Entering the field and eliciting refugee experiences with information and communication technology

Antonio Díaz Andrade
Antecedents

• Participants entered New Zealand as resettled refugees

• Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002)
  • Information and communication technology and the social inclusion of refugees (Díaz Andrade & Doolin, 2015)
  • Temporal enactment of technology-mediated information and communication practices (Díaz Andrade & Doolin, under review)

• Critical case as participants faced exceptional circumstances as newcomers to the country (Flyvbjerg, 2006)
Negotiating access

- July 2011
  - Initial contact with the National Coordinator via email
- December 2011
  - Ethics application submitted
- January 2012
  - Ethics application approved
- July 2012
  - Kick-off meeting with the National Coordinator and other stakeholders at the Ministry of Education office in Auckland
Nelson
11 Burmese
10 Bhutanese

Hamilton
2 Burmese
1 Colombian

Auckland
3 Burmese
3 Congolese
2 Eritreans
2 Ethiopians
1 Rwandan
1 Iraqi

Palmerston North
9 Burmese
8 Bhutanese
About the participants

• Occupation
  • Most of them were employed as store operator, government officer, housekeeper, interpreter, gardener, checkout operator, etc.
  • Some others were studying – mainly English
  • Ten were unemployed

• Age
  • Between mid-20s to 60s

• Education
  • From two illiterate to those holding university degrees

Paying special attention to participants’ social context (Klein & Myers, 1999)
In the field

- In-depth, face-to-face interviews (July/2012 – July 2013)
  - Between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours
  - Conversational in nature – family conversation
- 39 interview sessions, including:
  - One group interview with three participants
  - One follow-up interview with one participant
  - Six interviews required the assistance of an interpreter
- Accommodating to participants’ preferences:
  - 24 interviews at participants’ houses
  - 11 interviews at the local school
  - 2 interviews at the community centre
  - 2 interviews in public arenas

Probing participants in order to capture the nuances of their statements (Duranti, 1993)
Lessons learned

• Preparation for negotiating access
  • Invaluable support from local coordinators

• Flexibility during the fieldwork
  • Not everything works according to plan

• Active listening during the interviews
  • Follow the leads because unexpected stories emerge

• Sensitivity to participants’ circumstances
  • Minimise intrusiveness
Extended funding helps Computers in Homes

The Nelson branch of the Computers in Homes programme is achieving great success, with more funding on the horizon.

The initiative, which allows families to purchase a training, a recycled computer, and a 12-month subscription to an internet connection, has had great success. The Ministry of Education has announced $1.5 million of funding for the digital literacy programme.

The project, which helps children and families to use computers, has been a great success. It has helped teach children and families how to use computers, and the feedback has been positive.

Tutor Dayna Storkey said the programme was a great success because it helped children and families feel more confident using computers. She said she was proud to be part of the programme.

Many refugees can benefit from computers. The programme allows them to feel more comfortable using technology.

One refugee said it was a very exciting experience. "It's been a great thing for me, the kids and our family," he said.

Connected: Computers in Homes participants Zemirli Pah, left, Mu Yai, Mu, Ban Phe and Mu Bar, with Dr Anthony Elia of AUT and AUT staff and teachers, learn how to use a computer.

By SHAYNE ELBRIDGE

A new computer, an internet connection and a 30-hour course has helped refugees settle in to their new homes.

The refugees were chosen as refugees because they had an established community, which was helpful in helping them settle in.

The Hamilton family is the latest to be chosen. "It has been a very exciting time for us," said Mr Hamilton.

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Digital aids help refugees settle in

The feedback and appreciation for this course has been heart-warming, with many success stories of how access to a computer has helped refugees settle in.

One of the many support projects is Computers in Homes — a training programme of 30 hours, with the aim of providing basic computer and internet training. The training is provided by the Ministry of Education and covers the basics of using computers and the internet.

HMS finance manager Tania Pateman said the course is appreciated by the refugees.

The feedback for the course has been heart-warming, with many success stories of how access to a computer has helped refugees settle in.

One of the refugees, Min Aung, is grateful for the Computers in Homes programme. He said he was very lucky to be chosen.

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Photo: KATRINA BIELESTI