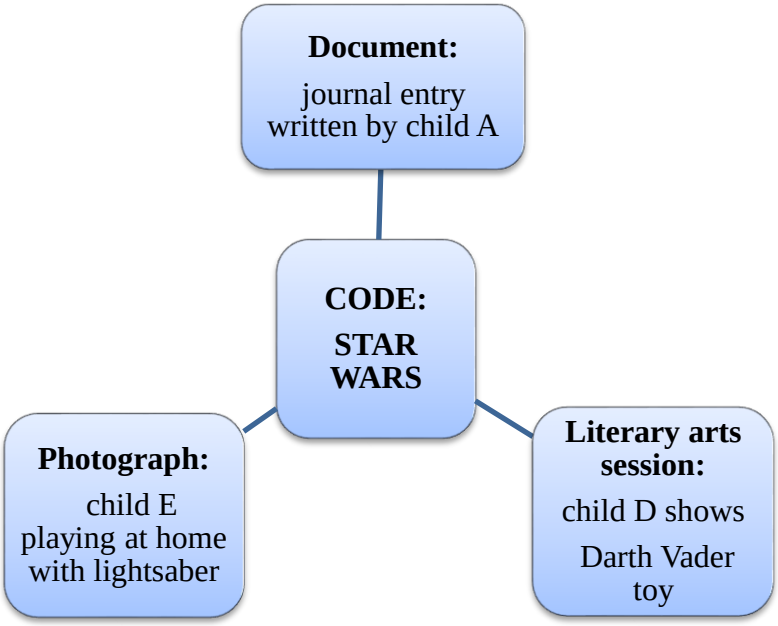

Figure 1. Triangulation of data emerging codes.

The emergent category of movies appeared in various data forms illustrating another example of triangulation. To elaborate: on one occasion, the researcher observed the children playing an imaginary, outdoor game involving casting spells called *Harry Potter*. On another occasion, the researcher recorded a lunch time conversation between two children discussing the

movie *Minions*. During classroom puzzle time, a favorite puzzle to complete created a picture taken from a *Star Wars* movie.

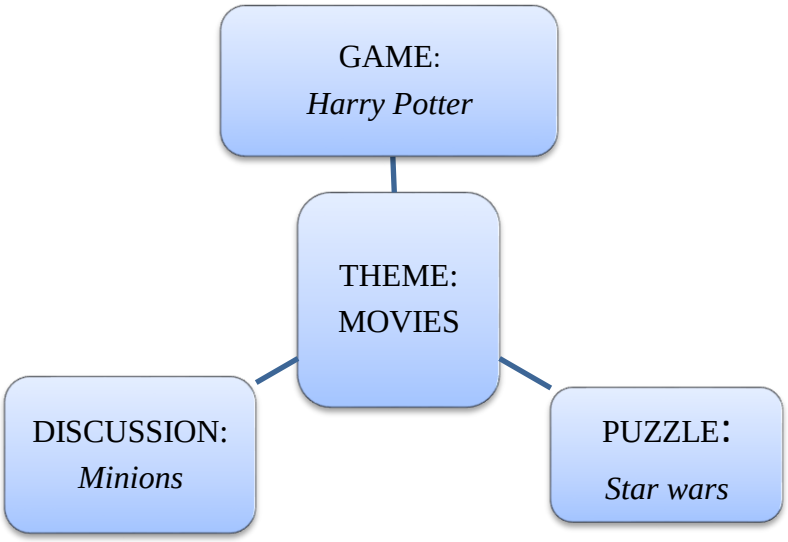

Figure 2. Triangulation of data emergence of themes.

As we have seen triangulation was used as a method to mitigate bias through data collection methods, as well as to assure the validity of the research. In order to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of this study a code of ethics was followed to address potential ethical issues arising out of the study design.

Ethical Issues

Following a code of ethics is vital to ensuring the integrity and credibility of this research study. Moreover, a study such as this, focused on young children, compelled the researcher to employ stringent ethical procedures throughout all stages of the research study (Creswell, 2013). Mindful of my responsibility as the key data collector and analyzer, Lesley University Institutional Review Board approval was sought and gained for this study to protect the rights of

human subjects and ensure confidentiality of participants, prior to any contact with subjects. Participants were recruited subsequent to IRB approval, and all IRB-approved protocols were adhered to throughout the study.

Recruitment

I approached an English-speaking early childhood educator who had expressed an interest in the study and requested educator consent to participate in this study. Upon agreement, the consent of the parents of each participating child was sought by the Kindergarten teacher. Parent/Guardian consent was obtained through an informed consent form (see Appendix B) in advance of my entering the kindergarten classroom. Specifically, the informed consent form indicated that "participating in the study is voluntary and that it would not place the participants at undue risk" (Creswell, 2013, p.57).

Embarking on the study also required the consent of the participating young children. This was obtained in a child-friendly, developmentally appropriate manner on my first day in the school. In short, this research project was explained to the participating children using suitable language, enhanced with photographs of the researcher attending class at Lesley University.

Moreover, it was explained and emphasized to the children that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any stage of the research project. Also, the children were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the project and their participatory role. Thereafter, I requested the verbal agreement of the child to participate in this project. This oral agreement was audio recorded (See Appendix C), and then played back to the participating children.

Furthermore, sensitive to ethical issues that may arise during the interview process (e.g., "how it creates a power imbalance" [Creswell, 2013, p.60]); I encouraged voluntary participation

in the various data collection activities, and ensured a balance of power was maintained. Additionally, the PEI protocols were designed to address the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Subjects were informed verbally at the beginning of each interview that they may terminate participation whenever they so wished. As soon as the interviewer (a trained, experienced early childhood educator) became aware of a child feeling uncomfortable, the interviewer asked the child if they wished to terminate participation in the interview. Likewise, when a child withdrew assent by leaving the area where the researcher was interviewing the child, this physical removal of the self was understood as withdrawal of participation by the child. Furthermore, when the children expressed that the researcher observing their free play was disturbing them, the researcher terminated the observation and moved away from the children.

Privacy. Information regarding participants in this study will be known only to the researcher and kindergarten teacher at the research site. Additionally, the researcher will only seek information about the participants regarded as necessary for the study, such as demographic detail (e.g., name, age, and gender). Furthermore, besides the kindergarten teacher, there was no third party (teachers or classroom staff) involvement or communication throughout and regarding the data collection or analysis for this study. The audio-recordings were heard and transcribed by no one except the researcher, respecting privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Anonymity. As the subjects are minors, names were not used or associated with research findings, in any way. Furthermore, this research process did not collect identifying information of individual subjects such as full name and family name, address, email address, telephone number or any identifying information of the parents whose children were participating.

Confidentiality. Data about participants was protected in several ways. Only the investigator is able to identify the responses of the individual children, as the researcher made every effort to prevent anyone outside of the project from connecting individual children with their responses. Data was stored on the researcher's computer, with code access only. Data was destroyed upon successfully defense of the dissertation with the following exception: data for future use will be stored on the researcher's computer once written consent has been gained from the parents and children participating in this study, and will be destroyed after 5 years. Finally, publication of this study obligates the researcher to share information from this study with all the participants.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Some of the limitations of this study are common to qualitative approaches. The researcher is the primary research tool in a qualitative study. Therefore, the research is highly dependent on the individual skills of the researcher. In addition, as addressed at the beginning of this chapter, qualitative approaches are influenced by the biases of the researcher, potentially resulting in misinterpretation of the results.

In particular, the context of this study presents a limitation – at the outset of my observations in the school, it was suggested to me that I limit my presence to the hours of the day that the kindergarteners spent with their kindergarten teacher in their classroom. Hence, this study reflects interactions, conversations, and behaviorisms I encountered during these specified hours of the school day in the classroom and on the playground. Specifically, I was present during table toy play, circle time, language arts, center time, snack time, lunch time, and outdoor play.

Delimitations

This study has seven delimitations. First, all participants speak fluent English. In order to prevent the loss of language nuances in translation of data collected for this research study, my choice of site was purposefully influenced by a preference for collecting data in an English speaking early childhood education environment. Second, the sample selected for participation in this research consisted of young children who attend an early childhood classroom that integrates digital tools into the learning environment. Third, all participants have access to digital tools in their home environment. Fourth, all participants live in the city of Jerusalem, Israel. Fifth, this research study observed the social interactions of the participating children in their learning environment. In other words it did not observe social interactions in the home environment. Sixth, this research study did not research interaction via social networking websites. It examined using digital tools and platforms for social purposes such as digital play or communication. Seventh, this research study was conducted during a 5-week time frame. The delimitations create a distinct context within which the research was conducted. The potential impact of this is that the research study may not be replicable influencing external validity of this study.

