



CAGD Project Report: Year One

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Introduction

The Children and Age-Appropriate Game Design (or “Child Appropriate Game Design” (CAGD) for short) project explores how ideas about “age appropriateness” shape the way digital games are designed, regulated, and played.

Over three years, our research team will: analyze laws and policies pertaining to children’s rights and safety in games in Canada, the UK and the US; analyze the designs of some of the games, platforms, parental controls, and companies that kids interact with when playing digital games; talk to kids aged 6-to-12 years to find out what *they* think is age-appropriate in games; and chat with children’s game makers to find out how they decide what’s appropriate for kids.

Our study began with a cross-cultural comparison of Canada and the UK; two countries with very different approaches to “age-appropriate design” (AAD). We are now working on identifying key trends in policies, game designs, player experiences, and developer strategies relating to AAD in both countries, tracking changes as they unfold over the study period (2022-2025).

Our goal is to produce findings that will help guide the development of better policies and games that prioritize and support children’s rights and well-being, no matter their age.

In keeping with our commitment to sharing work as it unfolds, we’re publishing open-access yearly reports on our progress and findings. In this inaugural report, we introduce the research team and briefly describe: i) the why (rationale) and how (research design) of our study; ii) Year 1 results and key takeaways from our ongoing policy analysis; iii) Year 1 results of our design analysis, which focused on tracking industry shifts and trends in kids’ gaming; iv) the results of our first round of focus groups with Canadian children aged 6-to-12 years; and v) where and how we’re sharing our findings with different audiences (with links to find out more).

In the final section, we provide a look ahead at our next steps, which include one-on-one interviews with children’s game developers and a second round of focus groups with the kids. And some exciting news about our partnership with A-Game Studios that puts some of our key findings, recommendations, and love of good games into practice.

Meet the Research Team

Dr. **Sara M. Grimes** is the Principal Investigator of the CAGD project. She is the director of the Kids Play Tech Lab and Professor in the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto. Sara has been conducting research on children's digital technologies, games, and play for over twenty years. She is the author of the award-winning book *Digital playgrounds: The hidden politics of children's online play spaces, virtual worlds, and connected games* (UTPress, 2021).



Dr. **Darshana Jayemanne** is a Co-Investigator on the CAGD project, and the lead researcher of the UK portion of this study. He is a Lecturer in the School of Design and Informatics, Division of Games and Arts at Abertay University in Edinburgh, Scotland. His research focuses on game development, but he has also conducted many studies involving toddlers, children, and teens. He is the author of *Performativity in art, literature and videogames* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).



Dr. **Seth Giddings** is a Co-Investigator on the CAGD project and an Associate Professor of Digital Culture and Design at the University of Southampton in Southampton, UK. His research spans a range of topics relating to creativity and play, from children's toys to AI. Seth is the author *Gameworlds: Virtual media and children's everyday play* (Bloomsbury, 2016). His new book, *Toy theory: Technology and imagination in play*, comes out later this year (MIT Press).



Our Year 1 research team included three student research assistants who are helping with all aspects of the data collection and analysis and playing key roles in sharing our findings at conferences. **Alan Bui** is a PhD student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Toronto, who is helping coordinate our activities and outputs as the study's project manager. **Riley McNair** is a PhD student in the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto, providing tech policy expertise. **Bronwyn Swerdfager** is a PhD student in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)'s Social Justice program at the University of Toronto, and brings an additional child rights lens to the study. We also benefitted from the legal expertise of **Michael J.S. Beauvais**, a PhD student in the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto.



Why Do This Study?

In recent years, the children’s digital games ecosystem has mushroomed. Games are now played on multiple devices. There are a seemingly infinite number of games to choose from. Many of the games kids love best are multiplayer and connected to the internet. Each of these developments introduces wonderful new opportunities for children to play and connect. But also serious challenges.

Key concerns have emerged around: **children’s privacy** in games that collect their data, **children’s safety** in games played with or made by other users, children’s exposure to **misleading ads** and **manipulative monetization** tactics (e.g., nudges, loot boxes), and children’s **limited rights as creators** of games and other content.

Existing regulatory systems are ill equipped to address these concerns.ⁱ In Canada and other areas of the world, games are mostly regulated by broader tech policies (e.g., privacy protection laws), and voluntary ratings systems run by private American companies and industry associations.

