
Aping around: Participatory Design with Teenagers and Care Professionals

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Abstract

In this position paper I discuss the dynamics of working with multiple stakeholders including teenagers, parents, academics and care professionals. I reflect on the context and process of using inter-disciplinary teams in participatory design and propose the use of SID teams.

Author Keywords

Teenagers; Participatory Design; Evaluation Methods

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): H.5.2 User Interfaces: User-centered design

Introduction

This paper reflects on the APE (Adolescent & Parent Experiences) project, in which a cartoon-based interactive story about a teenager and their family was developed. The project was funded by Crime Solutions, a knowledge exchange project for the anti-crime sector. We explored the use of digital technology to establish and facilitate communication between young people and their parents/carers in the home environment without intervention from outside agencies.

The project evolved as an extension to previous work, DVice, a joint project between the School of Computing, Engineering and Physical Sciences (CEPS)

and the Lancashire Youth Offending Team (LYOT) [7]. The DVICE project centred on the offending behaviour of 13-17 year olds, through the development of an interactive web-based cognitive behaviour programme that young people could use with the help of a professional LYOT worker. Evaluation of DVICE revealed that despite a positive response from the young people, the work did not address relationships at home. Previous studies indicate that children learn key social skills through their relationships with their parents [1] as well as self-control and how to manage risks [2,3,6].

APE Study

During the APE study a prototype DVD was developed that could be watched by the whole family on television; with both parents and teenagers able to make choices about how the story progressed by choosing responses that most closely matched their own. We used three different types of cartoon apes to play the characters – gorillas, orang-utangs and chimpanzees - with a parent and adolescent character for each type. The three ape families were based on a model of three parenting styles [1]: authoritarian (gorilla), laissez faire (orang-utang) and democratic (chimpanzee). Adolescent responses to those parenting styles were based on experiences of experts in the development team. A combination of humour and real-life choices in the story aimed to bring a light touch to the serious process of reflection [4].

Participatory Approach

A multi-disciplinary approach was taken in the APE project using participatory design and evaluation approaches at different stages in the project [5]. We worked with different groups of young people throughout the project, running design and evaluation

activities with teenagers of various age groups in several schools. We also worked in small groups with young people and their parents. Animation and software were developed and built by a group of undergraduate students who used their own experiences to inform their work. In addition we had input from academics from three Schools within the University – Computing, Health and Media – as well as with professional participants from outside bodies – Action for Children (a charity), Central Lancashire PCT (a health body) and Lancashire Youth Offending Team (a statutory body). The inter-disciplinary team working enabled us to pool our knowledge and working processes and leverage different areas of expertise.

We used an iterative, participatory approach to development. However, we found it was logistically difficult to get all our participants together at the same time as they were not always available, so we ran different types of sessions with different collaborators. With teenagers we ran paper prototyping sessions, focus group discussions and prototype evaluation sessions from which we elicited verbal and survey feedback. We did this in school settings, as teachers allowed us to go into schools and run workshops during class time. We also ran some prototype evaluation sessions with families at the University. With parenting professionals and academics we ran content design meetings and prototype reviews. These were run in the JAD lab at the University. We also ran prototype reviews with the professional, academics and software developers.

Discussion

When working with teenagers we found there were big differences in responses from teenagers of different

ages. These differences were sometimes difficult to accommodate, so we adapted our methods of working depending on the age of the group, running more activity-based sessions with younger groups and more discussion-based sessions with older groups. I found that older teenagers were good in prototype evaluation sessions at analyzing and critiquing the prototypes. They were more engaged when they had a clearer idea of what we were developing.

The context of this project was the development of a product to promote social change in family life, by engaging with a range of stakeholders. However, we had to work with the different groups separately, and although this was satisfactory, I felt it would have been useful to have more inter-group communication at certain key stages. It would have been particularly useful to have a small inter-disciplinary team (a SID team) consisting of a teenager, a parenting specialist, a parent and an academic who could have acted as key decision-makers throughout the process. Such an approach would have helped to co-ordinate the findings from the wider participatory process of engaging with different groups of stakeholders.

Interesting areas for further discussion are: setting up small inter-disciplinary teams for interaction design with teenagers; working with teenagers of different ages; working with experts who are not product end-users; selecting ideas from the range of different teenage voices that are heard in design sessions; working with teenagers and families in the home.

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