

The Lazy Empire: 12 Year-Old Programmes “The LazyHusband”

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In Western society, many children are exposed to digital media at a young age. With this new exposure, the frontier for youth production is given new meaning. It has come to the attention of many that children, regardless of their age or development, are able to produce digital media and learn difficult concepts if given the chance. Often, children are rarely given credit for their potential. As touched upon by Hendershot and Kinder (1999), the authors stated that in regards to science in America, children are given minimal opportunities to play, explore, and observe nature in a school setting (p. 3). Furthermore, only 6-13% of instructional time is spent teaching science in grades 1-4 (Hendershot & Kinder, 1999, p. 4). One can infer that there is less emphasis in science for these grades due to educators finding scientific content too difficult for young children to learn. Although this minimal teaching undermines the potential for children to learn, in other aspects, educators (parents, teachers, or guardians) have encouraged children to learn and understand difficult concepts at an early age. These children are educated and taught criteria they would otherwise not learn until their secondary or post-secondary studies. An example of allowing a child to prosper in his pursuit of knowledge through media production comes from the example of Ethan Duggan.

Ethan Duggan is a 12-year-old author/creator of the “LazyHusband” app, and the youngest member of VegasTech (Twitter, 2013; VegasTech 2013). The story behind “LazyHusband” was inspired by Duggan’s self-defined laziness (Cao & Lucht, 2013). Duggan’s mother would often seek his approval on new purchases, and after tiring from an episode of his mother’s sartorial questions, Duggan realized the power of his smartphone. Recording a few phrases such as “you look beautiful” and “you look nice”, Duggan played these phrases for his mother when she sought his approval (Cao & Lucht, 2013). One can infer that this was the initial beta version of the “LazyHusband” app. However, Duggan would not be able to profit from this idea, as it used his iPhone’s built-in recording feature.

Alternatively, Duggan consulted his father, a programmer, as to how he could turn his abstract idea into a concrete form, such as a standalone smartphone app (capable of playing “lazy” pre-recorded phrases). Duggan’s father told him that he would have to self-code/write the program for the app, and almost immediately, Duggan signed up for code writing classes.

In the article by Weber & Mitchell (2008), the authors stated that adults often teach skills to children in order for them to perform their media production (p. 43). Although children are free to choose the content or medium for their production, there is a degree of adult control over the selection of the general topic or medium (Weber & Mitchell, 2008, p. 43). Over the span of 4-months, Duggan learned how to use programs such as Phonegap, W3Schools, Stack Overflow, JavaScript, and Code Academy (Roblimbo, 2013; VegasTech, 2013). However, these are only some of the available programs that one could utilize to create an app. Therefore, Duggan’s production was limited, as he was only able to write his script in the programs he was taught. Moreover, the production of “LazyHusband” occurs through a computer, and within the previously listed programs. Additionally, the app can be updated should Duggan find bugs or have updates.

The purpose of creating this app was to bring a comical, clever, and “lazy” idea to life. Children are full of ideas, and if given the chance, can accomplish the “impossible”. It is not often that a 12-year-old child learns how to program out of personal interest, or create a marketable app. Moreover, one can infer that Duggan was determined to see his app come to fruition in order to be recognized as one of the youngest programmers in North America. In an interview, Duggan stated that he is interested in pursuing a career in computer programming, as well as expanding “LazyHusband” to include the “Lazy Family” with respective wife and child versions (Roblimbo, 2013).

The goal of “LazyHusband” is to give its users the ability to be lazy and funny while giving feedback to whomsoever the sound clips are played for. The app is simple, yet its purpose is very effective. Although the app is titled “LazyHusband”, people of all ages have purchased the app to share

their feelings through pre-recorded messages (Turner, 2013). Moreover, “LazyHusband” is available for 99 cents in app stores, and is supported on iPhone, Android, and Kindle.

Moreover, the critical reception of the app has been well received. “LazyHusband” is fun, neat, original, and capable of allowing its users to be lazy. Duggan presented his app at SXSW in March 2013, where he captured the attention of industry professionals and Shaquille O’Neal (Cao & Lucht, 2013). O’Neal expressed his potential interest for investing in Duggan’s app, as well as expanding the future of the “Lazy Family” (Cao & Lucht, 2013). In capturing the attention of professionals and O’Neal, Duggan achieved his goal of receiving attention and critical reception for his unique idea.

Furthermore, it is apparent that Duggan has access to resources that not every child may have access to. Weber and Mitchell (2008) stated that access to resources could impede one’s media production (p. 43), so it is important to expand the possibilities for children to experiment with multiple media types. Additionally, Charmaraman (2013) stated that children can create media production without having a lot of money (p. 108). On the Internet, free programming websites/software exist to help decrease limitations of access. However, one must acknowledge that Internet and computer access is required in order for one to program/write a script. Even in a developed nation such as Canada, an inner digital divide exists. While it is a good idea to encourage media production for children, one must support the narrowing of limitations to access as well.

Overall, I feel that children all over the world should approach complex media production. I feel that programming should be taught to children at a young age because, not only is programming an intellectual challenge, but it is also helpful in bringing ideas that children may have to life (such as creating apps). I feel that “LazyHusband” is a great app due to its simplicity in function, and complexity in design. “LazyHusband” is a great first app for Duggan, and within years to come, he shows potential for creating superior apps.

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