Working with Technology, Art and Children

Over the years, many artists have created artworks with children at ArtPlay using various forms of new technologies, and some have shared their practice at Artist Learning sessions. This document summarises their combined experience.

Some considerations when creating art with children using new technologies

At the risk of stating the obvious, remember that technology itself is not creative, it is what children do with it that is creative (e.g. telling stories, composing, or making images).

Consider how the technology can enhance children's creativity. How can they be positioned as artists and co-creators, even though they usually will not be designing the technology?

Consider if digital technology is the best way to explore your creative idea. Would it be enhanced by collaborating with an artist working in another artform?

Consider if you can use the technology to create an immersive, physical experience, instead of always focusing on screens.

Some tips

As with any art experience, know what you want to achieve and how, and communicate this clearly to participants.

Start with the creative concept and then look for the technology that will achieve this. If you start with the technology, it can be more difficult to find ways for the children to express their own creativity.

Choose tech that is responsive i.e. that has a clear cause and effect.

Use programs that offer children a range of possibilities and that require children's personal input. They will quickly become bored with programs with prescribed outcomes.

Prepare for, accept and work with the different ways that children may use the tech as this can open up new creative possibilities for them and yourself.

If only a few people can use the tech at a time, offer a variety of activities to maintain engagement and reduce waiting times. Conversely, too many stimuli can overwhelm the central idea and the children's responses, so look for a happy balance.

Screen images can be immensely powerful but tend to encourage children to 'shut down' into a vision and brain mode. Their sense of touch and hearing can be diminished, and they can become passive in the space which makes it hard to engage them in other aesthetic elements. Think about how to manage this, especially if the work is a collaboration between artists working with new and traditional art technologies (e.g. dance and projection).

The numbers of participants can strongly affect the energy of the experience – too few people may not create the right energy but too many people may create a lack of focus. You may need to build in some trial sessions to find the right number of participants.

Be aware that children will come to the workshop with different agendas. Some will be drawn to the artistic concept, while others will be fascinated by how the tech works. Plan for this, so each child can satisfy their interests.

Be prepared - test and retest the tech, with and without children, because things always go wrong! You may need extra personnel and equipment on hand to deal with emergencies.

Given the complexity of most projects involving new technologies, allow plenty of time between stages so you can refine the tech and, if necessary, rework the experience for participants.

Allow time for reflection with children so they can question and share their experience. This deepens their experience and can give you valuable insights into how the technology did or didn't work as a creative medium.