
Philosophy with Children: Helping Designers Cooperate with Children

Inge Duytschaever

Howest University College, Kortrijk,
Belgium
Ingeborg.Duytschaever@howest.be

Peter Conradie

Department of Industrial Systems
Engineering and Product Design
Faculty of Engineering and
Architecture
Ghent University
Peter.Conradie@UGent.be

Permission to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for third-party components of this work must be honored. For all other uses, contact the Owner/Author. Copyright is held by the owner/author(s).
IDC '16, June 21-24, 2016, Manchester, United Kingdom
ACM 978-1-4503-4313-8/16/06.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2930674.2932229>

Abstract

Engaging children in design through in-depth interviews is coming to prominence in the IDC community, which increasingly engages with issues about understanding the children's world. To date, research in this area has primarily focused on engaging children using techniques somehow similar to adult-techniques (moodboards, brainstorming, laddering,...). However, questioning or interviewing children is fraught with difficulties. The proposed workshop seeks to explore where and how a philosophy with children methodology can be adapted for design, exploring themes such as Socratic Attitudes, wondering, and question types. This workshop aims to build an interdisciplinary community of researchers, designers, and practitioners to share and discuss their work and experiences.

Author Keywords

methods; play; design; children; philosophy.

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous;

Introduction

As with designing for adult users, know thy user' remains important, also when designing for children [1]. To better understand users, designers can apply a

variety of methods [9], which could include interviews, observations or generative sessions.

However, there are differences between designing for children and adults [8]. For example, adults are less vulnerable, while children can be less predictable and more likely to experiment [7]. Simultaneously, children have different levels of skills at similar ages [7], in addition to using products in a different way than adults [4]. Read and Bekker [4] notes three important difference between adults and children in the context of interactive technologies: children use such technologies in a different way, they behave and think in a different way, while also having different concerns about such technologies.

Given the differences in between children and adults, an important theme when designing for children thus remains methods used to elicit design requirements.

However, merely acquiring theoretical knowledge is also not viewed as sufficient when applying methods and techniques during a design process [4]. Theories, how well adapted for design purposes, are not providing a designer with reasons why children find something interesting. In order to gain more in depth information about children's motives, interaction with children is necessary. But even for trained researchers it is sometimes hard to estimate children's reactions and enthusiasm [10].

Challenges when involving children

Methodologies are useful to broaden our thinking, for example the Developmentally Situated Design (DSD) cards [1] that help to have a (synthesized) insight in child development.

Yet, methods such as interviewing children be challenging and children might struggle to understand what is asked of them [2]. Questioning children with a certain aim, but without suggesting, is difficult because of their unpredictable behavior, their aim to act socially desirable along with the prejudices and top-down attitude of the adult. On top of this, it is a challenge to interest the child in your problem, or question.

Open ended questions

Children are used to adult 'authorities' asking them questions and they tend to make the interviewer happy by answering in a socially desirable way. A typical suggestive question by an adult after an activity is: 'Was this fun?' And all the children are nicely answering 'Yeeess'. This concern about socially desirable answers is important, at the same time it is not sufficient to place words as 'why, where, how, what, whom', etc. in front of a question to have an open question. All kinds of questions can be suggestive, and questions with a verb on the front end can also be very inviting to share lots of information.

'Why': Reasons and causes

Logically, 'why' can aim at asking about reasons and about an explanation of an act and is often confused with questions "whereby" that aim to ask about causes or effect of things. Reasons are influenced by human will, and causes often not.

"Why do fishes swim in the sea?" is hard to answer, because there is no act involved. We could not ask the fishes if they would like to swim in milk.



Figure. 1: The atypical prince and princess as the wondering starting point, before the questioning. 'How can we help the prince like construction blocks?'

Surprising answers

Another pitfall is when children are answering a quite 'surprising' answer. Surprising answers can offer a lot of interesting information. The pitfall is that the interviewer has to be very open-minded and creative to find another question that asks for more information:

Interviewer: What do you want to become, when you're older?

Child: I'd like to become a mama.

Student: Why do you want to become a mama?

Child: Because I want to go to work.

Interviewer: What do you want to do as work?

Child: With computers

According to some of our prejudices the answer of this young girl is surprising. Many people have another idea about what it is to become a mother. Follow-up questions could be in the laddering style [5]: 'Why is it important to you to go to work?'.

Laddering is a technique to investigate values [5]. The difference between causes and reasons could also be an important issue while considering the 'laddering

technique'[6]. It is not easy to come up with the values there aiming at. Not only children's competency to talk about abstract values is rather limited. Even adults are likely to have difficulties verbalizing values. Sometimes you explain what act you like, and it is possible to derive the values from the story. Additionally as noted by Zaman and Vanden Abeele [10], laddering may be a useful strategy, but only for older children and in familiar settings.

It might be easier to ask the child: 'What do people do when they go to work?' This question gives an insight into the ideas of the child about the definition of 'working'. A surprising question could work as well: 'Is your mama playing at work?', prompting an explanation about what the child understands as work, eliciting – in an indirect way – 'values' about working.

Why as a punishment

Emotionally, a 'why' question is often used as a punishment. When asking: 'Why did you do that?', often the person who is asking is not very curious about the reasons why, the question points out that you shouldn't have done this. This 'why' is aiming at the person defending himself by giving justifications. Trained that way from kindergarten, children will be suspicious about these questions.