Tech policies designed for adults often fail to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children. Not to mention children’s unique digital habits and legal status. Meanwhile, research suggests that game ratings systems are largely ineffective. They rely on limited definitions of what qualifies as “age-appropriate” that many parents and children don’t find useful.

For example, some game ratings (e.g., ESRB) don’t consider the data collection practices or commercial elements of games.

Other ratings (e.g., Apple Store) don’t cover the presence of scary content.

There is a growing need to revisit how we rate, regulate, and design games for children. Luckily, there’s rising global interest in doing just that; not just for games but across the digital environment.

This interest was given a major boost in 2021, when the United Nations adopted the [*General Comment 25 on Children’s Rights in Relation to the Digital Environment*](#).ⁱⁱ All Signatory States, including Canada, are now required to support children’s rights online and whenever they interact with connected technologies (e.g., smart speakers).

Governments in other parts of the world have been quick to respond. In the UK, the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) introduced the *Age Appropriate Design Code* containing 15 rights-focused standards that online services targeted to or used by children are asked to follow. Canada has yet to respond. However, there are growing calls for action at the federal and provincial regulatory levels. And a growing demand for the tech industries to do better when it comes to kids’ rights, safety, and wellbeing.

Our goal for the CAGD project is to contribute to future policy development in this area, while making sure the voices of children and children’s game developers are included in the conversation. We’re also collaborating with game developers and others in the tech industries to develop best practices for creating a rights-by-design children’s game ecosystem in Canada, the UK, and beyond.

Research Design

Our research will be conducted over a three-year period (2022-2025). It includes policy analysis, design analysis, annual focus groups with 35 children aged 6-to-12 years, and interviews with game makers.

A **policy analysis** of relevant laws and regulations in the UK and Canada, as well as the US (which we added due to the number of impactful policy developments that have happened there since the project began). This analysis will help us understand how children’s rights and/or ideas about “age appropriateness” appear in existing regulation. And identify gaps to be filled.

A **design analysis** of key games, game platforms, storefronts, parental control systems, and market trends shaping children’s digital gameplay. This will help us to understand how companies are addressing children’s rights, and how they’re responding to policy requirements and public demands.

Focus groups with children aged 6-to-12 years who play games, in Canada (Ontario and Quebec) and the UK (TBC). This will help us find out what kids think about age appropriateness in games, how they make decisions about which games to play, who and what they interact with, and if there are changes they’d like to see in how games are made, rated, or regulated.

Interviews with children’s game and game-app developers. This will help us understand how decisions are made about age targeting, monetization, contents, communication, and parental settings. And get a sense of how ideas about age appropriateness and/or AAD guidelines factor into game design decisions.

We’re looking at the connections, overlaps and gaps between policies, designs, and play. And trying to identify ways we can work together to support children’s rights in games.

Policy Analysis

Digital rights legislation is rapidly changing in North America, Europe and other areas of the world. Work on the CAGD project began in 2022 with a comparative analysis of policies relevant to children’s gaming. Our early focus was on understanding if and how the UK’s AAD or “Children’s Code” was guiding similar policy developments in Canada and other countries.

Our team examined policy documents, legal briefs, and media ratings systems to understand if, how, and to what extent children’s rights are addressed. We also examined if and how these policies refer to “age appropriateness” in relation to children and games or other technologies.

Key finding: AAD bills and acts have emerged in several EU countries and US states. So far, Canada has not made any move to draft its own AAD regulation. However, AAD is briefly mentioned in the newly proposed Online Harms Act.

Our analysis also found that existing regulation in Canada does not adequately address children’s rights. Several scholars and child advocates agree there’s an urgent need for child-specific consumer protection (beyond Quebec, where this already exists) and privacy regulation in Canada. Others are calling for enforceable limits on the types of content, advertising and communications that companies expose children to.

Some, such as the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and Professor Valerie Steeves,ⁱⁱⁱ have been advancing these arguments for well over a decade. Notable recent developments in Canada include:

- Proposed reforms to Canadian privacy legislation (Bill C-27), which include special protections for the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information of minors.
- A commitment by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada to champion children’s privacy rights as a strategic priority for the next 3 years.
- The introduction of the Online Harms Act (Bill C-63), which contains several new protections for children, including a “duty to protect” all those under the age of 18 years.

