Seniors Skyping: An Academic-Professional-Community Collaboration

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ECHICAGO @ University of Illinois at Chicago, April 21, 2012
Echicago as a Global Network
Clark Lindsey Village in Urbana, IL Research/service site location for UIUC GSLIS... ...students help as cybernavigators and librarians... ...even help people skype with grandkids!
Senior Citizens’ Cooperative in Beijing
Collaboration

- Clark Lindsey Retirement Village in Champaign-Urbana
- Senior Citizen Co-operative in Beijing
  [http://www.seniorcitizen.org.cn](http://www.seniorcitizen.org.cn)
- Skype Session March 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 7pm
- 80 over American participants
- 13 Chinese participants
- Plus researchers and administrators on both sides
eChicago 2009 and since: China and US, community informatics and librarians, especially CPL Cybernavigators

PKU doctoral student, visiting UIUC, reports at eChicago 2009 ... later invites group to China

Two cybernavigators, now DU GSLIS students, participated in CPL research reported in China
Nov 2010 Invitation to share our research at events in China

The Cybernavigators of Chicago Public Library and the ‘Informatics Moment’
Kate Williams, University of Illinois
COINFO, Beijing, November 2010

芝加哥公共图书馆网络导航员与“信息革命时刻”
凯特·威廉姆斯
伊利诺大学厄巴纳-香槟分校
2010.11
Two hour discussion with senior center founder and staff
Proposals for joint work discussed at Peking University’s “GSLIS”
Outline

• Rationale
• Implementation
• Activities
• Outcomes
Rationale

• Digital divide
• Informatics moment
• Many innovations but many have yet to make it to the “older masses”
• Age-related difficulties associated with adapting new technology
• Perceived resistance to using new technology
• Contingent of community informatics scholars from UIUC visit to China
Implementation

• Translators
  – 2 from the American side
  – 1 from the Chinese side

• Testing of equipment

• Communication
  – Ownership & communication with directors
Method

- Focus groups
- Survey
- Interviews with administrators from Clark Lindsey
- Case notes
The Skype Experience

- [http://www.seniorcitizen.org.cn/show/175.html](http://www.seniorcitizen.org.cn/show/175.html)
They quickly documented the skype session online
美：“我们忙着做事，每天有事情做有益健康，我们有很多活动很忙。我们有太极拳课。”

中：“我们有很多活动，也很忙……天天有歌声，天天有笑声，越活越年轻。”
中：肯定啊，女士优先，男人炒菜。让女士多出去活动活动。所以我们变成了家庭妇男。我会做饺子，馅饼，山西的刀削面。

美：
“你在厨房里煮菜吗？”
What did Participants Enjoy?

- **Theme 1: Technology**
  - Amazed at the technology
  - Participants wondered about the technology used by the Chinese participants

- **Theme 2: Cultural Exchange**
  - Became interested about Chinese culture, values, living arrangements, history (eg. Mao, cultural revolution)
Impact

• Few mentions on the novelty of technology but connection with people and end use appeared to be more important

• Reflected on their previous experience with China and memories associated with the country

• Would like to experience skype with another country but appeared to be fascinated by China
Suggestions for Improvement

• More interaction with Chinese participants
• Smaller groups for sharing
• Start an email penpal from China to learn about each other
• Start a book club: Read a book about China and interact with Chinese Skype pal
Concerns

• Dominated by one personality
• Placement of cameras
• Lighting
• Participants wondered whether the Chinese participants were able to see them since they were in front of a small computer screen
  – Seniors at CL waving good bye to the camera before leaving the room
Sustainability

• Low cost-technology
• Interested participants
• Enhancing life long learning and social engagement
• Bridging of digital divide through “informatics moment” (Williams, 2011)
Future Research

• Longitudinal study – what are the informatics moment for the individuals in the retirement village?
• Increase of Skype use over time
• Alternate uses of Skype
• Increase use of technology for social purposes
• Incorporate Chinese data
Thank You for Listening!

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