

Title: Playing around: Informing, including, and inspiring youth-centered information researchers

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Key Participants:

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Abstract: This interactive session will bring together youth information scholars, graduate students who study youth and information, and practitioners who work with youth in a variety of information environments for a creative ideas exchange about youth-centered information research writ large. It will address methods for negotiating access to youth research participants, ideas for navigating the wild world of IRB, other institutional policies, and community-wide directions in information research both with youth and with the adult intermediaries who serve them. Ideas exchange will comprise creative interaction methods, including verbal, tactile, and visual activities that can be used with youth in youth-centered research projects or with students in academic settings, from preschool to graduate school. Above all, this session will serve to uncover research and scholarship synergies among iConference participants with interests in young people's interaction with information.

Description:

Purpose and Intended Audience:

This interactive session is designed to inspire ideas exchange targeted toward youth information research. Key among ideas addressed will be negotiating access to youth research participants, strategies for navigating the wild world of IRB, hurdling other institutional policies that obstruct scholarship, and promoting community-wide directions in information research both with youth and with the adult intermediaries who serve them. The primary mode of engagement will serve as a model of interactive data collection that could be applied to studies with youth.

The intended audience of this session includes educators, scholars, graduate students, and practitioners with interests in studying youth and information in libraries, classrooms, and other social and learning settings. Our conversations may also be of interest to those who study information more broadly with populations other than youth, particularly our focus on creative, multi-sensory in-situ data collection methods.

Proposed activities including agenda, ramp-up (development), and follow-through:

Overview

To incorporate elements of play, user-centered design, and participatory learning, the focus of our session will be an interactive, cooperative game, driven by the interests and ideas of our attendees. During this portion of the session, we will provide prompts, questions, toys and game pieces (e.g., cards, blocks and bricks, spinners, game boards, timers) for our participants to play with together as inspiration and support for thought, discussion, questions, and reflections on issues pertaining to conducting research with youth. Not only will the game serve as the foundation for the session, it will serve as a model of an interactive data collection method that workshop participants can use in future studies with youth.

Agenda

INFORM (15 minutes)

In this introductory (or ramp-up) segment, we will open the session with context and research background. We will also lead a community building exercise and share parameters and ideas for game play.

INCLUDE (60 minutes, comprised of two 20-minute play segments with a 10-minute comfort and “new game” break)

This is the main participatory segment of the session. With support from the presenters to get started, participants will form groups (e.g., interest- or role-based, mixed groupings, etc.) to engage together in play and discussion.

INSPIRE (15 minutes)

In this concluding (or follow-through) segment, the presenters will facilitate a debriefing conversation, including goal setting and potential next steps and questions suggested by the participants. We will also help session attendees to connect with other session participants who share their scholarly interests to promote new scholarly collaborations.

Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field:

Nearly two decades ago, Chelton and Thomas (1999) lamented the state of information studies focused on youth, and the trickle-down effects of that status:

“One of the challenges of teaching graduate students to work with children and youth...is to inform their approaches to instructional design and their understandings of how people use information technology through an examination of current research. The problems in so doing have been exacerbated by the scarce, fragmented, and sometimes flawed nature of past research in information and library studies dealing with youth issues in information seeking” (p. 7).

More recently, scholars who study the information needs of young people have taken multiple measures to include the voices and perspectives of children and youth themselves (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Agosto, Magee, Dickard, & Forte, 2016; Barriage, 2018; Bowler & Large, 2008; Fisher, Bishop, Fawcett, & Magassa, 2014; Given, et al., 2016; Lu, 2010; Meyers, Fisher, & Marcoux, 2009; Smith & Hepworth, 2012) recognizing that “significant knowledge gains result when children’s active participation in the research process is deliberately solicited and when their perspectives, views and feelings are accepted as genuine, valid evidence” (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000, p. 31). When research in the information sciences includes children and youth as participants, findings not only contribute to our understanding of how these groups access, use, and benefit from information, they also debunk misinformation (Agosto, Purcell, Magee, & Forte, 2015), and enable service providers to enhance programs that might further support the many academic and personal information needs of these populations (Luo & Weak, 2013; Shenton & Dixon, 2003).

Going one step further, Bowler and Large (2008) advocate design-based research for investigations involving children and youth. Design-based studies tend to be user-centered; conducted in naturalistic contexts where children and youth work, play, and learn, such as classrooms, libraries, or family homes; are longitudinal; and involve researcher, practitioner and user stakeholders designing interventions investigated through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Design-based “participatory research moves the research itself from the position of being imposed by the researchers on the population studied to that of being a project owned by that population, thus promoting marginalized voices and making them central to understanding the issues relevant to their lives” (Buck & Magee, 2017, p. 644). When these methods are employed, researchers tend to appreciate the value for advancing both research and practice. For example, in discussing their work of designing an information intervention tool for youth and with youth, Beheshti and colleagues (2014) recognized the unprecedented contribution made to the field because of the close involvement of youth in both the research and design processes.

Despite the value of youth involvement in the research targeting their information practices and needs, challenges exist for scholars who study children and youth. "We are in serious need of more studies that collect data directly from young people and of more studies that aim to understand young people’s information worlds from their own cultural and personal perspectives. We are also in serious need of work that borrows theories and concepts from other fields and applies it to our understanding of youths’ information behaviors and practices" (Agosto, in press). Indeed, a recent review of the literature in school librarianship found that children and youth were participants in fewer than one-third of the published studies (Morris & Cahill, 2017). One means proposed for overcoming the barriers to community engagement is the sharing of strategies and stories of success (National Institutes of Health, 2011). Such sharing will be a core goal of this interactive session.

Duration: one 90-minute session

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