

Adventures with Lex: The Story So Far...

Dr Dawn Watkins, Dr Elee Kirk,
Dr Joanna Barwick, Dr Effie Law



Law in Children's Lives

- Funded by the **ESRC** under its **transformative grant** scheme.
- This project investigates **how far, if at all, children perceive themselves to be empowered by law in their everyday lives**.
- An **unusual and innovative** feature of this study is the **use of digital gaming as a research tool**.
- We **worked with 634 children (aged 8 to 11)** in 8 different Leicestershire schools in the 2015 summer term.

Why use a game?

- It allows for the deliberate **removal of adult interviewers** from the data gathering element of the research.
- We know that many **children are familiar with digital gaming**. 60% of 6-11 year olds use tablets each week,¹ and 99% of 8-15 year olds play games – on average 20 hours per week.²
- '**Gamification**' brings elements of games, such as structure, aesthetics, characters, or rewards, to non-game situations: in our case, a survey.
- It enables **research to be carried out with children in groups** in their **familiar classroom setting**, rather than individually.

The game: *Adventures with Lex*

- We designed a **tablet-based game** with the help of 48 children from 3 local schools, and adult experts, designers, and consultants.
- A '**naïve**' alien, **Lex**, asks the child to show him around their world. In different scenarios, **Lex asks the child what they would do and why**.
- Children **navigate everyday settings: a school, park, shop, and friend's house**, which present a series of linked dilemmas. The **choices that they make are tracked and captured by the game**.
- Each child **wears a headset**, so that they can **speak their answers** to Lex's questions. These are **recorded by the game**.



Which Children?

- From a **range of schools** identified using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and other data.
- Years 4, 5 and 6 **invited to participate**.
- Subject to **parent/carer and child's consent**.



[No] "Of course it's not fair just for boys to go on a school trip to the zoo. It's not boys that can just learn. Girls can learn as well."
(Year 5 girl)

[Yes] "Because sometimes girls are annoying."
(Year 4 boy)

- Only 5% of children said '**Yes**', it was okay for girls not to be allowed on the trip to the zoo.
- 1% said '**Don't know**'.
- A huge 94% said '**No**', this was not okay.
- The word '**fair**' appeared in children's explanations 312 times; '**rights**' appears 22 times.



[Don't know] "Because there are different reasons – probably all the girls have been naughty."
(Year 6 boy)

[No] "Because most people think that rough stuff is for boys but girls can go to the zoo as well. Maybe the boys think that they are allowed to go and girls aren't because it is dirty there but girls can go if they like too and it is sort of racist."
(Year 6 girl)

[Don't know] "Because the girls might go somewhere else."
(Year 5 girl)

[No] "Even though I am a boy myself, it is not fair for girls. Girls have their rights!"
(Year 5 boy)

What went well?

- The game was **highly appealing** to schools and to children.
- It made use of children's existing skills and interests –they found it intuitive, **engaging and fun**.
- Effective** use of online and print **communications** and meetings in person.
- Interdisciplinary approach:** law, childhood studies, information science and computer science.

Early observations

- Schools and parents/carers act as '**gatekeepers**' to children's access to resources.
- The game provides **robust quantitative and qualitative data**.
- We are gaining **valuable insights** into children's everyday legal competencies.
- Children frequently **default to adults**, whom they assume to understand the law.

What next?

- Complete the analysis of data** from this project.
- Child and adult friendly dissemination** of findings.
- Further research:** a deeper, richer study, with **smaller groups of vulnerable children**.
- Develop a game that children can download and play themselves**, to become more legally empowered.
- Influence policy and curriculum development** regarding children, the law, and their rights.