Summary

This Mini-Ethnographic Case study methodology allowed the researcher to employ an ethnographic approach that is bounded within a case study protocol (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017) as a blended study design. Concurring with ethnographic and case study designs, this mini-ethnographic case study used diverse sources of data such as interviews, observations, symbols, and artifacts (Fetterman, 2010 as cited in Creswell, 2013) together with engaging in extensive fieldwork within the participating kindergarten setting to collect data. Seeking to

identify significant patterns within the data corpus relating to the three research questions, data analysis employed descriptive and in vivo coding methods (Saldana, 2016). This chapter described the type of study implemented, the participants and their kindergarten setting, as well as the strategies for data collection and data analysis. The following chapter presents the study findings and analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study is to develop a deeper understanding of whether engaging with digital tools shapes the social interactions of young children with one another. It is based on data gathered from 10 Kindergarten children, who were observed daily for a period of five hours, during the month of February 2018. During this bounded timeframe, nine semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews were conducted: three group interviews using researcher chosen photographs were followed by six individual interviews drawing on child chosen photographs. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using In Vivo coding. In addition, throughout the month, spontaneous casual conversations occurred and were recorded with my observations in my field notes. These, together with my reflective journal, were analyzed using both In Vivo and Descriptive coding. The transition from first cycle coding to the next stage of my analysis felt disruptive and disjointed. However, tabletop categorizing recommended by Saldana (2016) brought me to a calmer space. Viewing the 28 codes that had emerged during first cycle coding and physically moving them around on the tabletop allowed four salient categories to emerge: - Social interactions, Parents, Digital tools, and Play. I will consider each of these categories by means of rich descriptions using participant quotations to substantiate and add the voices of the children to the major findings for this study.

Emergent Categories

The four key themes emerging from this study: social interactions, parents, digital tools, and play are intricately linked to each other. This connection creates a sense of repetition and redundancy in the key findings. Admittedly, this intricate overlapping and connection between

the salient themes form a discovery within itself that will be addressed in Chapter Five of this study.

Social interactions

Social interactions exist in both the daily conduct of young children, as well as their world of thought and fantasy, and occupy a large portion of their waking hours. This research study found that the participating young children interact with their parents, siblings, neighbors, classmates and teachers. Actually, during school hours these young children interact continuously with one another – playing and working together at every available opportunity, and conversing endlessly during activity transitions. Ultimately, playing together while sharing myriad toys and other teaching aids contributes to their learning environment and creates a natural space within which they interact socially. For instance, this dialogue ensued between two children playing with tabletop toys: "Hey, you wanna build with me?" (D). "We can both make our own construction, a building" (O). D (moves onto O building), "Okay we are gonna build together" (D).

Furthermore, using the classroom iPad the children collaborate with one another to photograph their work and upload the pictures onto the *seesaw* website. Moreover they connect with one another by participating in traditional outdoor games such as *tag*. In contrast it seems that afterschool social interactions are dominated by interactions with their mothers, fathers, and siblings. As much as they watch movies together with family members, share toys with their siblings, or go on outings, they tend to spend solitary time at home playing digital games or viewing movies. After school playdates with classmates are arranged and supervised by their parents and, seem to occur minimally. As two children told me: "We had a playdate" (D). "We dressed up and we ate sandwiches and my Mom stayed with me" (E).

Parents

The dominant role their parents play in the lives of these young children featured prominently in the data corpus. Actually, parents as a category in this research project stands as a theme on its own as well as a category connecting to the categories of social interactions and digital tools. Parents manage and guide their young children's social interactions. Ultimately, they direct the family socializing within the household, directing the daily routine together with the weekend leisure time. Indeed, parents establish the rules and norms forming the framework of their unique family lifestyle and influence their children's developing senses of self. In this role they set boundaries and limits on their children's use of digital tools. For instance, one participating child mentioned:" I am not allowed to use my Kindle in the morning or on Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath)"(R), and another added, "I played on my mom's computer for *IXL* (a math and language arts practice subscription website), just *IXL* cause I am not allowed to use any electronics cause my mom says you can get addicted"(C). Conversely, these parents encourage offline play, providing their children with a rich variety of toys. Additionally, consistent with the findings related to social interactions, parents manage their children's after school social contact with classmates. Specifically, they arrange and accompany the children on playdates. In fact, playdates are seen as opportunities to socialize within the school community. It seems that this community of parents espouses face to face interactions that exclude collaborations utilizing digital tools:

"On the iPad I never played with visitors because then they will be like I want to play on the iPad too and they are not allowed to play something on the iPad. I play with them all kinds of games, if there is enough time. Sometimes I play with them magnets and sometimes I play in my room and sometimes I get the toys out" (A).

Digital tools

Digital tools permeate both the home environment and the learning environment of these children. By extension, they are at ease with tablets and mobile cellular phones, familiar with the internet as a tool enabling them to watch digitally streamed movies on their family television, or interact with literature arts software on their classroom smartboard. Actually, engaging with digital tools within this kindergarten classroom promotes a collaborative learning culture reinforcing the social interactions of the children. As a matter of fact, during a photo–elicitation interview it became apparent that within the context of this classroom the children interact socially using a tablet to upload joint projects to the digital portfolio platform *seesaw* as well as to play games in modern-language classes:

> Z: I have shared an iPad with someone in Spanish.
>
> C: You shared one with me
>
> Z: Oh yeh in Spanish
>
> S: Can you tell me about that time?
>
> Z: Well we were practicing something…it's like this Spanish game or something but we don't understand it but we just tell Miss Dana we do and we practice on it together. We just guess.
>
> S: So you play on the iPad together
>
> Z: Yes
>
> S: You share an iPad
>
> Z: Yes (PEI#1. 02.02.18).

Moreover, they employ digital tools at home to work on their classroom linked portal to *IXL*, subscription based math and language arts practice website. This is illustrated in the

following exchange: "I don't have an iPad I have a Kindle. I play reading games and I downloaded IXL on my Kindle" (R). "Of course you did because Ms. J sent it in an email to all the parents of the kids" (O).

Whereas some of the children play videogames during their discretionary after school hours, all of the children reported watching movies. Specifically, they watch their movies on the family television or tablet using Netflix as a digital streaming platform. Consequently, for these children movie watching is an online activity. During a group interview one of the children stated: "I play on the iPad in my house with my Dad and I watch movies in Netflix. I have mover and it has a movie store" (O). A second child added, "I have Netflix on my TV" (C), and a third child excitedly said, "Me too I have it on my TV" (R, PEI#2, 02.02.18). On another occasion E mentioned to me, "Pokémon is a show…I see it on Netflix-it's a thing that there are lots of shows on a computer and movies."

Play

Play, the vehicle utilized by the young children to interact socially, features innumerable times in the data corpus. Indeed, various types of play were observed during this study. Moreover, the concept of playdates formed an integral part of the children's casual conversations. However, examining the data corpus it appears that within this peer group playdates feature as an ambition more than a reality in their lives. For example, in the following exchange two children discuss a potential playdate: C, D, and A are sharing a table during snack time.

C: D what days are you free?

D: I have a good idea this Sunday in the morning I need to go to Church but then we can have a play date.

A: Guys, I am also free on Sunday and Wednesday.

Ignoring A, C continues: Can we do Sunday after I go to Church?

D: Sunday is good. First I need to do football and then I can do a play date.

C: My mom is going to call your mom and then they will text back and forth okay? (Field notes, 02,12,18).

Another time while playing with table top toys, two children chatted:

O: Um, D, do you want to go to my house and have a playdate with playdough?

D: Sure…We never did a play date. (Field notes, 02,13,18).

Types of Play. Three types of play feature in the data corpus: digital play, games and toys, and outdoor play. I will now discuss these three types of play.

Digital Play. Digital tools are mostly employed by the parents in the home environment to individually occupy the child during transition or leisure times (weekends). Moreover, these children do not play collaborative, interactive videogames. As a matter of fact, they engage in online social environments but do not socialize online. Rather, they partake in solitary, single-player digital play. Interactive digital team play is allowed with family members only, as illustrated in the following quotes:

I play alone sometimes my brother watches me so he knows how to play so he can play it also. I play …um…my favorite game where you have to get two numbers that are the same, it starts at one and you have to go up to 11 but we never made it to 11, we only made it up to seven (A).

(O): I builded a house and when I got to desert mode, then I played it

Who did you play with?

By myself, I just got two robots

(Z): I play *Mario Kart* sometimes. It's *Mario Kart* 8 and I play sometimes with my father and sometimes myself…I play like different games. When there is no internet I play games that can entertain me and eat candy.

