

The Art and Craft of Capturing Children's Experiences in IDC

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Structure of the Course

The course has seven parts:

1. Experience unpicked
2. Beginners toolkit
3. Growth mindsets
4. Intermediate techniques
5. The Gallery
6. Advanced approaches
7. Summary

Experience unpicked

We use the word **experience** to refer to the child's experience with an interactive product or an idea. This might be described as a user study, an evaluation, an exploration; it can be descriptive or can be captured in numbers or stats; it can be easy or complex and it can be intended to answer a question, explore a single artefact or capture a complex phenomena; in short - it is a complex space. Examples might be:

- Evaluating children's performance in two games to discover **which game is more fun** or more challenging
- Capturing children's engagement with interactive artefacts in a museum in order to make claims about the **efficacy of such artefacts to improve** a museum visit
- Evaluating **wellbeing gains as a result of involvement** in a series of co-design workshops.

These three examples require different skills and different approaches. Note the emboldened words which we will come back to



Figure 1: Images of Course Materials

Abstract

The Art and Craft of Capturing Children's Experiences in IDC course focuses on evaluation studies with children and presents three graduated studies along with all their planning, tools and observations whilst also challenging attendees to go beyond each by applying a growth mindset to query what can be done better - in this way the craft of working with children is mapped out as a continuum in which skills develop in innovation, the use of tools, and in the products of research. At the same time, a set of provocations / top tips are given as art forms built from curated conversations with IDC influencers that both convey a simple message but also a deeper meaning - as is the nature of art. The course is therefore suitable for all levels, and for researchers and practitioners. It is a new course specifically designed for the IDC community but builds on similar courses that have been held at CHI.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → HCI theory, concepts and models.

Keywords

Evaluation, Usability, UX, User Studies, Children

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1 Benefits

In the late twentieth century, before radical changes in educational practice, the phrase "*could do better*" was commonly found on report cards for children at school. Nowadays such negatively phrased feedback is frowned upon but it goes without saying that everyone, ourselves included, can always "*do better*". Of course, knowing one can do better is easier than finding ways to "*do better*". and considerably easier than actually developing the skills that result in "*doing better*". In our work with children we are challenged to do our best but rarely consider how we can stretch that little bit further; we are not so sure where to find the inspiration or the tricks needed to go that extra mile. In this course, designed for a wide audience, we consider the craft of child computer interaction in the way we might consider the craft of woodworking; we look at entry level skills, skills for those confident with the tools, and advanced skills - and we pepper this with a set of *art-works* in the form of curated, in some instances, controversial, conversations with inspirational IDC individuals; after attending the course, individuals will:

- Know how to effectively capture children's experiences using self report, observations, logging methods and surveys
- Be inspired to look for ways to "*do better*". in their evaluations with children
- Be equipped with new ways to think about working with children in IDC



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Participants will hear about three quite different evaluation studies, each presented with data and observations from having been carried out specifically to give material for this course. They will be challenged to think about the details and the development of their craft and will be inspired with a gallery of provocations and top tips from IDC influencers.

2 Intended Audience

This course is valuable to students and practitioners within the IDC community who focus on children as a user group in their work. The specific intended audience for this course is those who have a strong interest in the successful evaluation of technology products for children.

3 Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites to this course aside from a general knowledge of HCI as could be gathered from an undergraduate module / course on the same or from work in the UX industry.

4 Content and Practical Work

The content is delivered in seven steps:

- (1) **Intro - Experience:** Introducing the broad area of evaluation and setting the scene for thinking about the tools, techniques and contexts in which evaluations take place. *Learning Outcome:* Be able to map out the space of experience gathering in IDC (Practical activity 1)
- (2) **Beginner skills:** Looking at the simplest sort of evaluation with non-ambiguous data collection, a tidy sample of children and an easy to manage study. *Learning Outcome:* Know how to effectively capture children's experiences using self report.
- (3) **Growth mindset in IDC:** Through consideration and discussion of a set of scenarios we look at how techniques can be chosen to answer a question. *Learning Outcome:* Be inspired to look for ways to "do better". in their evaluations with children (Practical activity 2)
- (4) **Intermediate skills:** Capturing data in a public place with an uncontrolled sample of children, practical logging data and simple surveys. *Learning Outcome:* Know how to effectively capture children's experiences using logging methods and surveys
- (5) **The Gallery:** Four or more short videos of curated conversations with IDC influencers will deliver top tips and provocations. *Learning Outcome:* Be equipped with new ways to think about working with children in IDC (Practical activity 3)
- (6) **Advanced skills:** A longitudinal evaluation of the effect of participating in a series of co-design workshops on children's topic knowledge, design skills and feelings of empowerment. *Learning Outcome:* Know how to effectively capture children's experiences using self report, observations, logging methods and surveys
- (7) **Summary:** Bringing the content together and taking questions

