

Working with libraries to explore the affordances of makerspaces

In my presentation I talked about the journey I was on from PhD into practice.

My PhD was a multiple case study of 7 year olds use of online devices in their home and school settings. The motivation of the study was to find ways of helping teachers and parents to support more critical and reflective engagement with these devices and I arrived at a way of conceptualising this support in terms of 'sponsors' of reflection that could be described in terms of spaces, resources and roles. My thesis is available here <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/32563>. The content will be available in a more accessible form in the near future.

Through the course of my PhD I became interested in the potential for libraries to sponsor reflective engagement in a range of ways. In addition several of the parents and teachers in my study identified that they would value access to more spaces of opportunity for learning creative ways of engaging with technology. As a result I approached Exeter's Central Library - <https://librariesunlimited.org.uk/> - to work with staff on creative ways of introducing 'moments of reflection' into library spaces and practices and I also began to volunteer with the Fab Lab - <http://www.fablabdevon.org/> Here I felt there was scope for developing alternative ways of using the Fab Lab, in addition to how it was predominantly used as a business start-up centre. My initial suggestion was to start exploring creative ways of using it as an intergenerational makerspace bringing together young children and their parents to explore new ways of making meaning, but also creative ways of understanding how technological world 'works' and the implications of this. This remains an area of future interest for me and now the relationship with the library is established I am exploring further ways to develop this.

As it turned out I proposed working in a collaborative way with library staff and was invited to join a new initiative working with a local community group, the Pelican Project - <http://pelicanproject.org.uk/> - who work with creative and cultural organisations, individuals, carers and families to create inclusive and accessible experiences for young people with a range of disabilities transitioning from full-time education into adult social care. This unexpected collaboration has led to a co-designed bid for funding from the Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health - <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/cceh/> - to co-create a small project with library staff and a local community group who support young people with a range of disabilities. The project will give these young people, their carers and some local college students working in Health and Social Care, the opportunity to freely explore the affordances of the Fab Lab and through these experiences to tell stories about their lives. The project is due to start in late May and although it goes beyond the early years remit, I am happy to keep in touch with anyone who is interested.