(A) :(In this picture) they are playing, maybe videogames on phones. I play on my mom's phone a lot so once you find it you will just find a bunch of games.

However, the parameters of their digital entertainment and play are bounded by their parents, as reflected in the following sentiments:

I don't watch TV and movies. I am not allowed only on Sunday and Saturday I am allowed to watch TV (E).

I really want to play Pokémon Go, my nanny has it on her phone but my mom and dad don't let me watch (E).

I play on my Dad's iPad… On the airplane, even my Kindle I only play on the airplane (C).

Looking at a photograph of a young girl lying on her stomach while using a laptop computer, R commented, I have something important to say:

Why is she playing on something she is not allowed to play on?

I asked: How do we know she is not allowed to play on it?

R: Because it is an adult computer.

Yet, in a few instances when the children spent time with cousins, neighbors or a babysitter the use of digital media and play is bounded by others:

> E: Actually I have played on an iPad, my cousin's iPad; he let me play video games.
>
> S: Do you remember what it was that you played?
>
> E: Um...Star Wars, I played the game, I played with my brother and sometimes by myself…

Toys and Games. Construction toys, action toys, toy vehicles and dolls, dollhouses and puzzles, board games, and ball games amuse these children within the home and school environments. Actually, the centrality of conventional toys in their home play was illuminated through numerous photographs the children chose to send to the researcher, together with photo-elicitation interviews conducted around these photos. For example:

> This is me playing with my magnets and my toy cars (A).
>
> I play with lots of toys and that's how I know these are *Legos*...baby hat is my favorite toy. She is a baby that has a hat (R).

Moreover, during the photo-elicitation interviews the children indicated that their choice of photographs was influenced by their natural desire to share. For instance, the children stated, "I wanted to show you", "it is kind of a favorite game", and "I like to play with these toys" were comments heard over and over again.

Although it is true that both real toys and digital tools facilitate their play, it is interesting to note that these children tend to differentiate between toys and digital tools, as evident in the following conversation:

> S: Is your Kindle a toy?

R: No, it is a kind of iPad.

S: Is an iPad a toy?

R: No.

S: So what is it?

R: A Kindle is a kind of iPad…okay.

S: I am wondering if they are toys.

R: They are a kind of iPad; now let's look at another picture…

Outdoor play. While walking to the playground, a young girl asked a young boy, "What do you want to play today?" "Tag," he answered (Wednesday 31 January 2018). Grounded in traditional children's outdoor games, such as *tag, police and robbers, and families,* this was the time in the school day used by these young children for imaginary play. In point of fact, these children exhibited daily outdoor interactions supported by a specific play routine; their habitual practice began with the *bubblegum rhyme* chant and evolved into a game of tag. During longer periods of outdoor play, once the *tag* game dissolved the children naturally divided themselves into two groups, participating in either a game of *police and robbers*, or of *families*.

Answers to my Research Questions

Having discussed the emergent themes in the data corpus I now turn to answering the research questions guiding this study. Admittedly, when answering these guiding research questions, I am cognizant that some findings are repetitive and I will address this outcome further in Chapter Five-Discussion.

How does engaging with digital tools influence the social interactions of young children?

Engaging in digital tools influences the content of the conversations and the imaginary play of the participating young children with one another however; digital

technologies do not form a vehicle for their socializing. This research study revealed that within the home environment these young children tend to engage with digital tools for entertainment purposes. Indeed, engaging individually with tablets or smart phones, they do not interact or socialize with others online. To put it bluntly, these young children engage in online social environments but do not socialize online. Actually, their engaging with digital tools is influenced by extrinsic factors and conditions. Primarily, their parents place parameters on their engaging with digital tools. These boundaries include when they employ the tools, what they engage in and with whom they interact when using digital tools. Additionally, it appears that an unstated parent school community edict encourages the norm of no screens or digital tool interactions during playdates. As A shared: When we are home I get to watch TV. I get to watch half an hour every day when we have school and on weekends I get to watch in the mornings.

On the other hand, engaging in digital tools influences the content of the conversations and the imaginary play of the participating young children with one another. Stimulated and motivated by their individual videogame play or online movie watching sessions, they interact with one another during the school day, playing games grounded in incidents, jargon, and actions they observed in specific movies: *Star Wars, Smurfs, Harry Potter, Minions,* and *Nemo.* Moreover, their spontaneous conversations are nourished by movie content:

> E: I have watched all of them (*Minions).* I can't believe there is a number four and do you know that in America soon coming out is *Star Wars 9*. There are no commercials and in Israel there is number 8 (snack time).
>
> Z: I watch on Netflix. There is no *Smurfs 2*.
>
> Trust me I am an expert.
>
> O: I have *Smurfs 2* in my Netflix.

Z: There is no *Smurfs 2*.

E: *Smurfs 3* is coming out. There are no previews but coming soon and they are starting to plan what the name is (lunch time).

Although these children do not interact or socialize with one another via digital tools, this study revealed that the participating children engage with digital tools, with family members influencing these social interactions and relationships. In answer to my question; "Who do you play with on the iPad?" The children responded: "I play with my brother or my Mom or my Dad" (E); "I watch with my brother a few videos" (A); "At the Pizza place we all were watching a movie on mom's phone" (C).

Undeniably, this finding concerning the social interactions of these young children with family members connects to the third guiding question of this study, where it will be discussed in more depth.

In sum, extrinsic and intrinsic factors and conditions influence the engaging with digital tools of young children, thus affecting the social interactions of these young children.

Are there various ways online/offline social environments influence face to face social peer group formation and functioning?

This study found that frequent viewing of online movies using a digital platform, sustains the face to face social peer group formation and functioning of the participating young children. In particular, this study discovered the influence of *Netflix* streaming software, which allows these young children to instantly watch films and shows through any Internet-connected device supporting the *Netflix* application. Moreover, this study found that all participating children have access to *Netflix*. Hence, *Netflix* as a digital streaming platform facilitates their entertainment needs. They watch their movies on the family television or tablet. Even though their movie

watching is not a peer group social activity, movies form the dominant influence guiding their social peer group formation and functioning. Stimulated and motivated by their individual movie watching sessions they interact with one another during the school day, playing games grounded in incidents, jargon, and actions they observed occurring in the specific movies. They watch certain movies. They discuss what they are watching. They have favorites: *Star wars, Smurfs, Minions, Harry Potter,* and *Nemo.* To put it succinctly, traces of stories, characters, actions, and expressions viewed in movies are evident in their casual conversations and imaginary outdoor play (Lemish, 2015). For example:

C: Expeliamous! You are Voldemort, you never turn to good. I am good!

C: Who should we kill?

Z: Kill me.

C: Not you –you are tiny.

Z: Pretend I am Voldemort you are the ghost…

A: Go like back…you like stop.

A casts a spell and tells Z to fall…they begin a chase…playing battle, using their fists in an imaginary dual…

Z: Expeliamous! He is right behind you. Help me C!

Z slides down the slide and runs away… (Outdoor play 02.06.18)

In this instance, having seen the movie *Harry Potter* serves as a point of entry into the outdoor peer group game. Moreover, it contributes to their understanding of how to function within the game, as character roles and actions are intricately connected to those in the movie. Accordingly, if a child has seen the movie, they are able to enter the group game.

Similarly, media characters permeate the toys this peer group of young children chooses to play with during face to face interactions in the classroom. The following examples illustrate this:

> C: Darth Vader-it's from the movie Star Wars.
>
> D: You know I have a Darth Vader, it can talk.
>
> Z pretends to talk like Darth Vader, sitting on the carpet imitating the voice of Darth Vader… (Field notes, 02,06,18).

Along the same lines, describing a photograph of play one of the children had brought in to show me, the child said, "This is me playing with my *Pokémon* cards. *Pokémon* is a show and he has *Pokémon* cards. It's a game people play together but I am not playing with anybody, I am just looking at them –and this is me playing with my lightsaber. It's a weapon that's in *Star Wars* and it is a toy one. It's a red one that means it is Darth Vader's one. Darth Vader is on the bad guys' side." (E, PEI 02.13.18).

To sum up, this study found that frequent viewing of online movies using a digital platform, sustains the face to face, offline social peer group formation and functioning of the young children. This support was particularly visible during the unstructured moments of the school day; in the course of casual conversations and spontaneous interactions that occurred during snack time, lunch time, and transitions from activity to activity throughout the kindergarten day.

How does relating to others through digital tools influence the developing social identities of young children?

