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Investigating the Family as a Community of (Digital) Practice: Where Do We Go From Here? (Poster)

Abstract: Family digital literacy is discussed in the context of a Community of Practice. Informed by the literature, a study investigating existing family digital practices and the use of the participatory design methodology of Bonded Design and digital badges to encourage and enhance family digital literacy is proposed.

Résumé:

Introduction

The complex web of social learning surrounding family digital practices suggests that the design and development of supportive resources for digital literacy that integrate with family and community may result in more meaningful, positive outcomes for both children and their parents.¹ This abstract provides a brief overview of research in the emerging area of family and digital media and proposes a research methodology to investigate the phenomenon further.

Practices surrounding the use of networked digital media are situated within the social and cultural context of users and their communities. One site of influence is the home, where members of the family – young and old – live, learn and communicate with digital media, and collectively, create a set of shared values. These practices contribute to digital literacy - the body of technical, social, cognitive, and communication competencies and practices needed by citizens in order to navigate cyber-infrastructure in the 21st century. If we, as information researchers and professionals, are to successfully scaffold digital literacy in the community we need to understand the everyday digital practices experienced within the crucible of family. As a preface to a study investigating family digital literacy, this abstract explores the concept of the family as a community of

practice for mediating digital practices and proposes a methodology that is particularly suited to the out-of-school learning environment of the family.

The Family as a Community of Digital Practice

A community of practice (CoP) has been defined as a group of people “who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002, 4). While CoPs are typically recognized within an organizational context, it could be argued that a family unit, in its shared concerns, experiences, learning opportunities, and ongoing interactions between its members, can be considered a CoP, especially in the context of a specific project. We assert that learning to negotiate the world of networked, digital media as a family, a joint venture between parent(s) and child(ren) is such a project. For example, when a new technology comes into the home and parents try to facilitate its use in ways that support their children’s well-being or when children adopt technology into their everyday lives, guided by lessons learned from their parents, caregivers, siblings and other family members. Indeed, children may also influence the ways that their parents use digital media. The literature suggests that there is a strong interplay between adults and children in the family unit with regard to online behaviour.

The research indicates that parents do play a key role in mediating their children’s online activities, often adapting strategies used for television viewing and co-using technology alongside their child. (Nikken and Jansz, 2014; Livingstone, 2015, Livingstone and Helsper, 2008; Barron, Martin, Takeuchi and Fithian, 2009). The ethnographic work of Ito (2010) and her colleagues, exploring the media ecologies of young people, found a link between the socio-economic status of parents, their experience with technology, and the nature of their mediation. But far from discouraging a family-centered approach to supporting digital literacy, the effects of social inclusion factors suggests a greater need for novel, supportive, and contextual approaches.

While many parents enjoy, and actually prefer, active co-use of digital media with their child, most parents perceive monitoring and restricting as a parental duty – something they *must* do even if they do not want to. For example, in a study with 21 Canadian parents and 66 teens, many parents equated surveillance with good parenting (Stevens, 2012, 3). Although the parents felt they had no choice in this behaviour, their constant vigilance was accompanied by discomfort and a general sense of exhaustion with regard to their role as technology mediator in the family.

Proposed Research

Informed by the research in the area of parental mediation of children’s online behaviour, and recognizing the power of public libraries to provide literacy education within the communities they serve, the authors propose a study in a public library setting to investigate how family digital literacy can be facilitated and enhanced through a participatory design approach. The proposed approach incorporates the methodology of Bonded Design (Large, Nessel, Beheshti, and Bowler, 2006) and the motivating elements

of badging (Wardrip, Abramovich, Bathgate, and Kim, in press). By conducting this study it is hoped that more insight into existing family digital literacy practices and how they can be further encouraged and strengthened will inform a scalable model of the process to help educate librarians so that they may facilitate family digital literacy in their own communities.

Notes

¹We use the term “parent” as short hand for the adults who are a child’s primary care giver. However, it should be noted that most of the research in the area of family digital literacy refers specifically to parents.

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