EDC&I 505: Everyday Technologies in Youth Culture

Mondays 4:30 to 6:50  Winter 2005  Miller 320

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Office Hours: Mondays, 10:45 – 11:45

COURSE OVERVIEW

Computer technologies have continued to make significant inroads into the inner workings of society. This very much holds true for youth as well. As computer technology becomes increasingly embedded in everyday niches, it is common for children to interact with dozens of digital devices throughout a typical day, and many spend hour-upon-hour learning about and manipulating computer devices such as laptop computers, handheld computers, game consoles, cell phones, pagers, and audio players. We actually know surprisingly little about how this increasingly rich technology infrastructure is influencing the development of children in terms of how they interact with others, how they seek out information and construct understandings of the world, how it shapes who they become and the communities they join, or how they accomplish novel and everyday activities with the use of technology.

The seminar has a dual focus on understanding the technological fluencies that kids are developing with new technologies as well as how digital technologies, electronic gadgets, and interactive media are influencing children’s learning and development. This seminar will investigate how toddlers, children, and adolescents use digital technologies in their everyday lives—in and out of school—and how they understand the technology and its possible uses. To great educational effect, we have devoted research energy to understanding how children develop conceptual knowledge about the natural world through their everyday and educational experiences with natural phenomena and processes. Corresponding pedagogical theories have stressed the importance of understanding and building upon student’s prior knowledge and experience. In a parallel manner, children develop technological skills, concepts, fluencies, and practices through their everyday and formal experiences with computational devices. We will attempt to identify or construct theoretical knowledge about how technological fluencies develop in order to inform the design of learning environments for children as well as to educate future teacher practitioners and educational designers about the technological fluencies of children. Also, we will try to understand the broad implications of technology on the lives of children. This will involve exploring such issues as:

- What are the cultural worlds that children are creating online?
- How are digital technologies changing the social practices of children?
- How does electronic gaming shape individual development (including prosocial, aggressive, or intellectual capacities)?
- How are mobile technologies being woven into the cultural worlds of teens and different societies of the world?
- How do children construct and play with their identities online?
- Should the practices surrounding digital technologies be considered new foundational literacies?
- How are network technologies changing family structures, activities, and relationships?
- What are the enduring equity issues surrounding the use of new technologies?
At a time of rapid infusion of digital devices and information technologies into society, we need to systematically understand how it is influencing the social, linguistic, emotional and cognitive development of our children. Toddlers are growing up playing with electronic pets and games, “hand-me-down” handhelds, and diverse ecologies of online information. Kid’s television shows regularly include characters that make regular use of digital devices and information technologies in their episodic depiction of life in society. Older children carry around multiple digital devices and often spend hours using them for social interaction, entertainment, digital design and creation, and inquiry. We need to better understand how their technological knowledge develops and is marshaled in the everyday experiences of children in order to better support their learning and development. This survey course attempts to paint some of the landscape and allow each participant to specialize in one or more areas related to the themes of the course.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Class Discussions.** All class members are expected to actively participate in the discussions each week. This is crucial for a graduate seminar of this size and purpose.

2. **Regular Posting to the Course Web Log (or “blog”).** All students will be asked to regularly post to a blog that has been set up for this course—a kind of distributed publishing system where we can all post short articles in a central place. The blog is intended to be an information funnel for our activities this quarter. Members of the class will use this site to share resources and collectively explore issues over the course of the quarter. (Of course, the blog will also be open more generally to folks interested in the issues of the class.) Individuals will sign up for a day of the week to make a small number of contributions to the blog (as will be discussed at the first class). These postings might be descriptions and pointers to relevant resources online, summaries and critiques of relevant articles, reactions to the readings, or personal musings related to the themes of the course. The URL for the course blog is:

   [http://faculty.washington.edu/pbell/blog/kidtech/](http://faculty.washington.edu/pbell/blog/kidtech/)

3. **Naturalistic Observations (3 over the course of the quarter)**

   This quarter we will develop an understanding of how kids and young adults are using technology in the details of their everyday activity as well as understand how it might be influencing their learning and development. One strategy we will employ to do this involves systematic observation of children’s activities in naturalistic contexts (which includes online spaces). You will generate fieldnotes based on each observation and will be asked to post a brief report — with perhaps some excerpts of activity or dialogue — to the course blog. Please title your blog observation entries “Field Observation: <description>.” This will count as one of your postings for that week. (I recommend that you try to spend some time observing each week, but you will only be responsible for three reports.)