This research project suggests that contents viewed for personal entertainment using digital tools influence the developing social identities of young children. Moreover, this study

revealed that the influence of relating to others through digital tools is shaped by the particular relationship. To be sure, relating to others includes connecting with classmates, family members, and teachers. Actually, the digital context within which the children engaged with digital tools affected the evolving social identity of the young children. Indeed, digital tools permeate both the home and learning environment of these children. Whilst, parents choose to educate their children in an education environment that supports digital learning, they do not allow their children to socialize online with their peers.

Relating to Classmates

The participating children consistently described their individual interactions with digital tools within the home environment. Most of them explained that they engage in online social environments but do not socialize online. That is, they engage in solitary digital play and generally do not relate to others through digital tools. Nevertheless, their daily classroom interactions constantly related to contents viewed online. Actually, as stated in question 2, digitally accessed and viewed movies influence their face to face school time interactions and relationships. Stated succinctly, tinges of stories, characters, actions, and expressions viewed in movies are evident in children's casual conversations and imaginary play within the classroom. In this instance, talk is a point of entry into the peer group focusing on who has seen what movie and the promise of new movies in the making. So if children have seen the movie they are able to enter the group conversations, in that they contribute to the conversation or brag about what they have seen, or they share a lunch table conversation with fans of a particular movie and become socially identified with this group of children.

Moreover, these children displayed evidences of the influence of media characters in their learning choices. In line with this, their choice of objects brought in to "show and tell"

when learning a new letter during the daily language arts period represented various movie characters or objects:

> C shows a picture she has colored in of Donald duck
>
> O: It's a movie. I love Donald duck.
>
> D shows a page with stickers. (Dories) and says: It's a fish. Dorie, from a movie. (Field notes, 02.06.18).

As much as traces of media topics, characters, expressions or actions sustain their social interactions and shape their social identity, their tensions, struggles and success in identifying with their peer group dominates the outdoor play. Actually, outdoor play connects and unites this group of kindergarten children, influencing their developing social identities. In contrast to the animated conversations around movies, the outdoor play is grounded in traditional children's outdoor games, such as *tag, police and robbers.* Actually, the group social identity is embedded in their daily games of tag, especially in the ritual chanting of the rhyme *bubblegum, bubblegum* in order to select the *tagger.* To put it another way, the daily outdoor period is supported by a specific play routine that begins with the *bubblegum* chant and evolves into a game of tag, as illustrated in the following example:

All of the kids except for R, who runs to the monkey bars, cluster together and put one foot out touching at their toes their friend's feet.

> E leads the chant: *Bubble gum, bubble gum in a dish, how many bubble gums do you wish?*
>
> On each word of the chant E, taps one of the kid's shoes going round in a circle. The child who is tapped at the end of the chant ...*wish*

removes their shoe from the circle. This continues until only Z is left and thus is "it." Frantically the class tag game begins (Field notes, 02.18).

On another occasion I observed the kids standing around in a circle:

E: We are gonna do a vote if you wanna play tag or freeze tag. Raise your hand if you want to play freeze tag.

No-one raises a hand.

E: Ok we are playing normal tag.

O shouts: My turn, my turn to say *bubblegum* (Field notes, 02.13.18).

Accordingly, this daily chanting rite followed by the customary game of tag serves as the glue that bonds these children together as a group of kindergarteners. In fact, one can recognize specific social norms and rules being expressed whilst the children took part in the game.

For example:

C shouts from up on the slide: O you cannot push. O no pushing.

O walks away with glum face and then returns to catch kids…

C yells: O you are not playing.

Z yells back: O is "it" and O runs after Z away from the slide (Field notes, outdoor play, 02.14.18).

Finally, one of the children reveals just how important interacting with one another on the playground is to their social identity:

E: Z quitted, I don't know why, they are now playing *tag*. I am sad because I don't get to play much with people at the playground but only with people who play *tag*. All my friends and I play *tag*- I taught them and they don't play anymore games now. Every day at playground I play with them (Field notes, 02.11.18).

Relating to Family

The participating children identified strongly with their parents and their siblings numerous times in the data corpus. Actually, family interactions fulfill a large social function in their lives, influencing the dynamic growth of their social identities: home based family movie sessions together with moments in time devoted to digital play feature side by side playing with their toys or trips to the beach in their personal leisure time. As an illustration, one child told me: "On the weekend I go out with my Mom and Dad to places that are really cool. On Saturday or Sunday, I don't remember we went to Tel Aviv" (C, PEI #1, 02.02.18). Another child said; "I go to there to the beach and it's called…I forgot…no I got it Palmachim. I swim sometimes when I go in the water I play a game with Mommy and she tries to catch me and I slip away" (A, PEI, #1, 02.02.18). On a separate occasion, when discussing a photograph with me one of the children commented, "I see this couch they are sitting on and I think they are watching a movie in this picture. I think the boy and the baby are cuddling together, they are having fun. I think they are having fun and watching the movie together. Fun is when you have fun with your Mom and Dad" (O, PEI #2, 02.02.18).

Moreover, their siblings featured prominently in their descriptions of family leisure time and seem to be the only children these young children are permitted to interact with using digital tools. To take a case in point, one of the children shared, "I normally sometimes watch *Star wars* on Amazon on my computer. I mean on my Mom's and Dad's computer. On the weekend with my brother, we have a popcorn movie (E).

Another child described how, "in the morning when G, my brother is not out there in the living room I play videogames, punching kinds. I play boxing on the TV with my (older) brother. Yeh and I can watch TV and I can play on my iPad…" (J).

In sum, this study discovered that the social identities of these kindergarten children, are influenced by specific daily digital and non-digital social routines and concerns exhibited by the children as they function within the social world of their school and home environments. That is, they are vigilantly conforming to social customs that result in being accepted and successful in establishing and maintaining classroom friendships.

Summary

Most young children spend their daily lives discovering, exploring and experiencing two environments: the classroom environment, and the family environment. This ethnographic case study discovered that the participating young children are exposed to a learning environment employing digital tools to support and advance collaborative learning and social interactions within the classroom, whereas, the home environment restricts the use of digital tools to family social interaction and individual entertainment.

Moreover, this study reveals the dominant role that parents play in bridging, moderating, and managing the lives of the participating kindergarten children in a digital era. Indeed, this group of children does not interact socially online, nevertheless they engage in online social environments. Specifically, they watch online movies via the digital platform Netflix. Furthermore, they watch their movies digitally on a tablet or a television. Although they view a myriad of motion pictures alone or with family members, stories and characters portrayed in these movies form the common communication thread and basis for social classroom interactions observed in their spontaneous conversations and imaginary play.

This chapter presented the findings from my study. The themes that emerged from the data corpus were discussed. Answers to the three research questions guiding this study and my

initial interpretations were stated and discussed. The following chapter addresses ideas and issues that emerged from these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation presents the following topics: Summary of Study, Discussion, Future Research, and Final Reflections. The summary of the study reestablishes the purpose of the study and recaps essential points made in the first four chapters of this study, providing context for the discussion section. The discussion section returns to the three questions guiding this research. It provides additional details around findings, together with implications associated with each of the findings. Areas for future research are also addressed in this final chapter. Lastly, final reflections from the researcher on conducting the study and the findings that emerged are provided.

Summary of the Study

A digital culture has been described as a lifestyle characterized by the relationship between people and digital technologies, a phenomenon attributed to the creation of a digital society (Turkle, 2011). There is a lack of understanding, and a dearth of research exploring whether digital technology as a social tool may influence the developing identity of a young child. Consequently, the positive and negative effects of technology on the evolving social world of the young child have become a crucial issue. Additionally, constant media discussion about the pros and cons of technology is generating a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996), while parents of young children look towards those with whom they engage in respectful relationships (Wagner, 2006) for knowledge and guidance on this critical issue. Motivated by this reality, the purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how engaging with digital tools shapes the social interactions of young children. It examined the various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning. Furthermore,

this study explored whether digital technology, as a social tool, influences the developing social identities of young children. This study captured data from kindergarten young children to answer the following three guiding questions:

1. How does engaging with digital tools influence the social interactions of young children?
2. Are there various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning?
3. How does relating to others through digital tools influence the developing social identities of young children?

An extensive literature review was conducted to ground my understanding of the existing research. Consistent with the three research questions that guide and focus this study the literature reviewed comes primarily from the field of education, as well as interdisciplinary fields of study, including developmental psychology, sociology, technology and leadership.

