ICTs in the daily lives of Australian students

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This qualitative study examines the use of information and communications technologies from the perspective of university students as co-researchers. Using methods developed for a similar study at the University of Cambridge (Riddle & Howell, 2008), students are prompted 8-10 times over a 24 hour period to fill out a diary and take photographs of technologies and techniques they are using. This poster reports on the progress of this study, including sampling student attitudes towards their own personal technologies as well as technology infrastructure, classroom technologies and library facilities.

Keywords: information and communications technologies, personal technologies, student perspectives

Introduction

ICTs in the daily lives of Australian students is a qualitative study about the everyday use of technologies by students, focusing on those studying in the Faculty of Law and Management at La Trobe University, Australia. The key aim of this project is the development of a rich description of the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in daily life of Australian university students, in order to contribute to a fuller understanding of the teaching and learning environment. It makes use of novel research methods, enlisting students as co-researchers, and looks at a broader context rather the role of technologies on their own.

Methods

The project uses a combination of research methods in order to identify key issues, including the Day Experience Method (Riddle and Arnold, 2007) and the Movers and Shapers Method (Howell, 2008). These methods are predominantly qualitative, and cast respondents in the role of co-researchers. The methods do not look to respondents as relatively passive sources of un-processed data, but as active sources of informed experience and analysis. The methods set out to enthuse and engage the respondents in stimulating and amusing ways, and make maximum use of their experience, intelligence and insight.

The Day Experience Method aims to reduce recall distortion and ideological biases of other sampling methods such as interviews, surveys and focus groups by prompting students at irregular intervals during a 24 hour period. A focus group (or "slide-night") brings all of those participating in the day experience for one week together. Refreshments are provided, and in an informal setting, selected participants show their pictures and describe their day. Discussion about the trials and tribulations of student life are recorded using a video recorder, which also constitutes data for later analysis.

Timeline

- Project initiation: January - July 2008
- Recruitment: August 2008
- Data collection: September - October, 2008
- Initial findings: December
- Final report: December 2009

Initial findings

Four cohorts of students took part in the day experience, resulting in a total of 19 participants (12 female, 7 male). Participants were from a wide range of disciplines within the Faculty including business, finance, tourism management, and included undergraduates (15) and postgraduates (4).

Among the themes emerging from the initial analysis is the comparatively low usage of laptops on campus, despite high levels of ownership among students. This relates to central provision of computing facilities on campus, and student perceptions that there is inadequate provision of infrastructure to support their needs, including power outlets, wireless internet, and suitable sheltered study spaces in common areas. The study has also identified a perception among international students that foreign language support could be more widely available on university computers. Finally, a number of students describe themselves as multi-taskers when using ICTs, some reluctantly so.

References

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