

Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)

HREC Project Number: 18877

Research Project Title: Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Empowering Students, Teachers and School Communities for Digital Learning

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Screen time has been a controversial issue in the media and we are very interested in your child's experience and opinion as a NSW student. This research project, **Best Practice in Screen Use for Education – Empowering Students, Teachers, and School Communities for Digital Learning**, aims to identify and promote the most effective uses of digital devices in schools, improve wellbeing and learning outcomes for students, and strengthen guidelines for healthy and educationally beneficial screen use.

This Participant Information and Consent Form tells you about the research project and what is involved. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to participate. Please read this information carefully, and ask questions about anything you do not understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to, and your decision will not affect your normal school involvement or relationship with the school. If you decide you want to take part in the research project, you will be asked to click "I agree" in the consent section. By clicking "I agree" you are telling us that you:

- Understand what you have read
- Consent to take part in the research project

You may print or save a copy of this Participant Information and Consent Form for future reference.

1. What is the purpose of this research?

This research explores **how screens (e.g., laptops, iPads, smartphones) are used by NSW schools students, teachers, and parents**, and seeks to identify “best practices” that promote healthy, safe, and effective digital learning. We want to understand current patterns, benefits, and challenges of screen use in real classrooms and at home, and to produce evidence-based resources for:

- Students (e.g., strategies for managing their own screen time for learning and leisure)
- Parents (e.g., family guidelines for effective and healthy screen use for learning and leisure)
- Teachers (e.g., strategies for managing effective technology integration in the classroom)
- School leaders (e.g., policies for safe, equitable, and academically beneficial technology use).

Significance

The project will provide an accurate snapshot of the perception and current use of screens in NSW schools and communities, and design a *best practice toolkit* to help guide effective screen use for students, parents and teachers. The findings will also help schools design guidelines and policies that enhance student learning and wellbeing. This study also contributes to broader educational research and helps ensure that our schools and communities have up-to-date, research-based information about digital technology use.

2. What does participation in this research involve?

- **Classroom observation:** Your child’s teacher has nominated a lesson for the researcher to observe. During the observation, the researcher will sit in the room and take written notes. No videos will be recorded. All the researcher notes will be anonymous and no child will be identified in the researcher notes. No preparation will be required for the students nor the teacher. (If you do not consent to your child participating, no notes will be taken about your child’s activity.)
- After the observation, your child may be invited to participate in a **focus group** with 2-4 other students in the class, held on-site during school hours at a time deemed appropriate by the school. The focus group will be **30-45 minutes** long and students will be asked about their screen use attitudes and habits.
- The focus group will be **video recorded and transcribed** to help the research team accurately capture what is said. These recordings will be securely stored and only viewed by the research team. The transcripts will be completely anonymous. If we wish to use any part of the recording that includes your child for the best practice toolkits, we will contact you separately to ask for you and your child’s explicit permission.

3. Other relevant information about the research project

The research project is a collaboration between all 11 NSW-based universities, working closely with the NSW Department of Education. We are surveying students, parents, teachers and principals in all schools in NSW, that is, over 3000 schools across the state. As a second stage of the research, we are conducting approximately 60 focus groups and classroom observations in selected schools.

4. Do I have to take part in this research project?

No. Participation is entirely **voluntary**. If you do not wish your child to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to participate and then change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any time with no questions asked, and with no impact on your school involvement, grades, or relationships with staff.

5. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Possible benefits include:

- **Summary of research results and a screentime toolkit:** Resources to help you and your child make better use of digital technologies for learning
- **Improved classroom practice:** Teachers and school leaders can learn from the collated best-practice recommendations.
- **Enhanced learning environment:** Students may benefit from refined policies, teaching methods, and self-management advice that emerge from study findings.
- **Better home-school communication:** Parents may gain insights on healthy screen use strategies to support their children's wellbeing.

6. What are the possible risks and disadvantages of taking part?

There should be minimal risks and disadvantages involved in taking part in the research. All the researchers have valid and current Working With Children Check (WWCC). The classroom observation is non-intrusive, the researcher will not be making any comments to the students in class, and all their notes are anonymous so there should be no impact on the students.

The focus group questions are general, and it will be emphasised to the students that there are no right or wrong answers. The researchers are experienced working with children and will ensure that the groups are conducted in a non-judgemental and positive manner.

7. What if I withdraw from this research project?

- **Withdrawal Process:** Your child can withdraw by simply letting the researcher know at any point of the classroom observation or focus group. If they withdraw, all the data collected about them will be deleted.

You and your child's decision to withdraw will not affect your (or your child's) normal school activities or your relationship with the school, the universities or the NSW Department of Education.

8. What will happen to information about me?

- Any data that can identify your child will remain confidential. Only the research team will have access to it.

- All data is stored securely on Macquarie University's servers, protected by passwords and encryption, which only the research team can access.
- AI platforms may be used to transcribe and analyse anonymised responses.
- Anonymised results may be presented at academic conferences, published in journals, and a final report will be presented to the NSW Department of Education. No individuals will be identified in any research publication, presentation, or report stemming from this project.
- If you wish, you can request a summary of the findings of the study.
- At the end of this project, we will archive **fully de-identified focus group transcripts and classroom observation notes** (i.e., with names and personal identifiers removed) in a secure repository under the care of the NSW Department of Education. Other researchers may put in a request to the Department of Education for permission to use the data in future, related research. If you object to future use of your de-identified data, please indicate on the consent form and we will remove your records before archival.
- You have the right to request access to any information we hold about your child and ask for corrections if needed, in line with Australian privacy laws.

10. Who is organising and funding the research?

This project is funded under the **NSW Department of Education's Screen Fund**.

It is conducted by a multi-university research team:

- Professor Matt Bower, Macquarie University
- Dr Jo Orlando, Western Sydney University
- Dr Lincoln Gill, Charles Sturt University
- Professor Jihyun Lee, University of New South Wales
- Dr Damian Maher, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Kim Rowston, Australian Catholic University
- Dr Katie Waters, University of Newcastle
- Dr Ben Zunica, University of Sydney
- Associate Professor Rachael Adlington, University of New England
- Dr Tiffani Apps, University of Wollongong
- Associate Professor Aspa Baroutsis, Southern Cross University
- Dr Karley Beckman, University of Wollongong
- Dr Stoo Sepp, University of New England
- Dr Jubilee Smith, Southern Cross University
- Professor Wayne Warburton, Macquarie University
- Dr Karen Woo, Macquarie University

11. Who has reviewed the research project?

The ethical aspects of this study have been reviewed and approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee and the NSW State Education Research and Partnership (SERAP) process.

12. Further information and who to contact

If you want any further information concerning this project or if you have any problems which may be related to your involvement in the project, please contact **Dr Karen Woo, Senior Project & Research Manager** at karen.woo@mq.edu.au or any of the research team member.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding any part of the project, how it's being conducted, ethical issues related to your participation, or general questions about being a research participant, please contact **Director, Research Ethics & Integrity on (02) 9850 7854, or email ethics@mq.edu.au**. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Participant Consent

By clicking "I agree", you agree that:

1. I have read the information in this Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form.
2. I understand the purposes, procedures, and risks of the research described in the project.
3. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.
4. I confirm that I am the parent/guardian with legal authority to provide consent for my child [name displayed].
5. I give permission for my child to participate, and I understand that my child can also withdraw or refuse at any time.

Please tick the relevant statement(s):

- ☐ I consent to future use of de-identified data for related research projects.
- ☐ I do *not* consent to future use of de-identified data for related research projects.

[I agree] [I disagree]