Meanwhile, in the UK, regulation aimed at protecting children and supporting children’s rights has continued to expand since the start of the CAGD project. Notable recent developments in the UK include:

- The widespread implementation and adoption of the AAD “Children’s Code.” [Note: This may have had a “trickle-over” effect of limiting the types of in-app ads kids are exposed to in Canada as well.]
- In 2023, the UK passed the Online Safety Act, which requires online platforms to adopt a “duty of care” and protect children’s online safety. It remains unclear how this Act will be applied to games.

Early in our analysis, we noted that AAD contains some tricky concepts that need clarification. Terms like “best interests,” but also “age-appropriate” itself. Fortunately,

discussions are now underway in the UK on how to address both of these concepts. A great resource for keeping track of developments happening in the UK is the [Digital Futures Commission](#).

In the US, there has been a ton of activity relating to AAD and child safety online. Notable developments in the US include:

- The introduction of AAD legislation in California and several other states, followed by lawsuits aimed at blocking them launched by a coalition of US tech giants.
- Several new state online safety bills that restrict children and/or teens from accessing social media, games, and in some cases entire devices.
- Ongoing efforts to revamp the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), including extending some of its protections to teens.
- The FTC launched an inquiry into the industry’s use of dark patterns on children and teens, with multiple questions focused on games.

Our analysis found that ideas about age “appropriateness” are socially constructed and vaguely defined. We know from previous research that age appropriateness is not a universal concept.^{iv} Culture, geographical location, and demographics including gender and race can all shape understandings of what is or isn’t age-appropriate.^v But these differences are largely ignored by policymakers and the games industry.

A key example is found in **game ratings**. Game rating systems like the ESRB determine age appropriateness based on the presence of fairly specific “red flag” themes, words, and/or imagery. The resulting categories are sweeping (“E” for Everyone, “T” for Teen), and do not address children’s diverse literacy and maturity levels.

Our background study (The Media Ratings Project) comparing the content ratings of 784 films and 342 games released in Canada, the US, and the EU in 2019 confirmed that content ratings are also culturally-specific.

In that study, we found important differences across Canadian provinces and between Canada, the UK, and the US, in terms of how media are rated. These differences tracked with different cultural norms about sexuality and certain forms of violence, among other things. Such differences are not part of many discussions about age appropriateness.

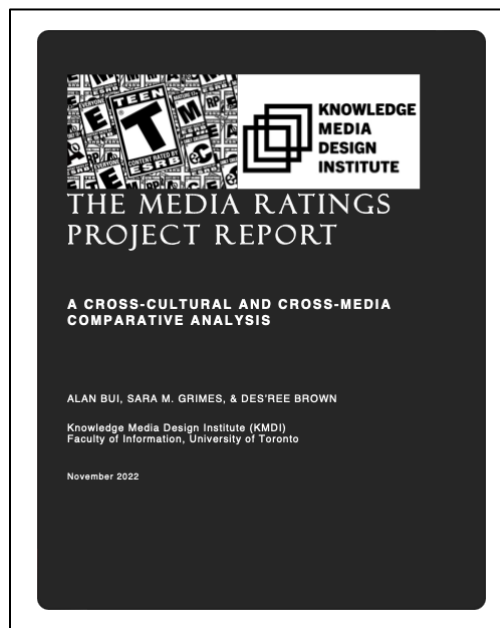


Figure 1: The Media Ratings Project Report, published online and open access in 2022

Design Analysis

Understanding game design is crucial for unpacking AAD and for advancing children’s rights in the digital realm. This year, our design analysis focused on higher-level industry trends. Some were responses to recent policy changes or to controversies. Others were part of larger shifts happening in the tech industries.

We’re still gathering recommendations from our child participants about which games we should look at in this study. That analysis will help us better understand children’s digital play experiences. To date, our “to do” list includes a number of *Roblox* experiences and *Legend of Zelda* games (among others).

Our design focus expanded this year through a new collaboration with [A-Game Studios](#). We will draw on our findings to help them create a **rights-by-design** children’s game, providing advice on how to make design choices that respect children’s rights.

Through this collaboration, the CAGD team is also creating a rights-by-design checklist specific to digital game companies. This tool will be made available to the public and shared at game industry events and conferences once complete.

Key finding: A rapid rise and spread of age assurance and age verification software, tools and strategies in games and across the digital environment.