The literature review addressed three main areas of scholarship. First, the development of the young child, particularly the social aspect was explored. Topics such as social interactions, the development of social skills, the role of friendship and peer culture were reviewed. Within this context the role of play in the life of the young child was examined. Moreover, factors influencing the developing social identity of the child were considered. Second, the evolution of a digital culture supporting the development of 21st century technology tools, their integration into home and educational environments, as well as implications for 21st century pedagogy was studied. Specifically, the use of technology tools within the contemporary social environment was discussed. Finally, theories of educational leadership, especially the adaptive leadership approach that serves to frame this study as an adaptive leadership challenge were discussed.

The design of the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures were detailed in chapter 3 of this study. This qualitative study was designed as a mini-ethnographic case study. Since, ethnographic research offers a unique method to investigate young children's cultural knowledge and practices in naturalistic settings (Worthington & Van Oer, 2017) it was identified as being a particularly applicable research approach for this study. However, time frame and cost constraints made it essential that I structured explicit boundaries for my study relating to time and place. Consequently, a mini-ethnographic case study research design more feasible for a student researcher was chosen for this dissertation. This mini-ethnographic case study design employs an ethnographic approach that is bounded within a case study protocol (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017).

Consistent with ethnographic research tools, data collection included participant observations, interviews, and field notes. Specifically, photo-elicitation interviews were conducted with individual, and groups of young children. Data analysis employing In-Vivo, and Descriptive coding (Creswell, 2013) was intertwined and interactive with the data collection process, taking place concurrently. Finally, using tabletop categorizing (Saldana, 2011), four salient categories or themes emerged from the data corpus. These were seen to repeat themselves in the answers to the three questions guiding this study.

Chapter Four of this study introduced study findings, including the four emergent categories that were identified through the study: social interactions, parents, digital tools, and play. Additionally, answers to the guiding questions produced findings connected to these categories. This study reveals the dominant role parents play in bridging, moderating, and managing the lives of the participating kindergarten young children in a digital era. Indeed, this group of young children does not interact socially online, nevertheless they engage in online

social environments. Specifically, they watch online movies via the digital platform Netflix.

Furthermore, they watch their movies digitally on a tablet or on a television. Although they view a myriad of motion pictures alone or with family members, stories and characters portrayed in these movies form the common communication thread and basis for social classroom interactions observed in their spontaneous conversations and imaginary play. Nonetheless, their outdoor play grounded in traditional young children's games influences their developing social identities. These findings are addressed further in the Discussion section of this chapter.

Discussion

This study revealed a number of findings regarding the social interactions and social identity development of a particular group of kindergarten young children at one point in time along their developmental trajectory. The themes that emerged as a result of the research process – social interactions, parents, digital tools, and play – captured and reflected young children's voices, understandings, and beliefs and were translated into findings. The following discussion provides a synthesis of the literature that grounded the research methods and methodology, analysis, and implications for educational leadership, families, and the broader community.

Emergent categories

As mentioned in Chapter Four, this study led to the identification of four emergent themes, intricately linked to each other, and so closely connected that there at first appeared to be a sense of repetition and redundancy in the findings. I propose that this intricate overlapping and connection between the salient themes represents an expression of the experiences and encounters of contemporary young children, a finding within itself. This phenomenon illustrates a world in which the salient categories of social interactions, play, digital tools, and parents

intertwine, penetrate, and connect, forming a unique cameo or vignette of young children's lived experiences, and strengthening the premise that these young children are digital natives (Prensky, 2001) growing up in a digital culture. It is an articulation of a 21st century lifestyle characterized by the relationship between people and digital technologies, a characteristic of a digital society (Turkle, 2011).

Social interactions

This research study found that the participating young children interacted with their parents, siblings, neighbors, classmates and teachers. During school hours these young children interacted continuously with one another – playing and working together at every available opportunity, and conversing endlessly during activity transitions. In contrast, after school social interactions were dominated by interactions with their mothers', fathers', and siblings. As much as they watched movies together with family members, shared toys with their siblings, or participated in outings, they tended to spend solitary time at home playing digital games or viewing movies. After school playdates with classmates were arranged and supervised by their parents, and were seen to occur minimally.

Parents

The dominant role parents played in the lives of young children featured prominently in the data corpus. They managed and guided their young children's social interactions, established the rules and norms forming the framework of their unique family lifestyle, and influenced their young children's developing senses of self. In this role they set boundaries and limits on their young children's use of digital tools, and managed their young children's after school social contact with classmates. Parents as a category in this research project emerged as an individual theme, as well as a category connecting to the categories of social interactions and digital tools.

Digital tools

Digital tools permeated both the home environment and the learning environment of the young children. Within the classroom context the young children interacted socially using a tablet to upload joint projects to the digital portfolio platform *seesaw*, as well as to play games in modern-language classes. Engaging with digital tools within this kindergarten classroom promoted a collaborative learning culture, reinforcing the social interactions of the young children. Whereas some of the young children played video games during their discretionary after school hours, all of the young children reported watching movies. Specifically, they watched their movies on the family television or tablet using Netflix as a digital streaming platform.

Play

Three types of play were featured in the data corpus: digital play, games and toys, and outdoor play. Digital play was employed by the parents in the home environment to individually occupy the child during transition or leisure times (weekends). Moreover, the young children did not play collaborative, interactive videogames unless playing with family members. Construction toys, action toys, toy vehicles and dolls, dollhouses and puzzles, board games, and ball games amused the young children within the home and school environments. The daily, school, outdoor play period was grounded in traditional young children's outdoor games such as *tag*, and *police and robbers*, which connected and united the group of young children. Additionally, the concept of playdates formed an integral part of the young children's casual conversations. However, examining the data corpus it appeared that within this peer group playdates functioned as an ambition more than a reality in their lives.

In the section that follows, the specific research questions that guided this study are discussed in the context of understandings that emerged as a result of the study and analysis.

The Research Questions

Schein (1992) observes that in organizational culture we can distinguish three layers: the explicit culture, the norms of the culture, and the implicit culture. This study examines a digital culture. Accordingly, the three research questions guiding this study are in harmony with these three layers of culture. The outer layer denotes visual representations people primarily associate with culture: the visual or explicit culture. Question one looks for visual representations of the digital culture in the social interactions of young children, and enquires how engaging with digital tools influences the social interactions of young children. Reflecting the middle layer of culture, which refers to the norms and values which a community holds, question two probes whether there are various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning of young children growing up in a digital culture. Finally, question three investigates the implicit level of culture. Seeking to understand basic assumptions of a digital culture, this question considers the influence of relating to others through digital tools on the developing social identities of young children.

Throughout the research process, biases and assumptions (acknowledged in Chapter Three of this study) influenced the lens through which I observed the young children and contributed to the specific understandings articulated in this study.

Research Question One

1. How does engaging with digital tools influence the social interactions of young children?

This question sought to discover the extent to which digital tools have penetrated the social interactions of young children. The findings show that engaging with digital tools

influences the content of the conversations and the imaginary play of the participating young children with one another; however, digital technologies do not form a vehicle for their social interactions. For example, a child stated, "I play alone sometimes my brother watches me so he knows how to play so he can play it also" (A), and another one specified, "I builded a house and when I got to desert mode, then I played it…By myself. I just got two robots" (O). This validated the notion that the young children engaged in online social environments but did not socialize online. Shedding light on the context within which these young children engage with digital tools, I found that though young children engage individually with tablets or smart phones, their engaging with digital tools was influenced by extrinsic factors and conditions, primarily parameters determined by their parents. These boundaries include defining the digital tools they engage with, when they employ the digital tools, and with whom they interact when using digital tools. In short, they set boundaries and limits on their young children's use of digital tools. For instance, during a photo-elicitation interview, looking at a photograph of a young girl lying on her stomach while using a laptop computer, R commented, "I have something important to say: Why is she playing on something she is not allowed to play on?" In answer to my question, "How do we know she is not allowed to play on it?" the child remarked, "Because it is an adult computer." Another child expressed these boundaries in a different manner:

> On the iPad I never played with visitors because then they will be like I want to play on the iPad too and they are not allowed to play something on the iPad. I play with them all kinds of games, if there is enough time. Sometimes I play with them magnets and sometimes I play in my room and sometimes I get the toys out (A).

Indeed, millennial parents anchor their young children within a digital culture, guiding them as they navigate new norms and conventions of the digital age. In this context, this study revealed that whereas the young children did not interact with one another online, they engaged with digital tools with family members influencing these social interactions and relationships. For instance, in answer to my question, "Who do you play with on the iPad?" The participating young children responded, "I play with my brother or my Mom or my Dad" (E). "I watch with my brother a few videos" (A). "At the Pizza place we all were watching a movie on mom's phone" (C).

