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# What does good look like when working in the classroom with 3-6 years old children?

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## **Abstract**

Working with preschool children in their classrooms present unique challenges, due to the specific age range and the characteristics of the environment. In this position paper, I will detail the challenges that I have encountered during a user study conducted in a Swiss preschool.

## **Author Keywords**

preschool; classroom; user studies; children

## **CCS Concepts**

•**Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**; User studies;

## **Introduction**

Preschools in Ticino - "*Scuole dell'infanzia*" in Italian, are not compulsory schools for children ages 3-6 years old. In November and December of 2019, I conducted a user study in a private preschool in Ticino; during this study, several challenges emerged that were specific to the classroom environment and the preschool age range.

## **The user study**

The user study consisted in the evaluation of either a mobile app for co-reading or its paper equivalent. Each session was conducted by two or three researchers and involved one child at a time. Before the study, we asked par-

ents to sign a consent form and fill a short survey about their children's use of technology and reading habits. At the beginning of the session, the teachers acted as intermediaries, and invited children to join us; we then introduced ourselves to the child, made some small talk and then asked the child whether they wanted to play with us. If the answer was affirmative, we explained how the app worked, and then we began the evaluation: one researcher interacted with the child, helping them use the app; one was in charge of the recording; the third, if present, took notes about the session.

## **Challenges**

*Parents' reaction:* we found significant discrepancies between the data collected in the survey given to the parents and our observations: while most parents wrote that their children used smartphones and tablets very little and not often, almost all children showed a significant familiarity with touch screens, and were able to use the tablet without needing any instructions. Therefore, it would be useful to also ask children about their experience with touch screens.

*Lack of a private space:* the preschool had different locations; in some of them there were not any private rooms, and we had to work in hallways or in the corner of the same room where other children were playing. This caused distractions, both for the children and for us.

*The school schedule:* the school offered several different activities for the children, such as music or English lessons. Because of this, we could only go one or two mornings a week, for two hours each time. Considering that each session took about 20 minutes, it took several weeks to finish the study.

*The time of the year:* we conducted the study between November and December of 2019, right before the winter

holidays; therefore, children were busy Christmas activities. This caused excitement among the children, and it made more difficult for them to focus on the task. We believe that this would also be true near Easter or summer holidays. Therefore I believe that, if possible, user studies should not be scheduled at any time conflicting with distracting activities and celebrations.

*Shyness and lack of familiarity with the children:* many children showed interest in the app, but they would not talk to us at all because they were shy. This phenomenon was so marked that, out of more than 40 children, we were only able to gather significant data from about 15 of them. Some suggestions to avoid this problem could be scheduling an extra visit just to familiarise ourselves with the children, having the children work in pairs, or having them evaluate the app with a teacher. However, both solutions have disadvantages: not all apps are designed to be used by more than one user at the time, and teachers do not often have the time to work with children one to one.

*Outnumbering kids:* in relation to the previous challenge, I believe that one reason for the children's shyness was also the fact that the researchers outnumbered them three to one; I suggest that, if possible, only one adult at a time interact with the child. Any other researcher should be as far away as possible, and should observe only.

## **Conclusions**

While the 3-6 age range is extremely varied from the perspective of child development, I have found that these challenges are independent of the age of the child, and therefore might be related more closely to the formal environment of the classroom than the age of the child. I welcome any and all opinions and suggestions on how to overcome these challenges.