5 Practical Work

There are three practical exercises within this course:

- (1) **Mapping Experiences:** Using a specially designed card deck participants will arrange thirty studies with children - taken from past IDC papers - into a logical structure that we will then map our three example studies, from the course, onto. This activity will assist in the discussion of the wide scope of, and the many methods for, experience gathering in IDC ranging from tightly controlled user studies to ethnographic work, from work with tots to teens, and from lab studies to open events in the park.
- (2) **My Growth Mindset and Plan:** Participants will self rate their expertise and skill levels, as well as their confidence levels on a set of parameters appropriate to experience gathering with children - they will then use this rating tool to identify where they might, could and will really try to, do better.
- (3) **Art Critic:** Having met the gallery of "art forms" participants will write a small art critique of what they have seen that has inspired them, or not, which will develop the skills of reflection.

6 Instructor Background

Prof Janet C Read is a full professor with over 20 years experience of working with children in HCI during which time she has examined over 35 PhD students across 13 different countries. She was a co-author of the book 'Evaluating Interactive Technology with Children' [2] and has recently contributed a chapter on Ethics in HCI to the Foundations in HCI series [6]. She has organised many courses at CHI e.g. [4], [5] and elsewhere where working with children has been a focus. Her Fun Toolkit [7] is the most often used evaluation method for children in HCI, and has been adopted by industry.

Dr Daniel Fitton is an Associate Professor in HCI whose research focus is on HCI and UX issues within the context of child users with an emphasis on evaluation and design techniques for this group. He currently has over 100 peer-reviewed publication in the field of HCI and has organized many successful workshops at past CHI conferences, and has twice been full-papers chair at the ACM Interaction Design and Children (IDC) conference.

Dr Matt Horton is a Reader in Child Computer Interaction with a long trajectory of research with children in HCI. He was instrumental in organising two IDC conferences in Manchester and Preston UK, two British HCI conferences in Southport and Preston UK, and has co-delivered courses on Child Computer Interaction at CHI e.g. [3], [5]. He is the main author of the paper describing the MESS day research protocol [1].

7 Call for Participation

While providing three ready to use rubrics for commonly seen evaluations of experience in IDC, this course challenges all participants to go beyond and do better in their work by exploring how we can grow our knowledge to become skilled craftsmen and craftswomen while also developing creative approaches and innovative practices to contribute to the 'art gallery' of IDC research. On completing the course participants will:

- Know how to effectively capture children's experiences using self report, observations, logging methods and surveys
- Be inspired to look for ways to "*do better*". in their evaluations with children
- Be equipped with new ways to think about working with children in IDC

The three evaluations cover the use of self report, survey design, logging data, observations, measures of empowerment, longitudinal studies, work in public places, lab or school based evaluations, young children, teens and mixed groups. Hear how each of these studies was planned for, see what happened on the day as we recount how each was carried out in the real world and listen to conversations about how each could have been made better. Reflect on where your own skills in doing studies with children can be developed and listen to IDC influencers to open your mind. Open to beginners and experienced alike - we guarantee everyone will come out of this course having learned many new things. See URL for more about the course. Note that if you are registering for this course you will also need to register for the conference.

8 Accessibility

To support inclusion we will ensure materials and information about activities are made available to attendees in advance of the

workshop. Attendees are encouraged to contact the course organizers to discuss accessibility arrangement where appropriate.

References

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- [3] Janet Read, Yoram Chisik, Elmira Yadollahi, and Matthew Horton. 2024. Children and Emerging Technologies: Ethical and Practical Research and Design. In *Extended Abstracts of the 2024 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI EA '24)*. Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, Article 593, 4 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3613905.3636275>
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- [7] Janet C. Read and Stuart MacFarlane. 2006. Using the fun toolkit and other survey methods to gather opinions in child computer interaction. In *Proceedings of the 2006 Conference on Interaction Design and Children (Tampere, Finland) (IDC '06)*. Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 81–88. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1139073.1139096>