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Paper Title Reading From the Screen: Making Reading Salient During Young Children's Use of Digital Technologies

Author(s) Christina R. Davidson, Charles Sturt University; Susan J. Danby, Queensland University of Technology; Karen Thorpe, Queensland University of Technology

Session Title Rethinking Normative Literacy, Literacy Practices, and Research on Literacy

Session Type Roundtable Presentation

Presentation Date 4/20/2015

Presentation Location Chicago, Illinois

Descriptors Early Childhood, Reading, Technology

Methodology Qualitative

Unit SIG-Critical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education

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Reading from the Screen: Making Reading Salient during Young Children's Use of Digital Technologies

While research establishes that parents play an important role in supporting young children's use of digital technology, less attention is given to how interactions between parents and their young children enable reading from the screen during naturally occurring activity. This paper employs conversation analysis of a corpus of interactions drawn from recordings of young children's everyday use of digital technologies in homes. Analysis examines talk between parents and young children about what letters, words, or more extended texts "say" and delineates interactional methods used to make reading relevant. Interactional methods are shown to be methodically employed to occasion reading during use of digital technology, particularly when accessing unfamiliar sites, programs or games.

Purposes

Much is known about the ways that social interaction promotes the acquisition of print literacy in the home (Smith, 2001), but little is known about how social interaction in the home functions to support the learning of digital literacies, specifically reading or writing on screen. Homes provide rich experiences for young children's use of digital technologies (Plowman, Stephen & McPake, 2010), yet, parents take-for-granted their contributions to children's learning, frequently attributing young children with natural ability (Plowman, McPake & Stephen, 2008). In this way, they underestimate support they provide. Similarly, studies of digital technology use by young children in homes fail to reveal ways that children initiate and enable provision of support by others (Plowman, McPake & Stephen, 2008). Even less is known about how parents and children enable reading during use of digital technologies.

Digital technology has changed what reading entails (Bearne, 2009; Burnett & Wilkinson, 2005; Yamada-Rice, 2010). Reading on the digital screen is a broad, complex skill extending far beyond the ability to decode printed text within paper-based media (Levy, 2009, p. 77). Reading digital texts involves "varied reading pathways and processes" (Bearne, 2009, p. 156) and greater attention to visual images incorporated into digital texts (Yamada-Rice, 2010). As well, readers must take account of other visual effects and sounds (Bearne, 2009). Readers develop "a more dynamic relationship with information" (Burnett & Wilkinson, 2005, p. 159) due to online facilities that enable readers to comment on and contribute to information, and due to the different pathways through information that hyperlinks afford (Leu et al., 2011). The impact of digital technologies on reading practices and process has implications for understanding how young children learn to read the screen.

Examinations of learning to reading using digital texts have emphasised use of educational technology specifically designed to teach reading (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Many studies of how young children learn to read the screen are intervention studies designed to examine digital reading programs and their contributions to vocabulary development, knowledge of letters and sounds (phonological awareness, letter/sound correspondence, letter recognition),

decoding skills (word attack) and reading comprehension (Burnett, 2010). Examinations of use of ebooks and CD-ROMS has been another important focus (Ertem, 2011) but this work usually does not focus on spontaneous activities using digital texts.

Less attention is given to reading of digital texts that occurs naturally during young children's everyday activity, or to the ways that reading is socially accomplished during interactions with others homes and preschools. Levy's (2009) study is an exception. She found young children used multimodal cues simultaneously, showing facility with use of symbols, pictures and print prompts. Though children did not yet decode printed prompts onscreen, they used prompts competently when accessing digital technologies at home. Levy argues that digital texts can provide opportunities to "learn how to use and make sense of print within a context that is meaningful" (p. 89).

In previous work, we consider young children's acquisition of digital literacies more broadly cast (Author A, 2009; 2012; Author B, A, & C, 2013). Here, we focus specifically on ways that young children and parents directly make reading of letters, words and more extended texts relevant. We establish how young children and parents orient to, and produce, reading during the course of their activity and we show that use of digital technologies in the home is an important way that young children begin to learn about reading.

Perspective: Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis

Ethnomethodology (EM) is the study of the accomplishment of social order during everyday social activity. Social order is taken to be a local order, oriented to by people and witnessable in accounts they offer during social interaction (Garfinkel, 1967). EM originated in the work of the sociologist Harold Garfinkel whose study of reading of case-notes by clinicians was the earliest ethnomethodological study of the accomplishment of reading.

Most EM studies of reading examine reading instruction at school (see Baker, 1991; Baker & Freebody, 1993; Freebody & Freiberg, 2001) and draw on the foundational work of Heap (1980, 1985, 1991, 1992). Heap's examinations of what counts as reading in classrooms show how reading is produced as cultural and situated activity. Much of the above EM work on reading employs conversation analysis. Conversation analysis requires the sequential analysis of interaction (Sacks, 1995), to develop descriptions of the orderly ways people produce social activity. Here, our focus is on the orderly ways that young children and parents produce reading during activity with digital technology at home.

Methods

This paper draws from a larger study of young children's use of digital technology in homes and preschools. Recordings of young children's use of digital technology in homes were made over a week by their parents who were asked to record their children's usual activity with digital technology. The number of recordings, and their length, varied across families. The larger project produced a number of single case studies (Author A, B., & C, in press; Author B, A & C, 2013). Here, we provide analysis of a corpus systemically selected from

the larger data set. The corpus consists of sequences where parents or young children oriented to reading of letters, words or more extended texts. To develop the corpus, all recordings of home use of digital technology were viewed. Excerpts were selected when utterances of parents or young children contained the word “says” or “say” produced about something on screen. The interactional sequence was determined (i.e. the course of talk that led to the use of the words and followed them).