Workshop Themes

Socratic attitude

Given these challenges with interviewing children, we propose a 'Socratic' attitude of 'not-knowing' and the art of questioning borrowed from 'philosophy with children'[3].

During the workshop we will demonstrate and discuss what philosophy with children can be. Afterwards we discuss how the questioning and attitude of philosophy with children could be used in the design process and at what stage (fuzzy front end or evaluation). Differences and similarities with existing techniques and practices will be proposed. Together we will examine certain questions (for example the laddering 'why' question) and their (lack of) effect.

In order to ensure a child-friendly interview setting we should think of different ways in which the interviewer can take a least adult position. In this context, the interested idiot research strategy [10] is another name for the Socratic attitude of not-knowing.

With this strategy (used by Socrates to 'annoy' people about the foundation of their ideas) the adult explicitly leaves the position of the all-knowing adult for an ignorant person, transforming the child into the expert in question. This attitude of 'research idiot' resembles the Socratic attitude; except for the case where the adult only 'acts as if he is ignorant'. The Socratic attitude starts from a wondering experience and the attitude is not some role-playing, but a real feeling.

Wondering

The world around us is full of amazing events and things. As an adult, we tend to forget that things are not so easily explained. If you realize this difficulty explaining things and acts, it is easier to create a good 'common experience' with the children as a starting point.

When the interviewer and the child want to engage in a real interesting and deep conversation, both need to start from a wondering experience.

Questioning

Questions have certain aims. Asking the right questions at the right time is an important capacity as a philosophy practitioner. Lipmann [3] proposes the 'Master Mice' exercise, which challenges in asking 10 questions for every statement: *Meaning; Assumptions; Suggestions; Truth; Evidence; Reasons; Mystery; Implications; Counterexamples; Explanations*

Every statement is based on reasoning, and that reasoning is based on assumptions, experiences, observations, suppositions and conclusions. If you really want to investigate a statement, you can ask questions with all these aims in mind.

Proposed Format

09:00 – 09:15 INTRO TO WORKSHOP TOPIC

Introduction morning program, presentation of the participants and their expectations of the workshop.

09:15 – 10:15 EXPERIENCING DIALOGUE USING PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN METHODOLOGY

Participants will be invited to experience a philosophical dialogue, starting from a wondering experience and with their own question. The workshop organizer will moderate the dialogue.

10:15 – 10:30 COFFEE BREAK

10:30 – 10:45 DISCUSSION WONDERING

EXPERIENCE: this method for 'ownership of the problem' will be compared to the participants' methods.

11:15 – 11:45 DISCUSSION SOCRATIC ATTITUDE: is it a not-knowing attitude or a fact?

10:45-11:15 DISCUSSION QUESTIONING: the method of philosophy with children will be linked and commented by the participants. Usability and need of scientific reliable information will also be discussed.

11:45 - 12:20 POSTER CREATION: The groups will discuss opportunities and lessons learned, highlights of which will be documented on a poster.

Intended Audience

The presented workshop aims to invite participants from social and technical backgrounds with an interest in design methods for children. Our ambition is to facilitate an interdisciplinary discussion about user involvement from children's perspective.

Bios

Inge Duytschaever philosophical practitioner and researcher for Industrial Design School (Howest, Belgium). She lectures and practices philosophy with children to help teachers install a community of inquiry. Trying to make connections between the different worlds of design and philosophy.

Peter Conradie is a researcher at the Department of Industrial Systems Engineering and Product Design, Ghent University. His research topics focus on user involvement, including methods for participatory design and characteristics of innovating users.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the PWO fund of Howest that enabled the PINK Construct project

References

- [1] Bekker, T., Barendregt, W. and Panos Markopoulos, J.R. 2014. Teaching Interaction Design and Children: Understanding the Relevance of Theory for Design. *Interaction Design and Architecture(s) Journal - IxD&A*. N.21, (2014), pp. 9–24.
- [2] Docherty, S. and Sandelowski, M. 1999. Focus on qualitative methods: Interviewing children. *Research in Nursing and Health*. 22, 2 (1999), 177–185.
- [3] Matthew, L. 2001. Roberta and the Master Mice. *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*. Volume 15, Issue 4 (2001), 45–47.
- [4] Read, J.C. and Bekker, M.M. 2011. The Nature of Child Computer Interaction. *BCS-HCI '11 Proceedings of the 25th BCS Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*. 1994 (2011), 163–170.
- [5] Reynolds, T.J. and Gutman, J. 1988. Laddering theory, method, analysis, and interpretation. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 28, 1 (1988), 11–31.
- [6] Reynolds, T.J. and Gutman, J. 1988. Laddering theory, method, analysis, and interpretation. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 28, 1 (1988), 11–31.
- [7] Rice, V.J.B. 2012. Designing for Children. *Handbook of Human Factors and Ergonomics*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1472–1483.
- [8] Torres, B.A. 2008. Children’s play with toys. *Ergonomics for Children: Designing products and places for toddlers to teens*. 477–498.
- [9] Visser, F.S., Stappers, P.J., van der Lugt, R. and Sanders, L. 2005. Contextmapping: experiences from practice. *CoDesign*. 1, 2 (2005), 119–149.
- [10] Zaman, B. and Vanden Abeele, V. Vanden 2010. Laddering with Young Children in User eXperience Evaluations: Theoretical Groundings and a Practical Case. *Proceeding IDC '10 Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Interaction Design and Children*. (2010), 156–165.