DYRN

A digital youth research network with a vision and a mission

Af Beth Juncker & Gitte Balling

Abstract

Artiklen fortæller historien om det samarbejde på tværs af universiteter, faglige discipliner, sprog, lande og kontinenter, der i Berlin marts 2014 gjorde det muligt at grundlægge et nyt iSchool Digital Youth forskningsnetværk - DYRN.

The Beginning

March 4 2014 after a half-day workshop at the iSchool Conference in Berlin, *DYRN*, the Digital Youth iSchool Research Network was founded. The organizers - Professor Beth Juncker, Associate Professor Gitte Balling, University of Copenhagen; Assistant Professor Marianne Martens, Kent State University, Dr. Theresa Anderson, University of Technology, Sydney; Professor Eliza T. Dresang, Professor Karen E. Fisher, Assistant Professor Katie Davis, University of Washington - representing three continents and four universities had invited the 52 participants to:

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"Break down walls across disciplinary borders and to establish dialogues among researchers across continents in order to contribute to the development of LIS research communities

Together we want

- to examine how digital youth can function as an overall research frame.
- to establish dialogue and cooperation between and across disciplines and perspectives
- to define the field so as to remain open to broader theoretical and methodological perspectives.
- to provide a statement of purpose inviting other researchers to join the research initiative." (2014, Workshop Description, iConference Berlin)

The upcoming research network was built on a vision:

"Grounding a new Digital Youth Research Network we intend to break down disciplinary walls between information studies and cultural studies related to the young digital generations. We intend to ask to the philosophical assumptions behind them and to the different theories and notions encompassing them. We intend to blur the borders between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, to question digital technology not only as a matter of function, but as a matter of content. Together we are going to develop a new multidisci-

plinary research field, to ground it in philosophies, in theories, in notions and methodologies allowing us to develop new kind of approaches, new kind of perspectives, new kind of knowledge across social sciences and humanities." (2014, Juncker, keynote, Digital Youth Workshop, iConference, Berlin)

A great, but at the same time a challenging vision.

The work in groups began with the following central questions:

*   What should be the purpose of a Digital Youth Network?
*   How should the research network be organized?
*   How do we communicate?

Three intense hours later the reports from the discussions showed an overall consensus on purpose, organization and means of communication. In general the groups had asked: do we define the field as *digital* youth? Which means that young people without access to digital media is not part of our research field? Or do we define the field as *digital* on one hand and *youth* on the other and thus opening the possibilities researching youth both *inside* and *outside* digital technology? Everyone agreed on the latter.

Another discussion took the point of departure in the iSchool triad, which the groups considering the importance of dialogues between information and culture found too narrow and excluding:

Information

People   Technology
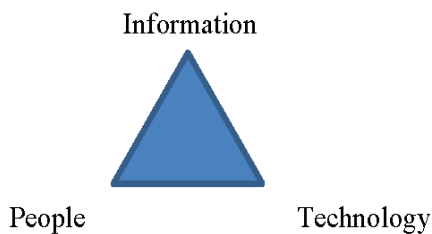
As a supplement, they drew a new triad:

Culture

Context   Computing/IT
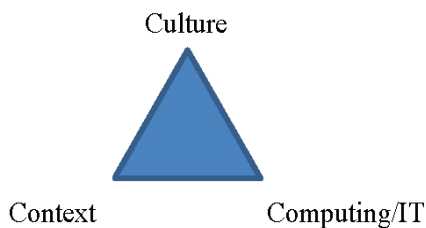
The triad was followed by three guidelines:

*   Across borders
*   Across disciplines
*   Across culture(s)

To the question on the purpose of a Digital Youth Network the groups answered:

*   Pushing Digital Youth Agenda in the Context of iSchools
*   Identifying LIS contribution
*   Platform for mutual collaboration and inspiration
*   Inspiration, collaboration, communication
*   Exchange as well as comparing and sharing ideas and "programs".
*   Introduce new theoretical frameworks, methodologies, research ideas across boundaries, disciplines, institutions and continents

To the question of the organization of the research network they preferred to start with a realistic, non-hierarchical solution:

*   Open (not closed), flat (not hierarchical) – the door is open but one must knock!
*   Open, less formal
*   Co-chairs
*   Enabling to enhance visibility
*   Starting down to earth but with visions to grow

To the question of ways of communicating they suggested to:

*   Forming an open (by invitation) facebook group
*   Uploading ideas, articles, new conferences etc.
*   Annual meetings at iConferences
*   Cross disciplinary seminars
*   Special editions of journals

A new iSchool research network was born. Considering the almost global research focus on the different challenges related to digital technology and digital youth one might ask: Why on earth? Is it important? Isn't it too late?

Because we since the late 1990's due to digital technology have been moving from one information society to a new. The development might be described as a social and cultural turn. The former media matrix

and the concepts of reality, knowledge, information, art, culture, learning and communication connected with it have not disappeared. It has been integrated as part of the new digital matrix and concepts, research approaches, methodologies and perspectives have been in a state of transformation (Finnemann, 1997). Part of these transformations is connected to digital technology itself, others are raised by the young generations born with the digital possibilities – digital natives, tweens, remixers, prosumers, producers. Their use of media and possibilities challenge not only former concepts of reality, culture, information, knowledge, art, learning and cultural dissemination, but also the roles of professionals and the notions of truth, authority and quality associated with them.