Since the start of our study, there has been an explosion in interest and applications of age assurance technologies. The makers of these technologies claim their systems can accurately estimate or confidentially verify a person’s age. Their purpose is to ensure that

kids aren't exposed to inappropriate content or services, at the level of design. The tools involved range from facial recognition software to submission forms that ask you to attach a "hard identifier" like a government-issued ID or personal banking details. Many use AI to assess or cross-check this data.

Age assurance technologies are increasingly used by websites, platforms, and games played by kids. For example, *Roblox* players who want to set their account to a 17+ content rating must first upload a government-issued ID. Tencent Games uses facial recognition to estimate the age of users in China to comply with local laws that limit children's tech use to specific times of day.

The companies involved describe this move as a way of following new regulations like the AAD Children's Code. Or as proof of their commitment to child safety. But there are a LOT of unanswered questions about age assurance technologies and how they are being used. This includes questions about privacy (of both children and adults as their faces and IDs are collected and tracked); questions about accuracy and potential bias; and questions about how the initial decisions about what counts as "age-appropriate" are made (and by whom). We will continue to explore these questions in Year 2.

Key finding: The expansion of content ratings to items and costumes in games like *Fortnite* and *Roblox*.

Some of the most popular games among kids are platforms filled with huge amounts of user-generated content (UGC). Think *Roblox*, *Minecraft*, and *Fortnite*. This means kids often play games, put on avatar costumes, and find items that were created by other players. This has been awesome for kids' creativity. But for

years, all of that UGC was unmoderated and unrated. And some players abused that by releasing hateful and inappropriate content.

There is now a growing trend for UGC game platforms to put content ratings on player-made creations. Initially, this was limited to full games (sometimes called "experiences"). Usually, player-creators are asked to "self-rate" by filling out a survey about their content before they're allowed to share it. If they don't, their content defaults to a higher age rating, like T for Teens or 13 years +.

Increasingly, things like items and costumes are also being rated. This applies to both player-made and official (made by the game company) creations. Different companies are using different approaches and they've had mixed results so far. For example, there was a backlash when *Fortnite* introduced ratings on costumes and items that previously could be transported from one game to the next, but must now match the game's age-rating.

The expansion of ratings to UGC seeks to make kids' gaming experiences more predictable and age-appropriate, while still allowing players to express themselves. Again, however, there are big questions about how age appropriateness is being decided, and how "ratings creep" might restrict kids' freedom of expression and creativity.

Key finding: More attention is being put on how parental controls and safety settings are designed and used (or not used).

Parental controls are widely championed by policymakers as vital child safety tools, but evidence of their effectiveness is mixed.^{vi} Meanwhile, studies show that parental controls are not widely used. Globally, less than 3% of parents report using them.^{vii}

Many game companies and platforms now provide parents with a separate “parent account” they must use to set up parental controls for their child. Parental controls for games commonly include content filters, time limits, spending limits, and limits on who can see or communicate with the child. Some also provide tools for monitoring kids’ activities. Some provide the option to approve kids’ friend or purchase requests.

At first glance, providing a separate parent account seems like a good way to make the controls easier and more convenient to use. However, we found that too often, numerous steps are involved in setting up these accounts. Some also require a high level of “gaming” literacy to navigate. But our main critique is that parent accounts tend to separate and hide the decisions parents make about children’s access and safety. Kids might not even be aware that their parent has put limits on what they can see and do, or that safety settings even exist. They might think that’s just how the game is for everyone.

This results in missed opportunities for families to discuss the risks of life online, and for kids to learn about the darker sides of gaming before they experience them firsthand. Instead, open communication about these issues can help kids learn how to identify and mitigate risks, and build trust between children and parents. In fact, open communication and trust are actually predictors of children’s ability to develop and engage in safe online practices.

Our focus groups confirmed that parental controls aren’t working for everyone. In Year 2, we’ll be delving into this finding and exploring if and how parental controls might instead be designed to *promote* trust and communication within families.

