
Position Statement for Róisín McNaney: Supporting Children with Complex Communication Needs

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Participant biography

I am a third year PhD candidate with the Digital Interaction group at Culture Lab- Newcastle University [1], studying the design and application of pervasive technologies for clinical use in the monitoring, management and quantification of specific aspects of care in Parkinson's. Before I began my PhD I clinically trained as a Speech and Language Therapist, where I then went on to begin my career working specifically with children with communication needs in school and clinic contexts. I have worked with a wide variety of cases, ranging from the treatment of mainstream children with mild speech and language issues to the diagnosis and management of complex communication needs in children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Although my current research focuses on adults, I have been involved in a multitude of research projects within my time at Culture Lab, including several pediatric studies including; (a) the design and deployment of a photo-sorting tool to aid interpersonal communication and expression, between pupils and staff, in a classroom of mixed ability children, with a range of complex additional needs (involving pupils and staff) [2], (b) an exploration into the design of a mobile phone application to prompt loudness in children with

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cerebral palsy, and the subsequent design of a head-worn microphone (involving pupils only), and (c) the design of a mobile phone application to aid home based practice of speech and language therapy exercises (involving parents of younger children).

Why do I want to participate?

This topic interests me as a speech and language therapist working in HCI research. I feel that this workshop would be a great opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences with other healthcare researchers, and to reflect about and discuss how well current methods for the engaging children with complex communication needs in design, and research in general, are. In addition, I was an organizer of the 'Designing for and with Children with Special Needs in Multiple Settings' [3] workshop at the IDC'13 conference in New York, as well as being an organizer of the 'Designing for and with Vulnerable People' at the CHI'13 conference in Paris. I feel that inclusion in this workshop would add to the knowledge and insights gained from the discussions we had in these workshops and I would be interested to see whether the perspectives of this group are different, when dealing specifically with issues in communication.

What can I contribute?

I hope to be able to contribute applied clinical expertise in methods of supporting communication with children, as well as contributing experiences around designing for and with children with complex communication needs. When working with a group of children with a range of complex needs in [2] the main challenge which arose was that the pupils were so varied in the nature of their communicative ability, both expression and comprehension. In order to better orientate ourselves

to this challenge we observed several lessons, being carried out with the group, and linked closely with their teacher, to gain an understanding of each individual pupil and their specific difficulties, so we could modify our communicative support accordingly. Having this 'inside knowledge' about the individual children who might need more support was invaluable during group work, and enabled us to ensure each child was able to engage in the activities, to the best of their ability. In this regard, we found our close, continuous collaboration with school staff, who shared with us their knowledge and expertise of the target client group and complex learning environment, to be invaluable.

What do I want to get out of the workshop?

I would be interested in hearing how other researchers, particularly those without clinical healthcare backgrounds, manage the contingencies of engaging children with communication issues, and their caregivers, in research.

References

- [1] Digital Interaction group: <http://di.ncl.ac.uk/>
- [2] Durrant A, Hook J, McNaney R, et al. "Design to Support Interpersonal Communication in the Special Educational Needs Classroom". *In Proc of IDC'13: New York*
- [3] McNaney R, Balaam M, Marshall K, et al. "Designing for and with children with special needs in multiple settings." *Extended Abstract In Proc of IDC'13: New York*
- [4] Vines J, McNaney R, Clarke R et al. "Designing for-and with-vulnerable people." *Extended Abstract in proc. of CHI'13: Paris*