In sum, question one illuminates extrinsic and intrinsic factors and conditions that influence the engagement with digital tools of young children, and the consequences these have on the social interactions of these young children.

Research Question Two

2. Are there various ways online/offline social environments influence face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning?

Marsh et al (2016) propose that the dichotomy of online/offline worlds, together with the contrasts of the physical and virtual shape the activities of young children, providing a means of classifying play types in a contemporary context. This study found that frequent viewing of online movies, using a digital platform, sustains the face-to-face, offline social peer group formation and functioning of the young children. This was particularly the case during snack time, lunch time, and transitions from activity to activity, as illustrated by this lunch time conversation:

Z: I watch on Netflix. There is no *Smurfs 2*. Trust me I am an expert.

O: I have *Smurfs 2* in my Netflix.

Z: There is no *Smurfs 2*.

E: *Smurfs 3* is coming out. There are no previews but coming soon and they are starting to plan what the name is (lunch time).

Specifically, movies viewed are streamed via the Netflix digital platform as the following examples from the data clarify. During a group interview one of the young children stated, "I play on the iPad in my house with my Dad and I watch movies in Netflix. I have mover and it has a movie store" (O). A second child added, "I have Netflix on my TV" (C), and a third child excitedly said, "Me too I have it on my TV" (R, PEI#2, 02.02.18). On another occasion E mentioned to the researcher: "Pokémon is a show…I see it on Netflix- it's a thing that there are lots of shows on a computer and movies."

Furthermore, these examples illustrate the notion that for these young children, movie watching is not a peer group social activity; however movies form the dominant influence guiding their social peer group formation and functioning. Stimulated and motivated by their individual at home movie watching sessions, they interacted with one another during the school day, playing games grounded in incidents, jargon, and actions they observed occurring in movies. Character roles and actions intricately connected to those portrayed in movies guided the interactions of the young children. Actually, movies served as a point of entry into the outdoor peer group game, contributing to their understanding of how to function within the game. Accordingly, if a child had seen the movie, they were able to enter the group discussion or game. As a case in point, when playing outdoors three young children initiated a game of *Harry Potter:*

C: Expelliarmus! You are Voldemort, you never turn to good. I am good!

C: Who should we kill?

Z: Kill me.

C: Not you –you are tiny.

Z: Pretend I am Voldemort, you are the ghost…

A: Go like back…you like stop.

A casts a spell and tells Z to fall…they begin a chase…playing battle, using their fists in an imaginary duel…

This study discovered that the norms and values of the participating community affected the various ways online/offline social environments influenced face-to-face social peer group formation and functioning.

Research Question Three

3. How does relating to others through digital tools influence the developing social identities of young children?

This study found media narratives, characters, expressions, and actions sustained the day to day social interactions and shaped the social identities of the young children. This finding echoes Lemish (2015) who acknowledges that: "media contents were found to leave media traces in young children's stories, play, and artwork. They were used by young children to construct their make-believe worlds and in doing so to express their desires through imagined play within these worlds" (p.63).

However, this study also revealed that tensions, struggles, and success in identifying with their peer group dominated the young children's outdoor play. In contrast to animated indoor conversations around movies, the young children's outdoor play was grounded in traditional young children's outdoor games, such as *tag* or *police and robbers*. Actually, this study observed that the group social identity is embedded in their daily games of *tag*, especially in the ritual

chanting of the rhyme *bubblegum, bubblegum* or counting-out game in order to select the tagger and begin the game.

Concurring with Corsaro (1988) , who asserts that "socialization is not something that happens to young children; it is a process in which young children, in interaction with others, produce their own peer cultures" (p.24), this study illustrates how young children often collectively teach each other how to get along: "the kids are more concerned with 'playing' than 'making friends', and anyway, you make friends by playing with other kids- as many as you can" (Corsaro, 2003, p.1). As an illustration of this idea from this study, during the outdoor play period a child approached the researcher and said:

> "[Z] quitted, I don't know why, they are now playing *tag*. I am sad because I don't get to play much with people at the playground but only with people who play *tag*. All my friends and I play *tag*- I taught them and they don't play anymore games now. Every day at playground I play with them" (E).

In accord, Goffman (1959) observes that seemingly insignificant forms of social interaction such as cooperation, conflict and coercion are of major importance in human relationships and should not be overlooked. So too, young children's friendships are characterized by support, conflict, exclusivity or intimacy, and asymmetry (Sebanc, 2003). In line with this assertion, Bagwell and Schmidt (2011) state that "friendship provides optimal contexts for social development because of the ongoing experiences of companionship, intimacy, and conflict."

Consequently, this study acknowledges that social identity is how we see ourselves in relation to others. Moreover, social identity as affirmed in this study reflects two social motives: our desire to be included and be part of a group, while simultaneously needing to develop our

individuality and separateness (Brewer, 2001) for example, joining in the group game of *tag* while wanting to be the tagger. The following observation validates this concept:

> All of the kids except for R, who runs to the monkey bars, cluster together and put one foot out, touching at the toes of their friend's feet.
>
> E leads the chant: *Bubble gum, bubble gum in a dish, how many bubble gums do you wish?*
>
> On each word of the chant, E taps one of the kid's shoes going round in a circle. The child who is tapped at the end of the chant ..."wish" removes their shoe from the circle. This continues until only Z is left and thus is "it." Frantically, the class tag game begins (field notes, 02.18).

In sum, consistent with Rubin (1980), this study found that social relationships tend to be the sources of young children's greatest pleasures, frustrations, and disappointments.

Implications for Educational Leadership

This study revealed the interface of home and school interactions of young children growing up in a digital culture. Specifically, the findings presented in this study illuminate how digital tools permeate both the home environment and the learning environment of these young children. Moreover, they expose means for adapting their lifestyles and family norms to educating young children within a digital culture. In particular, this study demonstrates that parents choose to educate their young children in an education environment that supports digital learning. For instance, they facilitated their young children's employment of digital tools at home to work on their classroom linked portal to IXL (a subscription-based learning site). This is illustrated in the following exchange:

(R): I don't have an iPad I have a Kindle. I play reading games and I downloaded IXL on my Kindle.

(O): Of course you did because Ms. J sent it in an email to all the parents of the kids.

However, this study found that parents do not allow their young children to socialize online with their peers, highlighting the importance parents place on the context within which their young children engage with digital tools. In other words, this study found that parents support the employment of digital tools as a learning tool, but limit the use of digital tools as a social tool. This seemingly contradictory behavior regarding digital tools illustrates contrasting lifestyle commitments that, according to Kegan and Lahey (2002), result in a paralyzing effect, causing an *immunity to change*.

Addressing this immunity to change among the parent population will benefit educational leadership. Consequently, guiding and adopting an approach that initiates the illuminating of big assumptions regarding engaging with digital tools in the education environment verses the home environment of young children will set in motion a process for educators, parents, and young children to challenge their existing assumptions (Wagner and Kegan, 2006). Indeed, Kegan & Lahey (2001) assert that these notions are "woven into the very fabric of people's existence" (p.56). Hence, as leaders in the field of education, initiating a collaborative framework for educators and parents to examine their immunity to change is a meaningful act, emphasizing the importance of constructive and cooperative honest communication led by leadership. Moreover, this process will serve to maximize the positive potential of digital tools and minimize the negative repercussions in both the home and school environments. It will encourage

communication, collaboration, and co-operation, allowing educators and parents to work together to support the emotional and academic needs of young children in this digital era.

Additionally, consistent with the work of Marsh et al (2016) who suggest that "Contemporary play draws on both the digital and non-digital properties of things and in doing so moves fluidly across boundaries of space and time in ways that were not possible in the pre-digital era" (p. 8), this study found online movies viewed by the young children in their home environment stimulate and motivate daily interactions within the school environment. The young children play games grounded in incidents, jargon, and actions they observed occurring in movies. Furthermore, movies serve as a point of entry into the outdoor peer group game, contributing to their understanding of how to function within the game.

Educational leadership will benefit from this finding by recognizing that digital and non-digital environments facilitate contemporary young children's play. Heidi Hayes Jacobs (2009) contends that "as educators, our challenge is to match the needs of our learners to a world that is changing with great rapidity. To meet this challenge, we need to become strategic learners ourselves by deliberately expanding our perspectives and updating our approaches" (p.7). Specifically, adopting a change leadership approach (Wagner and Kegan, 2006) offers educators a systems change framework that encourages leaders to recognize and relate to crucial organizational elements challenging improvement for schools. Key elements such as competency, conditions, culture and context (Wagner & Kegan, 2006) provide educational leaders with a useful framework for initiating conversations about the social interactions of young children in a digital culture with, educators and parents. In addition, literature suggests that there is a necessity of leadership groups to be the champions of the change. Thus, an essential element in the change processes is transformational leadership (Senge, 2000). There are

certain types of leadership necessary for "transforming organizations to meet adaptive challenges and become knowledge-generating vs. merely knowledge-using organizations... [this] requires very different kinds of leaders-ones who recognize that they, as individuals may have to change in order to lead the necessary organizational changes" (Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing & Rasmussen, 2006, p. 11 as cited by Millen and Robert, 2016).