Focus Groups with Kids

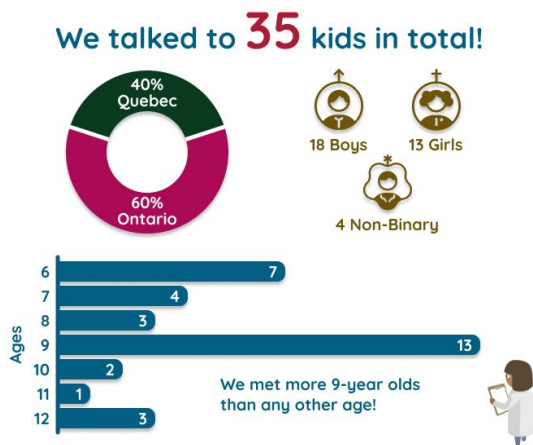
In Year 1, we conducted six focus groups with a total of 35 children aged 6 -to-12 years. We held four sessions in Ontario and two in Quebec. Each focus group session lasted about an hour, and included between 3 and 8 kids. During each session we asked kids a set of scripted questions, and took turns playing *Minecraft*. Our custom-made *Minecraft* game provided playable examples of the types of things we asked questions about. And it gave the kids an opportunity to “show and tell” us things they liked and didn’t like in games.

We asked the kids what they thought about “age appropriateness” (e.g., What games are good for kids to play? What do grown-ups think is appropriate for kids? What do you think?) and game ratings. We also asked about in-game ads and purchases, how kids choose which games to play, what is fair in games, and if kids think that changes depending on the player’s age.

The kids in our study are aware that we’re sharing findings with academics, policymakers, and game developers. We’re also sharing our results with *them* as we go, and giving them regular opportunities provide feedback on our findings and on how we’re conducting the study. Rigorous research ethics are applied every step of the way, as approved by the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board.

Our Year 1 focus groups were held in September (in Quebec) and October (in Ontario) in 2023. Our plan is to reconnect with the same kids for two additional sets of focus groups over the next two years (at 6-to-9 month intervals) to follow up on key themes and track changes over time.

We strived to recruit a diverse cross-section of kids in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, dis/ability, and socio-economic status. In the end, white boys are slightly over-represented in our focus groups and racialized girls are under-represented, as are children from lower-income households. However, the kids are of diverse ages and genders, and include a representative number of children with disabilities. Our participants include several sets of siblings, who attended together or separately based on personal preference. As much as possible, sessions included kids of similar ages, and we adapted our questions and agenda for our youngest participants.



Data analysis is now underway. We’re using software called NVivo to help us organize and make sense of the kids’ responses, which were captured in video and audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes. We’re coding this data to make it easier to parse and compare as the study unfolds over the next two years.

So far, our data reveals a highly diverse and eclectic set of experiences and ideas. That said, we’ve identified several trends across our six sessions so far. These “key findings” do not represent the answers of all the kids we talked to. But they capture what we heard from multiple kids in all six sessions and across demographic categories.

Key finding: When it comes to age appropriateness, one-size-does-not-fit-all

The kids we talked to seldom agreed on what exactly was “appropriate” for kids. They had lots of different opinions about this. However, most did agree that individual children have their own thresholds and criteria for what is appropriate for them. This might be based on maturity level, personal preferences, previous exposure, existing fears...but not on their numeric age alone.

One of the things that struck us most was how many of the children wanted game makers to acknowledge this fact by providing more flexibility and customization options in the games kids play. Some wanted to avoid scary themes (more on that below), others wanted fewer ads. But most agreed kids should have more control over what they see and do in games, based on their own sense of “appropriate” content and interactions.

The kids had many different strategies for deciding which games are appropriate for them. Most thought the appropriateness of a game cannot be known through an age-based content rating alone. Some of the kids did refer to game ratings, but used them alongside other sources of information.

When asked about what is appropriate for “younger children,” many of our participants said that younger kids are also all different. They were seen as deserving some level of individual consideration and assessment when decisions are made about which games or content are appropriate for them.

Key finding: Scary and horror are hot topics when it comes to age appropriateness.

When we asked the kids to tell us what kinds of inappropriate content might appear in a game (e.g., What’s something that you can see in a game that you think is not good for kids or is inappropriate for kids?), one of the most popular answers was “scary” things. Think horror games, frightening images, creepy characters, and jump scares. Many of the kids had stories about playing a game that turned out to be “too scary” for them.

However, not all of the kids regretted playing those games. And many more said that they like scary games and media, and seek these out on purpose. We heard the phrase “sometimes scary is fun” repeatedly during our focus groups. Even the kids who tried to avoid scary games themselves acknowledged that other kids might enjoy them.