Digital technology and the visual and social media have changed children's childhood and young people's youth radically. It has during the last twenty years created what the German researcher Thomas Ziehe has named 'a cultural liberation' allowing young people not only to attend and to experience but also to create and communicate, to seek information, to express feelings, to exchange ideas, to discuss values in new online ways and without constant adult or educational surveillance. Digital technology and the social media have so to speak rendered the participatory and expressive parts of the young generations peer cultures and their meaning to everyday life more visible. It has at the same time turned young people's private rooms into the biggest cultural institution to day and thereby challenged cultural policy, cultural dissemination and the authority of the classical cultural institutions – theatres, concert halls, museums, libraries, cinemas.

The development as Samuel Jones puts it

"…blurs traditional definitions and understandings of the term 'culture', breaking down the structural barriers of the virtual and the real, and the innovatory and the orthodox. It also demonstrates that we need to think afresh about cultural policy, how it is framed, what it is for and what it can and should help us do. Technologies and the invigorated will of the public to participate, shape and personalise have changed the nature of cultural engagement." (Jones, 2009)

It also blurs traditional definitions and understandings of the term 'information', not only breaking down the structural barriers of the virtual and the real, but also of the professional and the layman, the library and Wikipedia.

During this period of social and cultural transformation individual researchers and collective research teams from all over the world have from different angles and with different perspectives focused on these challenges. Public research councils and great private foundations across the world have supported these interests knowing that when the social conditions change radically it has consequences not only for social and cultural everyday life in general, but also for the relations between the social, the educational and the cultural sectors as a whole. We have to renew and to think afresh of the common understandings of the meaning of social and cultural life in creedles and kindergarten and how to support it, of how to teach and how to learn on new conditions and in new settings, of the meaning of playing and participating in spare time and across cultural arenas.

The global interest in digital youth and the public and private economical support have created a huge and ever growing research literature on this subject. Findings from very small individual research projects, from bigger projects to established research centers have found their way as contributions to research based anthologies, which have tried to compare findings, to draw lines, to establish kind of overviews. A central example is The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning:

"This book series is founded upon the working hypothesis that those immersed in new digital tools and networks are engaged in an unprecedented exploration of language, games, social interaction, problem solving, and self-directed activity that leads to diverse forms of learning. This is reflected in expressions of identity, in how individuals express independence and creativity, and in their ability to learn, exercise judgment, and think systematically." (https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/series/john-d-and-catherine-t-macarthur-foundation-series-digital-media-and-learning)

Until now 17 central anthologies gathering researchers, projects and findings from all over the world have been published.

This book series is actually a meeting place for researchers across countries, continents and cultures. So why on earth use energy founding a new multidisciplinary research network without structure, status, economy? You will find central reasons and argumentations in the short story of the initiative taken by colleges at five iSchool faculty from Michigan, Maryland and Washington in 2013.

The Digital Youth Initiative

"I am writing to ask your support for launching a Digital Youth Initiative across the iSchool community. Five iSchool faculty from Michigan, Maryland and Washington are in the process of organizing 3 annual events-beginning with a workshop at iConference 2013-for researchers and PhD students from all our iSchools. The objective is to host and obtain external funding for a "Digital Youth Summit" in 2014 with the goal of showcasing the expertise of our world-wide iSchool research community and forging collaborations with industry and government organizations to advance work focused on "digital youth".

I would like to ask your help to support the first step in this Digital Youth Initiative, by encouraging (and perhaps funding) the participation of at least one faculty/researcher and one PhD student from your school in a planning workshop at iConference 2013 (see below). These can be researchers whose interests and areas of expertise touch any aspect of "digital youth"-from application design to search, policy and information behavior, to archives, library services, knowledge organization and beyond."

These were the words written by the dean of the iSchool faculty at the University of Washington, Seattle. They were sent to his college the dean of the Royal School of Library and Information Science in Copenhagen Per Hasle. He immediately passed the request on to professor Beth Juncker and associate lecturer Gitte Balling asking them to form a small group of researchers from Copenhagen and join the initiative at the iConference in Fort Worth, Texas in the spring 2013. As Harry Bruce wrote the idea was to use the digital youth workshop to gather research-

ers across the iSchool community and ask them to contribute to a forthcoming "Digital Youth Summit" both showcasing the research expertise in an iSchool context and developing collaborations with industry and government organizations. But preparing for participation in the first *Digital Youth Workshop: Calling all Designers, Researchers and Policy Makers* arranged by Karen Elizabeth Fisher, University of Washington, Eliza T Dresang, University of Washington, Katie Davis, University of Washington, Sarita Yardi, University of Michigan and Allison Druin, University of Maryland we also met another goal: the development of an iSchool Digital Youth Research Network. In the invitation to the workshop in Forth Worth the group of organizers wrote:

"Digital youth cross the interests of most every faculty member, researcher and student across the iSchools. Digital youth has emerged as a focus of particular interest to researchers across many disciplines. Whether youth is their core interest or user group or are affected through broader impact of findings, iSchool researchers address youth through designing applications and writing code, policymaking, understanding youth behavior and resources in myriad situations-including school, family, and neighborhoods, and teaching and designing services in schools and libraries. But whether one's focus is on social gaming, reading, online learning, social media, mobiles, multiculturalism, drug prevention, etc two common themes are: (1) trying to improve the lives of youth through iSchool research, and (2) actually involving youth in iSchool research. Despite the common interest in youth, we have yet to conference as a field and move forward around a shared agenda. Instead, the technology experts attend sessions on their interests; ditto knowledge organization researchers, information behavior researchers, visualization, etc." (2013, Digital Youth Workshop, iConference, Forth Worth)

What they stress is that although the international iSchool community is a multidisciplinary research field researchers only attend sessions on their own interests. The result is that they gather in disciplines and never meet and communicate across. Besides ideas and plans for the Summit the vision behind the workshop was to unite iSchool researchers across disciplines, interests in and perspectives on this field. They wanted both to give their research a strong

voice and to make it visible for policy makers, industries and people working with children and young people in practice.

Here you find the strongest argument for using energy developing not only another research network, but a multidisciplinary research network built on dialogue and cooperation across disciplines, approaches and perspectives with a vision to make a difference not only amongst researchers but also in practice. Looking once more at the ever growing research literature on digital youth and digital challenges you will find that projects, research centers and anthologies publishing findings do gather people across countries and continents, but not across disciplines. Information people gather information people, media people gather media people, cultural policy researchers gather cultural policy researchers etc. They don't meet across. They don't exchange ideas, approaches, perspectives and findings.

The participants in the workshop in Fort Worth stressed the need for exchanging theories, terms, concepts and research perspectives across the field. During the workshop it became clear that approaches and perspectives differ from iSchool to iSchool and from one continent to another. A new multidisciplinary network was needed. The group of organizers promised to go on arranging a digital youth summit in Seattle in 2014. Participants from RSLIS in Copenhagen, University of Sydney and Kent University, Ohio promised to prepare for a second Digital Youth workshop at the iConference in Berlin 2014 with the explicit goal to found this research network.

CoLIS 2013 – a step forward

Several of the participants from the workshop were coming to Copenhagen in august 2013 in order to attend the CoLIS conference at the Royal School of Library and Information Science. Theresa Andersson and Beth Juncker strongly supported by Laura Skouvig decided to ask the CoLIS organizers if it would be possible to arrange a small digital youth workshop. They kindly gave permission and *Digital Youth - a New LIS Multidisciplinary Research Field?* was made possible. In the invitation to the participants they looked back on Fort Worth and forward to Berlin:

"The aim of this COLIS workshop will be to examine and discuss the possibilities and perspectives and thus contribute to the development of a research field and a research network, where social, informational, organizational and cultural research perspectives are in dialogue and cooperation.

Widening our gaze beyond the digital can enable us to draw in insights from

- Studies in the challenges to art, culture, cultural institutions and cultural communication/ mediation;
- Studies in the challenges to terms of knowledge, knowledge production and knowledge architecture;
- Studies in the challenges to terms of information, information systems, information retrieval, information behavior and information mediation and communication;
- Studies in the challenges to organizations and to learning processes.

Studies such as those listed above are not organized as a common research field. Thus, within this initiative we want to invite colleges who share this interest in digital youth to take part in open-ended discussion of theories, methods and research perspectives connected to this digital turn and to consider the possibilities of forming a research network. (…)".

The participants engaged in discussions contributing to define the complexity and the dynamic of the digital youth research field. Their contributions made the third workshop: *Digital Youth: Towards a new multidisciplinary research network* in Berlin 2014 possible. The news of the upcoming research network had spread and just before the iconference in Berlin we were invited to make this special edition of the Nordic Journal for Information Science and Cultural Communication. The participants were delighted. But – one thing is immediate joy, another hard work with articles! What you meet here is not representative for the research network, but a small picture of interests, approaches and perspectives involved. We do thank the authors for their contribution and their patience.

The research network lived happily ever after …

To end this story we can tell that immediately after Berlin a digital youth research network group were made at Facebook. Please knock and we will let you in! The summit – The Digital Youth Think Tank - took place at the University of Washington in Seattle in the autumn 2014. Thanks to the organizers a great event! The white paper reporting from it will be published soon. We held the first real research network workshop presenting and discussing papers at the iConference in Newport Beach this year. We do hope to be able to make a panel and paper session at the upcoming iConference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania March 2016. Join us there!

On behalf of all organizers

Gitte Balling and Beth Juncker

We have dedicated this special edition of the journal to the memory of professor, Dr. Eliza Dresang. Despite of her illness she helped all the way to Berlin making 'danglish to english, drafts to real templates.

She wished to be there herself, but she was too weak. Soon after the conference in Berlin she passed away. We miss her!

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