Designing a tool to support zoo interpreters’ pedagogy and professional development

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Who are interpreters?

(a.k.a. docents, explainers, facilitators, guides, museum educators, volunteers…)

Museum staff that draw connections from visitors’ interests to exhibit content, and help visitors make sense of complex ideas by means of dialogue and artifacts

What kind of scaffolds can we provide to support interpreters, in light of existing instructional challenges?
Emerging scaffolding tools such as mobile technology are promising, but...

- Often appropriated from tools intended for visitors
- Provide little instructional support for interpreters

(Hsi, 2003; Garibay & Ostfeld, 2013; Tebeau et al, 2014)
A Mile in My Paws tablet tool

Designed to complement Brookfield Zoo’s interactive exhibit “A Mile in My Paws”

- Displays multimedia and live data representations
- Connects the game to real-life polar bears and climate change concepts
*Paws* tool could serve as a mediational means (Wertsch & Rupert, 1993) for **new facilitative strategies**

- New artifacts could **disrupt**, or **reproduce** existing norms and goals (Engeström, 2001)

Supporting use of speech, media, and gesture to convey exhibit **concepts** and highlight different levels of the **learning environment**

- Similar to science teacher practices (Jaipal, 2010)
Emerging facilitative strategies

“Graphs are awesome, they tell you a little bit about everything.”

Interpreters used the tablet as a way to provide evidence, rather than as a purely didactic tool.

- Ask question about player’s experience
- Identify relevant parts of graph
- Connect visitor’s answer, graph, and play experience
Ongoing redesigns based on interpreter input and feedback

- Increasing relevance to visitor interests instead of game state
- Less prescriptive and more improvisational
- Able to juxtapose, compare, contrast representations
- Developing system to display automatic and interpreter-created logs, tags, and notes
Participatory design

Interpreters proposed **design revisions** with post-it notes and paper prototypes

- **Discuss tablet learning challenge**
- **Propose training and design solutions**
- **Refine scale and intention of supports**
Interpreters can **benefit** from **small-scale** instructional supports

- But needs to support **visitor-centered** facilitation

Interpreters can recognize and **design** these scaffolds for themselves

- Potential for **ongoing** professional development

Educators should pay **more attention** to tools that support ongoing instruction, especially in informal spaces
Learn more about this project!

- bslatt2@uic.edu
- http://bslatt2.people.uic.edu
- Next presentation at IDC on participatory design sessions