This preliminary finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that children can be drawn to scary content for multiple reasons. As well as evidence that children can vary widely in their definitions of, interest in, and tolerance of “scary.” What’s scary to one kid might not be scary to another.

Another common theme in these discussions was the perceived gap between what kids find scary and what grown-ups *think* is too scary for kids. Many said that adults often think things are too scary for them that they aren’t actually frightened by. And vice-versa.

Most of the kids in our study wanted the option to play scary games...or not. They also wanted to be able to make informed decisions about it, asking for more (and more accurate) details about the scary content in games *before* they play them.

Key finding: Youtubers are important sources of information about games and gaming for kids of all ages.

Social media influencers, especially YouTubers, were a valued resource for many of the kids we talked to. Several of the kids watched YouTubers to find out what games to play and how to play them. While the kids told us they also seek advice and information about games from parents, siblings, friends, and other online sources, YouTubers were a cultural touchstone for many.

Some of the kids also described watching YouTubers to find out which games are “cool” and popular. This finding suggests that YouTubers can provide a window into the mainstream gamer culture of teens and young adults, which younger players are otherwise largely left out of. The YouTubers discussed in our sessions mostly consisted of well-known young adult men who are also popular among older age groups, such as Mr. Beast and Preston Plays.

Previous research shows that kids often rely on YouTubers for technical help and gaming tips. For some kids, YouTubers can also become trusted authorities on pop culture and the gamer identity.^{viii} This can have positive or negative implications, depending on what is said, represented, or excluded by individual YouTubers (and their fans).

As we analyze this trend, we are considering how gaming-related content on YouTube offers opportunities for children to immerse themselves in the games they love and develop new skills and ideas. And the challenges that can arise when individual YouTubers spread misinformation and bias, or promote “toxic gamer culture.”

Key finding: There is a disconnect between kids and parents when it comes to if, how, and why parental controls are used.

We asked the kids several questions about the safety settings and the parental controls on their gaming devices (tablets, consoles, phones), platforms, and individual games. Their answers show that different kids have very different levels of experience and familiarity with these features.

A few of the kids knew a lot about safety settings. They had a clear sense the types of content and interactions safety settings are meant to prevent. They were able to describe how a parent used settings to manage their gameplay or limit spending. Some of these kids were unhappy about the settings their parent had chosen to use, while others reported agreeing with them.

But many of the other kids were unsure about parental controls and safety settings. Some of these kids also weren't sure if their parents knew about parental controls or how to use them. At times, this conflicted with other things those same kids told us about their gameplay experiences.

For example, one of the kids who said there were no parental controls set on their new Xbox console also didn't believe voice chat was possible on that device...even though it is unless set to "off."

We suspect that at least some of the kids in our study are unaware that parental controls are indeed being used to limit their communications with others and their access to certain content and features. We've already integrated questions about this in our Year 2 focus groups and parent survey.

Emerging finding: In-game ads should be part of the "age-appropriate" conversation.

We asked the kids about in-game ads, how games make money, what they think about "free" games and paying for items and levels, as well as family rules about game and in-game purchases. The kids had a lot of different perspectives about the commercial side of games. Most of them had limits on spending, while others weren't sure because it hadn't come up yet. Otherwise, there were few clear trends in the kids' answers to these questions. We'll be focusing on mapping and trying to understand the differences in kids' perspectives on this moving forward.

What is clear is that ads and monetization must be part of the conversation about "age appropriateness" in games. Most of the kids had seen in-game ads that they found annoying, disruptive, or even very frightening. We'll follow up on this topic in Years 2 and 3.

Emerging finding: Many grown-ups don't fully get why games are important to kids.

We asked the kids what they would like us to tell other grown-ups about kids and gaming. Nearly every single one of them had something to say. Many of their answers had to do with broadening adults' understanding and appreciation of how valuable and important games can be for kids. Some kids wished that adults were more aware of the social and educational benefits of games. Some wished adults placed greater value on the fun and enjoyment that kids derive from games. Some wanted grown-ups to help them tackle problems they're having in games instead of just saying "turn it off." Most agreed that games for kids should be more customizable, of higher quality, and more in tune with kids' diverse likes and needs.

Sharing our Findings

A core priority of the CAGD project is to share our findings widely and often. We are publishing and presenting in multiple formats, trying to make our work available to as many different audiences as we can. This includes academics, policymakers, game makers and other industry professionals, kids, their families, and teachers. Here's what we've done so far.