Furthermore, this study expands perspectives on social identity development among contemporary young children, demonstrating that in an era of digital tools, young children's outdoor interactions on the school playground form the glue that bonds them socially. Indeed, social identity, as affirmed in this study, reflects two social motives: our desire to be included and be part of a group, while simultaneously needing to develop our individuality and separateness (Brewer, 2001).

Similarly, Bagwell and Schmidt (2011) put forward that collaboration in young children "occurs through verbal and non-verbal exchanges as friends suggest ideas for play, build on one another's ideas , coordinate their perspectives, and create mutually agreed upon interactions and understandings" (p.79). This study elucidates how a daily designated outdoor play time serves to encourage communication, co-operation, and collaboration amongst the young children. For instance, the researcher observed:

> E: we are gonna do a vote if you wanna play tag or freeze tag. Raise your hand if you want to play freeze tag.
>
> No-one raises a hand.
>
> E: Ok we are playing normal tag.
>
> O shouts: my turn, my turn to say *bubblegum*.
>
> (Field notes, 02, 21, 18.).

Millar and Garran (2008) propose that social identities emerge at certain times under specific conditions; they are shaped by social and cultural contexts, public discourses, national myths, and intergroup relations (p.4). Similarly, promoting a classroom culture that respects individual and group learning while supporting outdoor play is advantageous to educators who query the influence relating to others through digital tools has on the developing social identities of young children.

Implications for Parents

This study was inspired by casual conversations with parents of young children who claimed that during recreation and leisure time their young children are absorbed in watching videos, playing television games, or engaging in interactive Internet games rather than playing outdoor physical games. Moreover, these parents inferred that the integration of technology into their lives has become a source of contention within the home environment in general, as well as for the functioning of the family unit in particular. Indeed, digital tools have garnered debate regarding their developmental appropriateness. There are those who consider them beneficial for young children (Bourke& Marsh, 2013 as cited in Vittrup et-al, 2016), while others remain cautious due to potential negative impact (Van dewater et-al., 2007 as cited in Vittrup et-al, 2016). In this context, adaptions parents have made are depicted in this study, and can guide parents of young children navigating the world of digital tools in making knowledgeable choices for their young children.

This study found that anchoring their young children within a digital culture entails that parents assist their young children to navigate new norms and conventions of the digital age. On the one hand, boundaries parents created for their young children regarding the use of digital tools contributed to the sense of stability and confidence the young children developed. On the

other hand, family social interaction facilitated by digital media was found to enrich these social interactions and relationships .This finding is consistent with the work of Plowman and Stephen (2007), who assert that when supporting the child's play as a "technical expert," even for a short moment, parents and siblings receive unique opportunities to share, and scaffold, the child's digital play. Furthermore, Plowman and McPake (2013) note that digital media, with the correct support, opens up avenues of communication over time and distance, providing new and intriguing possibilities for the development of young children's communicative skills. Indeed, encouraging the thoughtful employment of digital media as a catalyst for family social interaction is seen as beneficial to young children and their families who live in a digital culture .

Likewise, this study revealed that parent's cautious employment of digital media for leisure purposes led to movies becoming the main source of their young children's online entertainment. In other words, parents consider online movie viewing (streaming media) as a safer alternative to online interactive play or "joint media engagement" (Joan Ganz Cooney Foundation, as cited http://learningworksforkids.com). I propose that this behavior is a consequence of a digital culture that is disturbing the familiar context of parenting. In this environment, characterized by ubiquitous technologies and limitless access to information, parents strive to keep their young children safe from the dangers of cyber- bullying and cyber-stalking. Moreover, young children are taught from a very young age not to talk to strangers, yet in cyberspace interactive social media facilitates playing and talking with strangers.

Consequently, young children can engage with digital tools, along with other users, facilitating a sharing of information and participation in on-line discussions together with far and wide connections. It is important to note that "this ability not only expands young children's social networks but also leaves them vulnerable to predators and unintentional influences if

parents and caregivers are not involved" (Vittrup, Snider, Rose & Rippy, 2016, p.52). Considering that parents intuitively protect their young children, and that potential relationships developing as a result of movie watching will be para-social relationships (Brunick et al, 2016) between the child-viewer and a character in the movie, I suggest that adapting to parenting within a digital culture has resulted in the notion that *online movies are safe*. Heifetz (1994) asserts that adaptive predicaments involve our assessment of reality together with the clarification of our values. Consequently, employing digital tools to view streaming media is considered harmless within the maze of digital social interactions. This new solution offers a desirable resolution to an adaptive challenge confronting parents .

Similarly, providing parents with *a sanctuary* (Heifetz, 1994) from the world of digital technologies, this study found that young children interact daily on the school playground. Moreover, this study revealed that young children's outdoor interactions, supported by traditional outdoor games, form the social glue bonding young children. In light of the casual conversations inspiring this study, this finding contributes to sustaining a sense of purpose for parents. Specifically, this finding is encouraging to parents as they lead and guide the daily lives of their young children to trust themselves, listen to their inner voices, as well as to use themselves, their individual young children, and their unique family unit as data to guide and monitor the influence engaging with digital tools has on the evolving social identities of their young children (Heifetz, 1994).

Future research

Recognizing that early childhood educational leadership is a particular role, and an English language instruction school in Israel offers a very distinct context, the conditions and factors which supported or inhibited this research study are not generalizable. Studies within

other leadership roles and contexts would serve to offer new insights into the questions driving this study. Additionally, there are a number of implications of the findings of this study for future research studies on digital tools and the social interactions of young children.

Demographic implications

In order to prevent the loss of language nuances in translation of data collected for this research study, the choice of site was purposefully influenced by a preference for collecting data in an English speaking early childhood education environment. Studies into other demographic groups within the Israeli society would offer insights into the influence of digital tools on the interactions of young children within different population groups. Specifically, it would be valuable to conduct studies in Hebrew language instruction schools, or mainstream, public schools.

Environment implications

This study could serve as a potential model for further research into the influence of digital media on interactions of young children whose home environment includes two (both) working parents. Investigating how young children interact during the outdoor play period within educational environments that do not support a digital learning culture is another potential topic for future research. Additionally, this research study observed the social interactions of the participating young children in their learning environment. It would be interesting for future research to observe social interactions of young children in the home environment. Also, a study observing social interactions of the participating young children in their learning environment, in addition to their home environment could result in a broader study.

Digital implications

Still another line of research could be to explore whether other demographic groups in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Israel are exposed to digital streaming via Netflix, as well as to how the particular media characters that the young children choose to relate to in their social interactions influence the games they create and play. Finally, future research could probe the social interactions of young children via social networking websites.

Final reflections

"How does who you are shape what you know about the world?" (Taka cs, 2003).

When embarking on an online learning adventure three years ago, I knew very little about the world and culture of digital technologies. Whilst, our home was a hub of Internet activity, a space ruled by screens and social media networks; my own technological content knowledge and skills were limited. At the same time as I relied on my husband and young children to assist me with basic computer applications, I perceived screens as obstacles to socio-emotional human interaction; hiding physical responses and mannerisms, masking facial expressions, and gestures. Indeed, there were times when our home was a space of conflict, navigating motherhood in an unfamiliar world of digital media was a challenging experience.

My experience with overcoming my own fears of technology and embracing various technological tools was comparable to learning a new language. To speak it one must use it. To become fluent one must practice it, and most importantly one must not be afraid to err or to ask for assistance. My first online course forced me to explore a frontier that left me wanting to embrace and revisit it frequently.

As my journey with online learning progressed, I discovered a cohort of supporting friends who seemed to live inside my computer screen. I belonged to a community of scholars

who discussed, debated, and created meaning online. I experienced the power of digital platforms supporting collaboratively written assignments that could be discussed in real time using digital applications on my smartphone. Shared academic insights and course experiences resulted in burgeoning friendships.

