Community Informatics Studio:
A Model of Information Scholarship in Action

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Abstract

This poster describes an educational research project we call "Community Informatics Studio," which uses studio-based learning (SBL) to support enculturation into the field of community informatics. The SBL approach is rooted in the apprenticeship model of learning in which students study with master designers or artists to learn their craft and is closely related to John Dewey's inquiry-based learning. The poster reports on research from our Community Informatics Studio course, which uses experiential learning as a model of information scholarship in action. We highlight the guiding theoretical frameworks, research questions, methodological approaches, findings, and recommendations. The goal of our poster is to respond to this year's conference theme by presenting our research question: "How can the Community Informatics Studio be understood as an innovative educational model of information scholarship in action?"

Keywords: community informatics, studio-based learning, digital literacy, popular education, service-learning

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Introduction

This poster presents findings from an educational research project we call "Community Informatics Studio," which uses studio-based learning (SBL) to support enculturation into the field of community informatics (Keeble & Loader, 2001; Gurstein, 2003; Williams & Durrance, 2009). The SBL pedagogy is rooted in the apprenticeship model of learning in which students study with master designers or artists to learn their craft and is closely related to John Dewey's inquiry-based learning (Lackney, 1999). The poster reports on research from our Community Informatics Studio course, at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which uses experiential learning as a model of information scholarship in action. We highlight the guiding theoretical frameworks, research questions, methodological approaches, findings, and recommendations. The goal of our poster is to respond to this year's conference theme by presenting our research question: "How can the Community Informatics Studio be understood as an innovative educational model of information scholarship in action?"

Theoretical Framework

The relevant literature in which our research is situated can be traced to the teachings of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and other educational philosophers who argued that learning must be rooted in people's everyday experiences (Becker, 2000; Mehra, 2004; Ball, 2008). "Service-learning" seeks to connect "practical experience to reflection" as a strategy to enhance student learning and "personal growth through civic engagement" (Ball, 2008). However, scholars have noted the long-standing tension that exists between theory and practice in library education (Morehead, 1980). Others have sought to

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problematize the concept of service-learning by addressing the unequal power relationships in university/community partnerships (Reardon, 1998; Mehra, 2004). Our educational research project attempts to fill a gap in the literature by fusing theory and practice through studio-based learning (Lackney, 1999; Brown, 2006; Brocato, 2009) as an innovative pedagogical approach to advance library and information science.

Case Study: Community Informatics Studio

Using studio-based learning (SBL) methods, Community Informatics Studio has brought students, instructors, and professionals together with community members in a collaborative environment to apply community informatics scholarship to a real-world problem or "case." Project work has been student-led, with students' works-in-progress, critiques by the instructors and peers, and engagement with outside practitioners all taking place inside the studio: a facility designed to closely reflect the professional work environment. The learning objective is to shift focus from "learning-about" to "learning-to-be" by providing a more nuanced understanding of the thinking behind design choices (Brown, 2006). Formal lectures are used sparingly to provide students with the background information and knowledge needed to successfully address the case and produce an effective proposal/plan.

A Model of Information Scholarship in Action

In this section we briefly describe our research this semester. We emphasize the use of SBL as an experiential approach to promoting information scholarship in action.

Fall 2012. Students have built upon lessons learned from the past two semesters: the case for the course in 2010 was titled "Designing Public Computing Centers of the Future" and the case in 2011 was titled "Community Media Newsrooms: Equipping Citizen Journalists." This semester, students are addressing a new case, "Popular Technology" (Eubanks, 2011). Eubanks's concept of popular technology is rooted in popular education, participatory research, and participatory design methods. Students are engaged in SBL with the goal of developing more engaged digital and media literacy workshops. The poster will describe findings from a "participatory evaluation" (Stoecker, 2013, p. 199) of the students' work with instructors by analyzing the following three data sets: weekly journal entries, desk-critique artifacts, and final presentation materials. The workshops developed by students for the course will be made available online at www.prairienet.org and offered to community members at public computing centers as part of our "Eliminate the Digital Divide" grant, awarded to two of this abstract's authors by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Conclusion

In this poster we hope to introduce an innovative educational model of information scholarship in action by presenting our case study of the Community Informatics Studio course, which uses studio-based learning to advance library and information science. Our goal is to inspire further lines of inquiry to support the development of engaged information scholarship.

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