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# Ethics in Interaction Design and Children: A Panel and Community Dialogue

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**Abstract**

Designing technology for and with children comes with unique ethical challenges and responsibilities, related both to the inclusion of children in the research and design processes and to the outcomes of that work. With this panel, our intention is to create a forum for critical reflection and debate about best practices, underlying drivers and persistent or emergent ethical challenges. As a starting point, this panel aims to focus on questions around the involvement of children in our research and we aim to hear from designers and researchers in this community with different backgrounds and perspectives to reflect the diversity of work being done and cultures in which they are conducted.

**Author Keywords**

Ethical priorities, ethical issues, ethical guidelines, interaction design for children, child-computer interaction.

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H.5.m [Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI)]: Miscellaneous; See [<http://acm.org/about/class/1998/>]: for full list of ACM classifiers. This section is required.

**Introduction**

Interactive technologies are constituent parts of the fabric of our lives, and of those of our children. As Read and Markopoulos remark “Children now grow up immersed in

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technology to a level that keeps surprising earlier generations, but which, to them, is simply an inherent element of their habitat.” [3]. Child-Computer Interaction (CCI), then, became a multi-disciplinary scientific field that focuses on understanding and designing the roles of technologies in the lives of children. It is widely recognised that involving children in these endeavours is generally beneficial [2], but also that this participation is shaped by power-relationships and value propositions that directly impact the collaboration processes and outcomes (e.g., [4, 1]). Consequently, it is difficult to facilitate children’s participation in designing new technologies on an equal footing. Also, more than with other user groups, e.g. adults, the goals and intended outcomes are often framed by adult ideals about what constitutes a good childhood and upbringing in the researchers’ own culture(s).

Ethical issues around this work bring a broad responsibility for us, as adult researchers and designers, to examine challenges and dilemmas ranging from the small and practical issues, such as informed consent, to fundamental questions about privacy and research legacies. Rapid development in the interactive technology space necessitate urgent yet well-considered dialogue to find answers and make recommendations on ethical issues. For example, at the recent ACM CHI SIG on Child-Computer Interaction (CCI), the discussion focused on issues of impact, education, agency, opportunities and threats associated with the development of ubiquitous technologies and the associated “big” data collected from children by these technologies. The report back to the community, highlights some of the considerations that must be given to developing technologies that collect data about children.

With this panel, then, we aim to create and foster a culture within the CCI/IDC community that makes ethical and re-

sponsible thinking an inherent quality of the work that we do, rather than ethics being considered as a nod to ethics boards, an add-on or after thought. We believe it is essential to raise awareness and create a space in which the community can critically reflect on its best practices and develop new ones.

### **Goals and Scope**

As argued above, ethical best practices involved in technology research and development with children vary from widely agreed upon guidelines to rapidly changing, emergent, and at times evasive recommendations. In this panel, we bring together a group of diverse researchers to discuss three key priority areas for research that is either targeted to and/or directly involves children as participants. While we acknowledge the importance of ethical priorities and the need for guidance in the development of technologies that impact children’s lives more generally, we limit the scope of this panel to issues that arise during research when working with children and their communities, i.e. the ethics of participation in interactive technology research and development.

Our primary goal then is to create shared dialogue around different standards, practices and processes across continents, ethics boards and researchers. To this end, this panel aims to question, discuss and exchange ideas about best practices and challenges around working with children in ethically responsible ways. To kick-start this discussion, we have identified three priority areas (of many) that we will focus on, and which we think provide a foundation for other discussions of ethics. We frame these as questions, acknowledging the dynamic and situated nature of ethics.

The panellists will have a short opportunity to provide their answers to the following three questions, with ample oppor-

tunity for discussion, comments, and questioning from the audience. The questions are:

- What do children gain from participating in our research and what constitutes evidence of those benefits?
- How can we explain to children what the research is that we want them to participate in?
- As researchers, what are our obligations to the community of children we work with after the research ends?

### Outcomes and Impact

The primary outcome of this panel is, as argued above, to provide the community with an opportunity to engage in a discussion about the ethical dimensions of researching and developing interactive technologies for and with children. We see this panel as a way to raise awareness and hope to prompt critical reflection in the field. However, it is intended only to open up the ethical space for discussion and in doing so acts as a stepping stone to further dialogue and awareness in the CCI/IDC communities of the importance of promoting and acknowledging ethical conduct.

There are several ways in which we intend to make the outcomes of this panel discussion available: firstly, we will produce a written report and aim to publish it in an appropriate venue to reach members of the community who were not able to attend at this year's panel. Secondly, we will share these results with the ACM SIGCHI Ethics Committee, which supports and provides guidance for conferences across SIGCHI. Thirdly, we will engage the IDC board and future organisers of IDC conferences to discuss ways in

which the results can impact on the processes and structures by which we identify and reward excellent work. Finally, we hope to develop guidance for such panels and similar formats to inform future organisers of ethics events at IDC.

### Panellists

**Christopher Frauenberger** (Moderator) is Senior Researcher at the Human-Computer Interaction Group, TU Wien (Vienna University of Technology). His research focuses on designing technology with and for marginalised user groups, in particular autistic children. He is committed to participatory design approaches and builds on theories and methods from diverse fields such as the action research, disability studies, philosophy of science, research ethics amongst others.

**Alissa N. Antle** is an innovator and scholar, whose research pushes the boundaries of computation to augment the ways we think and learn. As a designer and builder of interactive technologies, her goal is to explore the ways in which these innovations can improve, augment, and support children's development. Her interactive technologies have been deployed to facilitate collaborative learning about aboriginal heritage, sustainability and social justice; improve learning outcomes for dyslexic children; and teach self-regulation to disadvantaged children. Alissa was inducted into the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists in 2015, acknowledging her as one of Canada's intellectual leaders.

**Monica Landoni** is a senior research in the Faculty of Informatics, USI (Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland). She has worked in many research projects looking at how technology can support children in reading and writing, for education and leisure. In doing so, she has devised

new ways to engage children in co-design activities and studied the many roles children can play, from informants to co-researchers, and beyond. Always making sure they get acknowledged for their contribution and benefit from it. Thus, it is no surprise ethics is one of her core interests.

**Janet C Read** is a Professor in Child Computer Interaction and is the Director of the Child Computer Interaction (ChiCI) research group at UCLan. Since 2002 she has been concerned with how children participate in IDC and CCI research and has written on ethical work in a textbook as well as in academic papers. Her current work is focusing on empowering children in participatory work and also on ensuring ways in which their participation can be valued. She is the Editor in Chief of the International Journal of Child Computer Interaction and has twice chaired the IDC Conference.

**Jerry Alan Fails** is an Associate Professor in the Computer Science Department at Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. He has been actively designing technologies with and for children utilizing—and further developing—participatory design methods for children since 2003. His research focuses on technologies that promote children’s creativity, activity, mobility, collaboration, and exploration of the world around them. He is also collaborating with researchers to improve search interfaces for children.

### Further Reading

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