

# **YOUNG CHILDREN'S PLAY PRACTICES WITH DIGITAL TABLETS**

# YOUNG CHILDREN'S PLAY PRACTICES WITH DIGITAL TABLETS

Playful Literacy

BY

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## **About the Author**

Isabel Fróes is currently a Postdoc at the Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from PUC Rio and a Master's degree from ITP at New York University. Her research taps into the values and uses of newly developed technologies, investigating how they affect ways in which new concepts and activities are socially and culturally developed. Her PhD research combined her psychology and design background exploring how young children's play practices with digital devices foster novel ways of communication and learning.



# Preface

You are about to begin a journey that explores how young children defy and discover digital universes (tablets) through their *magic wands* (hands). Since my research interest involves interdisciplinary fields, it also involves challenges. The largest is that no matter how much I write, I feel there will always be more fields and angles to cover. However, I could not consider addressing a study in any other way, as my background is interdisciplinary. I have a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master's degree in Interactive Telecommunications. My master's focused not only on learning technological skills, such as programming and electronics, but also on approaching technology reflectively and critically. We were encouraged to think of technology as a verb, as suggested by the head of our programme at the time, Ms Red Burns.

I remained on a learning path by working in different countries and organisations with a variety of foci (interaction and service design, teaching, programming, etc.), both within industry and academia. Consequently, during the three years of my PhD studies, my educational and professional background experience converged to form my topic of choice. At the same time, by applying an interdisciplinary lens to my process, I have had the wonderful opportunity to be able to work with fields that I find highly motivating, and that build on my personal experience of observing young children and their digital interactions. It was partly this experience that informed the *what* and *why* that fuelled this book.

Regarding reading this book, I would like you to approach it as a piece of music. I explore a repertoire of studies by eminent researchers; their notes and perspectives harmonise and contrast with my own soloist moments, which originated during my writing process. All *notes* lead back to the initial train of thought, however, adding vital layers to the final composition.

For my research, I travelled to Japan. It was an eye-opening experience that expanded my horizons and shook my convictions. Despite having studied Japanese earlier in my life and knowing aspects of Japanese culture through a variety of media, books, films, origami, etc., the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture, though only for three months, proved one of the most significant learning curves of my life. I entered Japan with one set of lenses and I came back with very different ones.

The experience I gained there proved highly valuable for my PhD research and consequently, this book. Not only from the perspective of the data collected, but also for prompting me to think of aspects that were not necessarily initially visible in digital practices. For example, the role of iconography and symbols in a culture that is then confronted with western designs. In other words, how would tablets look if their interfaces had been developed in Japan? Probably you would swipe vertically and browse right to left through pages. More tangible

differences included those related to broader use of Roman rather than Japanese characters in young children's everyday life.

Japan proved to be the most playful and efficient country I have ever encountered. I would therefore like this book to reflect an element of the same playfulness by bringing you a different set of perspectives when reading about this journey of mine. I hope it makes you curious about the connection between play and efficiency, how much one rests on the other, and, if there is such a relationship, how children's play practices and their *magic wands* can lead the way to uncover this mystery.

## Disclaimer

The author had no affiliation whatsoever with any of the App production companies either before or after her research. A total of 60 apps in total were chosen and downloaded based on the age category, their descriptions and popularity ranking on the Android and Apple store (Google Play and App store). The types of apps varied from *puzzle*, *game*, *entertainment*, *educational* and *family* categories, which were highly rated (four to five stars) however with download rates lower than 500,000 downloads at the time of the download (February 2014 in Denmark).

# Acknowledgements

I very much feel my achievements have been reached and supported by the wonderful people around my life. As if possible I would like to thank each and every person who brought me here with a text of its own. In order of life appearance, I thank you by trying to use a few words or sentences to sum it up.

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The educational institutions with which I have been affiliated throughout the years: Thank you for giving me support, a space to think, learn and expand my knowledge with the bonus of meeting wonderful colleagues and mentors.

True learning is a life experience that happens through a powerful exchange between curious and engaged learners, so I would like to thank those students who were a part of mine.