   You should just try and find contexts where children or young adults are using digital technologies in their activities. Allow your personal interests and the viability of particular sites shape your selections. You might observe the activities of an after-school computer club, a computer lab, an online community, a videogame parlor, or home setting. You can also elect to coordinate your observations with your final course paper as an empirical research project (described below).
4. **Research Paper** (15-20 pages, double-spaced [with the exception of the op-ed piece])

The primary assignment for this course is a research paper that can take one of three forms:

1. *Mini empirical research paper*—this should include a description of the motivation for the study, a targeted literature review that situates the study, presentation of data and associated analyses, and discussion of conclusions and implications. Your paper can build directly upon your naturalistic observations (e.g., all three observations might be of the same context).

2. *Review or review/design article*—this should take the form of a comprehensive review article or you may elect to craft a composite review/design paper that includes educational design scenarios derived from the substance of your review.

3. *Research proposal or book prospectus*—this should map out a new line of research or take the form of a detailed prospectus for a new book related to the themes of the course.

4. *Opinion-Editorial*—this should be a strong argument about some issue directly related to the course. Crafting an op-ed piece that is accessible, tightly-written, and compelling will take significant effort. Select a target publication (e.g., NY Times) and carefully craft an op-ed piece according to their guidelines (typically 600-1200 jargon-free words). If you elect to write an op-ed piece, you must turn in a draft by the end of Week 7.

5. **Class Presentation**

We will spend time in the last two class sessions (March 7th and 14th) having a “seminar conference” in which you will give a 12-minute oral presentation of your work. The oral presentation of research results is an invaluable skill that you will use throughout your professional life as an educator/researcher. It is best to start practicing early and often, and it often doesn’t receive adequate attention in graduate school. (As proof, just drop into a random session at AERA, APA or other major professional conference!)

**GRADING POLICY**

I expect all assignments to be completed in a timely fashion. All written work will be held to high standards and should conform to rules of proper grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling. Because of time pressures, *late papers will not be accepted unless prior written confirmation has been given by one of the instructors*. Please double-space all written work and use a 12-pt. font. APA format should be used for references. Assignments will be weighed according to this scheme:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation &amp; Blog</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalistic Observations (3)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
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**SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS**

Supplemental readings are available on every course topic. If you are interested in delving more deeply in any area, please let me know.
SCHEDULE OF READINGS & MILESTONES

**Week 1, January 3**  **Course introduction and overview**

This session will provide an introduction to the purposes, themes, and activities of this course.

**Week 2, January 10**  **An overview of technology within youth culture**

- **Spend time browsing the old course blog** ([http://faculty.washington.edu/pbell/kidtech](http://faculty.washington.edu/pbell/kidtech)).

**Background:** Turkle, S. (1999). What are we thinking about when we are thinking about computers? In M. Biagioli (Ed.), *The Science Studies Reader* (pp. 543-552). New York and London: Routledge.


**Week 3, January 17**  **HOLIDAY—Language socialization amongst peers, families, and strangers**

**NO CLASS THIS WEEK, BUT READ THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES**

- **First observation report is due. It should be posted to the course blog by this date.**


**Week 4, January 24**  **The linguistic frontier of chat in youth culture**


Week 5, January 31  Mobiles and sociality


(There is likely to be a third paper that will be announced in class. I’m still looking for a strong empirical piece that depicts kid’s learning with the instrumental use of cell phones.)

Week 6, February 7  Families, technology & equity

→ Second observation report is due. It should be posted to the course blog by this date.


Week 7, February 14  The cybercultures of children


*And select one of the following…*


Week 8, February 21  
**New technological literacies / frameworks for understanding the effects of gaming**

NO CLASS THIS WEEK, BUT READ THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES


Week 9, February 28  
**Studies of computer gaming**

→ Third observation report is due. It should be posted to the course blog by this date.


Week 10, March 7  
**Teen’s social practices with text messaging**


→ Final course paper is due in my box in Miller 312 by 4pm on Friday, March 9th.

Week 11, March 14  
**Course Presentations (Exam Week)**

Each student will be asked to make a professional presentation summarizing their class project. We will start presentations during our Week 10 meeting and finish them during this session.