The corpus consists of thirty two sequences, each transcribed using Jefferson notation (see Table 1 below). Screen shots were included of non-verbal actions that accompanied reading (though not in this proposal). Sequential analysis led to descriptions of the specific interactional methods that produced reading aloud.

Data sources

Analysis of the entire corpus established two ways that talk made reading relevant: (1) use of the question “what does that say?” (or variations, “what does it say?” or “what does this say?”), and (2) use of “it says” followed by reading in the same turn. Here we provide two extracts from the full paper to illustrate.

What does that say?: Reading implicative question

Brayden (B) and his mother (M) are sitting at the desktop computer. Brayden has asked his mother to find Power Rangers games. It takes time to download a game and during this time they talk.

- 1 B: I have that
2 ((B points to image))
3 B power rangers
4→ B: [[what does that say?
5 [[B points to sign))
6 M: power ↑rangers
7 B ↓power ↑rangers! (0.2) I have that
8 [[((B turning to M then back))
9 B: on my power rangers sword

Braydon asks the question “what does that say?” and uses pointing to indicate what “that” is referring to on screen. Initially, he notices an image of a Power Rangers toy and draws his mother’s attention to it with his verbal and non-verbal actions. He then asks the question which makes reading relevant. His mother responds by providing an exact reading of the words. Brayden then repeats those words in an animated fashion. This is followed by an informing about where those words are written elsewhere.

“It says ...”: Indicating that reading is to follow

In this first extract, a mother (M) is helping her young son (A) to find information on the desktop computer about volcanoes. With her help, he has keyed the word “volcanoes” into a Google search box but is not satisfied with the results. He asks for help to find “better ones”.

- 1 M: okay (0.4) ↑we:::ll
2 (0.8)
3 M: if you want to watch ↑videos o::f
4 (0.2) the ↑volcanoes
5 A: yeah
6 (0.8)↔((M moving closer to A))
7 M: pre[ss:::
8 [(moves finger towards screen)]
9→ M: that button >that one< there >it says
10 ↑videos<
11 A: hm:: ↑muh
12 (2.0)↔((M puts hand over A's and clicks mouse))

Here, the mother's actions draw the child's attention to a specific spot on the screen. She directs him to press a button as she simultaneously points and talks about it. She emphasises the button and its position and then tells the child what it says. Her words “it says” are followed by a marked rise in pitch for the production of the word, although the clause “it says videos” is produced quickly and so appears incidental to the “main game” of telling the child how to access videos from a list.

Substantiated conclusions

We focus on these key points in the full paper: (1) producing a sequential environment for reading (2) pointing is an important device for situating talk about what things “say”; and (3) how young children's use of unfamiliar sites, programs, games or activities prompted talk and reading as they sought to adapt their existing knowledge and skills. Here we provide very brief commentary.

Talk between young children and parents occasioned reading from the screen. In the case of a question asked by a young child, adults regularly responded by reading. Some parents directed questioning at children (e.g. what does it say?) to make reading by children the preferred response. When reading was not supplied, the omission was marked in particular ways; children deferred by claiming not to know. “It says” followed by reading, within the turn, indicated that what followed “it says” was reading and not conversation. Reading was often marked through change of pace or use of pausing.

Pointing was an important embodied action that frequently accompanied talk that made reading relevant. Although occurring quickly in time, screen shots in transcripts show how

pointing was finely coordinated with talk to draw the visual attention of the recipient of talk to what was being asked about or read. Reference terms such as “it” or “that” were accompanied by pointing that indexed places on the screen; especially important given the myriad of images and print that were often visible. Parents and children attended to what was being said but also looked to *where* pointing specifically referenced talk. Verbal and embodied actions were finely coordinated, requiring close attention. The absence of pointing sometimes resulted in trouble in talk that needed to be repaired for reading to occur.

Many of the sequences in the corpus were producing during use of unfamiliar websites, games, and so on. Young children actively sought information that could help them acquire new skills. So, reading by parents was often followed by some next action by young children (such as clicking on a particular button). Actions indicated their understanding and highlighted the importance of reading in the context of activity with digital technology.

Scholarly significance

Understanding how parents support children’s use of digital technology at home can delineate how that support specifically enables children’s literacy learning. Although parents take for granted the support they provide (Plowman, Stephen & McPake, 2010), this paper establishes ways that they orient to reading, and read for children, during interactions. The paper also establishes ways in which children orient to letters, words, and more extended texts, and inquire about what they “say”. The resulting negotiations of activity between parents and children show finely-tuned ways of making reading matter. Although these frequently occur on-the-hop, they are employed methodically to produce reading.

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Table 1 : <i>Transcription conventions</i>	
[[Utterances that begin at the same time
[Overlap in speakers’ talk
]	Point where simultaneous talk finishes
=	Talk between speakers latches of follows without a break

()	Indicates length of silence e.g. (0.2)
:::	Indicates that a prior sound is prolonged e.g. li::ke
-	Word is cut off e.g. ta-
> <	Words enclosed within are said at a faster pace than surrounding talk
?	Rising inflection
ˊ	Rising inflection but weaker than ?
.	Stopping fall in tone
,	Continuing intonation
!	Animated tone
↑	Marked rising intonation
↓	Marked falling intonation
<u>no</u>	Underline indicating greater emphasis
CA	Upper case indicates loudness
°	Softness e.g. It's a °secret°
hhh	Aspiration or strong out-breath
(it is)	Words within are uncertain
()	Indicates that some word/s could not be worked out
(())	Verbal descriptions e.g. ((sits down))
(adapted from Atkinson and Heritage, 1999)	