For Kids and Families

- Year 1 Findings [Infographic](#)
- *CAGD Project Report: Year One*

For K-12 Teachers

- Sara organized a roundtable on: “What does “age-appropriate” mean to and for children?” at the *Connected Learning Summit* in 2023, with Darshana, Betsy Bozdech (Common Sense Media), and Allisyn Levy (Sesame Workshop).

For Industry

- Sara presented on the CAGD project to LEGO Group’s UX Research Network.
- She also gave a keynote on AAD at the CanUX Conference in 2022.
- Through our collaboration with A-Game Studios, the CAGD project joined the [Design Well, Play Well](#) community hub led by Sesame Workshop and RITEC.

For Policymakers

- Sara presented on the CAGD at the *International Association of Privacy Professionals Symposium*.
- We submitted a [response](#) to the US Federal Trade Commission’s advance notice of proposed rulemaking on commercial surveillance and lax data security practices.

For Academics

- In Year 1, we delivered **12 talks** about the CAGD project **at six different academic conferences**, including: *Canadian Communication Association Conference*, *Canadian Game Studies Association Conference*, *International Communication Association Game Studies Pre-Conference*, *Digital Games Research Association Conference*, *Society for the Social Study of Science (4S) Conference*, and the *International Symposium on Digital Ethics*.
- We published an article on our policy analysis in the *Canadian Journal of Communication* [[open access version](#)].

For Everyone

- Project website: kidsplaytech.com
- We published an open access research report of our content ratings sub-project: [The Media Ratings Project Report: A Cross-Cultural and Cross-Media Comparative Analysis](#).
- CAGD Logo: The logo and website design for this project was created by Kenji Toyooka, through the support of the Knowledge Media Design Institute.



Figure 2: Excerpt from 'Year 1 Findings Infographic'

Next Steps

At the time of writing, our Year 2 activities are already in full swing. Our plans for the year include: More data collection, with a second round of focus groups with kids and interviews with game developers. More policy analysis, with a focus on new regulation targeting online harms. More design analysis, including case studies of important games and the next phase of our partnership with A-Game Studios. And lots more data analysis and synthesis. Here are a few of our priorities for Year 2:

Priority 1: Developer Interviews

In addition to our focus groups with kids, we will be interviewing children’s game developers in Canada, the UK, and beyond, to understand their thoughts and experiences with “age appropriateness”. Recruitment for this stage of the project is now underway.

Priority 2: Year 2 Focus Groups with Kids

In April 2024, we’ll be conducting our year 2 focus groups. Our questions this time are focused on delving into the themes that emerged last year. As well as following up on unique experiences and exploring differences of opinion and perspectives.

Priority 3: Bringing it All Together

Now that we’ve collected a nice chunk of data, we’re starting the hard work of synthesizing, comparing, and making linkages across the different types of research we’re doing. For example, what do our focus group findings tell us about recent policy developments? How can designers address the disconnect between children and parents when it comes to safety settings? And how do we bring this all together to create a framework for supporting children’s rights and best interests in games?

Priority 4: Design Well, Play Well

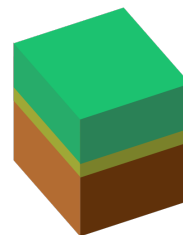
We are thrilled to announce that CAGD has joined the Sesame Workshop and RITEC’s [*Design Well, Play Well*](#) community hub. The hub aims to connect all those who are interested in designing digital experiences that promote children’s wellbeing. We will share findings with this community, and seek advice as we move into the next phase of our collaboration with A-Game Studios.

Priority 5: Sharing Our Findings

We currently have six conference presentations slated for this summer (2024), with more on the horizon in the fall. This includes both academic conferences and a major convention for trust and safety professionals (TrustCon). We’ll be sharing findings from our focus groups, engaging attendees in discussions and hands-on activities, and working through the implications of what we’ve found so far.

We’re also working on four academic publications: a chapter on digital playgrounds, an article on kids’ complex feelings about scary games, a piece on YouTubers’ roles in children’s gameworlds, and a paper on the disconnect between parents and kids around parental controls.

Lastly, we’re hoping to branch out this year into other types of media. Maybe a podcast or a children’s picture book. Stay tuned!



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