Concurrently, I observed my young son, then a fourth grader, befriend a classmate by collaboratively playing an online game. Daily, after school hours, they would meet in cyberspace, chat on Skype, and play together. However, on the school playground their relationship floundered. In time, their friendship evolved and moved from cyberspace to the tennis court. Today, two seventh graders, who study in different schools, maintain their weekly tennis game, as well as their online friendship. This very personal experience stimulated my desire to explore whether the socio-emotional development needs of our young children, who live in an ever evolving digital world, are changing. Specifically, I began to question the role of technology in the social interactions of young children.

This mini-ethnographic case study is the culmination of my journey that began three years ago. It has been an adventure exploring for myself whether a digital lifestyle that integrates digital technology into our daily interactions in general and our socializing in particular is really a cause for concern and conflict within the social interactions of young children. The findings of this study have strengthened my conviction that young children are the active agents in their own socialization. I observed in the classroom and on the playground how in cultivating their social identities young children advance and perceive their own individuality within their peer group, gaining skills to communicate with others and processing their actions. Indeed, this study depicts socially competent, independent individuals who actively make sense of the world around them. It has illuminated my respect for young children's independent ability to make meaning,

collaborate, co-operate, and manage their lives. Observing the young children express meanings as they interacted with one another, and with the environment, has validated my social constructivist approach to education.

Moreover, this study has shown me that "Computers are not good or bad; they are powerful" (Turkle, 2005, p. 311). It has encouraged me to understand my connections to the world of digital technologies, generating a new awareness of how my positionality can inevitably bias my meaning making (Takacs, 2003).

Finally, I have come to recognize that throughout our lives, we are all actively constructing our identities in a continuously evolving understanding of ourselves and others. I am aware that the life journey I have travelled has been filled with encounters, stations, places, and people who have influenced the ebb and flow of my travels, and so too my perception has been swayed. The landscape I currently view observes specific light and color. It is this prism that dictates these final words.

I sit in Jerusalem, Israel, and write these final reflections. I sit physically alone but virtually connected to my International Cohort friends whose numerous messages, comments, and suggestions continue to motivate my work. I am guided by my doctoral committee, who email me, and support my work in conversations facilitated by remote conferencing services using cloud computing. I am aware that the young children who participated in this study are outdoors playing traditional games.

And I am certain that adapting to living in our digital culture with knowledgeable support opens up avenues of communication, over time and distance, providing new and intriguing possibilities for the development of communicative skills, social and learning interactions, as well as lasting friendships.

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Appendix A: Educators Informed Consent

Dissertation Research:
The Development of Young Children's Social Identity in an Era of Digital Tools

This study, designed and facilitated by Sharon Kaplan-Berkley, is being conducted as part of the requirements of Lesley University's Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. The purpose of my research is to develop a deeper understanding of whether engaging in digital tools shapes the social interactions of young children with one another. It will examine the various ways online/offline social environments influence face to face social peer group formation and functioning. Furthermore, this study will explore whether digital technology as a social tool, influences the developing social identity of young children.

I will be conducting an ethnographic study that entails non-participant observations, interviews and field notes to collect data. Specifically, photo-elicitation interviews will be conducted with individuals, and groups of participants. Photo elicitation is based on the idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview, resulting in an interview inspired by images and text rather than by words alone. I believe that this instrument is developmentally appropriate for interviewing young children.

I am interested in conducting research in your classroom.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary and there is no compensation for participating in this interview. You may cease participation at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. There are no known risks associated with participation in this project. The benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to provide information and guidance to educational leaders and young parents.

You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at any time before or during this research. The researcher's contact information, as well as the researcher's senior advisor's and Lesley University's IRB contact information appears below. There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu

By replying to this email and inserting an "X" next the appropriate statements, you are giving electronic consent to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this research study!

Sharon Kaplan-Berkley

Sharon Kaplan-Berkley	Professor Lisa Fiore
PhD Candidate	Senior Advisor
Lesley University	Lesley University
shashikaplan@gmail.com	lfiore@lesley.edu

___ I agree to participate in this study. ___ I do not agree to participate in this study

Appendix B: Parent Informed Consent Form

Dear Parent,

My name is Sharon Kaplan-Berkley and I am hoping to conduct a research study in your child's class. I am exploring whether digital technology as a social tool, influences the developing social identity of young children. Furthermore I am interested in gaining a deeper understanding of whether engaging in digital tools shapes the offline social interactions of young children with one another.

Participation in this study is voluntary and can be terminated at any stage in the research project. Furthermore, each participating child will give the researcher oral assent to participate. (See attached form).

I intend gather data in your child's class daily for three weeks. While I'm in the classroom, I will observe the children's interactions, especially their free play and conversations, whilst taking field notes. In addition I will conduct photo-elicitation interviews, discussing photographs of digital devices with your child. I will not record your child's name or any other materials that will identify your child. I may collect drawings, but I will have the teacher remove your child's name before giving them to me. Your child will not do anything outside of their normal classroom activities and there is no risk to your child. I wish to reiterate that your child's participation is voluntary and not compensated.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, or if you would like to withdraw your child from the study, please contact me by email: shashikaplan@gmail.com or by telephone: 0523857260. *There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu*

Sincerely,

Sharon Kaplan-Berkley

Lesley University doctoral Candidate

Date_____Investigator's Signature: _____ Print Name_____

Date_____Parent's Signature: _____ Print Name _____

Appendix C: Participating Young Child's Oral Consent

My name is Sharon and, I am a student at the Lesley University in a city called Boston in America. I would like to learn about what you do when you play with classmates and especially if you are using different types of digital gadgets (screens) to play with when you are interacting with your friends.

While I'm in the classroom, I will observe (watch) you playing and talking to your classmates. I might write down what I see or record what you are saying to each other. Sometimes I will bring photographs of children or digital devices and ask you to discuss with me what you see in the photographs. I would like to tape record our conversation, so that I can get your words accurately. If at any time during our talk you feel uncomfortable answering a question please let me know, and you don't have to answer it. Or, if you want to answer a question but do not want it tape recorded, please let me know and I will turn off the machine.

Now I would like to ask you if you agree to participate in this study, and to talk to me about what you see in these photographs. Do you agree to participate, and to allow me to tape record our conversation? Can you please record your name and that you agree/assent to participate in this study and talk to me about these photos.

Appendix D: **Individual Photo-elicitation Interview Protocol**

Visual Thinking Strategies can be defined as a tool using art to develop thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy to young people. Developed by Abigail Housen and Phillip Yenawine (Housen, 2001) the Visual Thinking Strategy curriculum guides the viewing of works of art by asking three questions:

What's going on in this picture?

What do you see that makes you say that?

What else can we find?

This protocol encourages the development of an interpretive, open mode of dialogue about a specific work of art.

The individual photo-elicitation interview protocol is grounded in this tool.

Individual Photo-elicitation Interview Protocol

The interview with the young child will proceed from question to question in the following order:

Show the child the carefully chosen age-appropriate photograph.

Ask: **what do you see?**

Record the child's description using a tape recorder.

Ask: **what do you know? /what do you see that makes you say that? / How do you know that?**

Ask: **what more can you see/tell me?**

Thank you.

Appendix E: **Photographs used for Photo-elicitation Interviews.**

Retrieved from https://www.teachpreschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Visitor-penguin-office-240.jpg

Retrieved from https://goo.gl/images/HrjvXa

Retrieved from: https://goo.gl/images/BA6W4k

Retrieved from https://goo.gl/images/4XoNu8

Retrieved from: https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo-happy-kids-using-technology-sitting-couch-image61438253

Retrieved from: https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/two-girls-playing-with-plastic-blocks-with-their-royalty-free-image/82955263

Appendix F: Letter to Parents Requesting Photographs for Photo-Elicitation Interviews.

Dear Parents,

During the past two weeks I have been observing your children as they play indoors and outdoors. During center time, I have conducted photo-elicitation interviews with groups of voluntary participating children. Photo elicitation is based on the idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview, resulting in an interview inspired by images and text rather than by words alone.

We have been discussing what we see, think and wonder about when we look at photographs of children in **various play contexts**. The photographs I have chosen to bring in have the Creative Commons license. (Creative Commons is a set of licenses which automatically give you permission to reuse and distribute the content).

I am aware that an additional important process of conducting photo elicitation interviews occurs when the participating children take their own photographs of the subject being studied and discuss these pictures the researcher.

I would appreciate it if during the next 4 days (Thursday-Sunday) your children could take photographs of their views of play. The photographs can be sent to me or Ms Jodi by email. I intend to print their photographs and discuss the reasons for their photographs with them.

I wish to reiterate that partaking in this study is voluntary and can be terminated at any stage in the research project.

Thank you for your support and participation in this research study!

Sharon Kaplan-Berkley
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Lesley University
shashikaplan@gmail.com