Beyond the Survey: Using Qualitative Research Methods to Support Evidence-Based Practice

Lynn Silipigni Connaway, PhD
Director of Library Trends and User Research, OCLC
connawal@oclc.org
@LynnConnaway
When put on the spot and asked to define “research,” what would you say?
What about answering question(s)?
Survey Method
The data collection methods you choose depend on your questions.
User-centered research identifies how and why individuals make sense of their environments

(Dervin, 1992)
(Dervin, Connaway, & Prabha, 2003-2005)
Why qualitative research?

- Gathers rich, descriptive data
- Answers “How?” and “Why?”
- Supports decision-making
- Can help motivate and increase buy-in
- Helps build relationships

(Connaway & Radford, 2017)
Qualitative research:
• Tends to use multiple methods
• Is open to developing new approaches

(Connaway & Radford, 2017)
Mixed Methods Research

• Any combination of research methods
  • Qualitative
  • Quantitative
  • Participatory
  • Action
  • Design
• Equal attention to all stages of research process
• Findings should be iterative & informative

(Kazmer, 2017, pp. 232-233)
INTERVIEWS
Types of Interviews

• Structured
• Semi-structured
• Formats:
  • Individual
    • Face-to-face
    • Telephone
    • Skype
  • Focus Group Interviews
Semi-structured Interviews

- Incredibly detailed data
- Time consuming
- Establishing rapport
- Selecting research participants
- Transcribing observations & conversations
Public Libraries Respond to the Opioid Crisis with Their Communities

1. How did your library decide to offer this program/these services?
2. How did you go about building awareness, understanding, support for the program inside your organization? Outside your organization?
3. With whom did you work with to make this program/these services happen?
4. How did you find the resources needed to support this work?
5. What feedback/reactions did you get from the community?
6. What feedback/reactions did the local media have about the offering of this program/these services?
7. What challenges and new opportunities arose as you worked with other community services?
“Different agencies were invited by the mayor. We asked the opioid users and homeless if there was one thing that they want most people to know and it was, ‘I am a human being.’” (Community partner)

“I think the opioid use has a huge stigma and the perception is very negative. I think some people do not think it is safe to come to the Central Library. There was a (the local) news report that had people stop bringing children’s groups to the library.” (Frontline staff)
Visitor Mode

- Functional use of technology
- Formal need
- Invisible online presence
- Internet is a toolbox

Resident Mode

- Visible and persistent online presence
- Collaborative activity online
- Contribute online
- Internet is a place

(White and Connaway 2011-2014)
2. Think of the ways you have used technology and the web for your studies. Describe a typical week.

3. Think about the next stage of your education. Tell me what you think this will be like.
“Wikipedia… it’s perfect, because it gives you the words, the things, the technical words that you need to look, keywords, so Wikipedia is always, always the first step.”

(UOCG1, Male, Age 35-44, Professions and Applied Sciences)
“It’s like a taboo I guess with all teachers, they just all say – you know, when they explain the paper they always say, ‘Don’t use Wikipedia.’”

(Digital Visitors and Residents, USU7, Female, Age 19, Political Science)
“At first I started looking online, and it was a little bit overwhelming…I ended up reaching into my mom’s cupboard and using a recipe that I found in one of her old cookbooks. The recipe was just what I was looking for...”

(Digital Visitors and Residents, USS3, Emerging, Female, Age 17, High School Student)
“You spend many hours with Saint Google. We entrust ourselves to Saint Google and that solves it for us.”

*(Digital Visitors & Residents, UOCFI6, Male, Age 53, Arts & Humanities)*
ACRL Value of Academic Libraries: Action-oriented Research Agenda


Project page: [http://www.oclc.org/research/themes/user-studies/acrl-agenda.html](http://www.oclc.org/research/themes/user-studies/acrl-agenda.html)
6. What challenges do you see in the way the library staff communicates with the academic community, including students, faculty, and administration?

7. What do you think would facilitate communication between the library staff and your academic community, including students, faculty, and administration?
Communication

“[Librarians] have to be able to sell to the deans that this is something valuable that the deans want to be a part of, and the deans are going to be impacted by their faculty feeling like that this is a worthy thing because if we use money for one thing, we can’t use it for something else. I think customer service…becomes really important in this kind of environment.

(Provost Interviewee PP07, Research University, Secular, Public)
Focus Group Interviews

- Group interviews
- A lot of data in little time
- Small time commitment for participants and researchers
- Possibility of “groupthink” or self-censoring in the group setting

(Asher & Miller, 2011, 15)
6. If you had a magic wand, how would you better communicate and make your administration, faculty, and students more aware of the services the library offers and their impact on student learning and success?

7. What else would you like to share about:
   a. How your library supports the mission of your larger institution?
   b. How you communicate this support to your institution’s administration?
   c. How you articulate value to your institution’s administration?
“...the whole kind of conversation around fake news is this really important example of how important it is in our daily life and civic health in order to bring critical skills to bear on understanding information and being able to critically evaluate the source of that.”

(Advisory Member LM03, Research University, Secular, Private)
Seeking Synchronicity: Evaluating Virtual Reference Services from User, Non-User, and Librarian Perspectives

Funded by IMLS, OCLC, and Rutgers University

Four phases:
1. Focus group interviews
2. Analysis of 850 QuestionPoint live chat transcripts
3. Online surveys
   - 137 VRS Users
   - 175 VRS librarians
   - 184 VRS Non-users
4. Telephone interviews
   - 76 VRS Users
   - 100 VRS librarians
   - 107 VRS Non-users
VRS User Focus Group Questions

1. What do you like best about VRS?
2. What don’t you like about VRS?
3. What most influences your decision to use VRS?
4. How would you like to see VRS improved?
5. How would you compare your VRS experiences to face-to-face, email, or phone interactions with librarians?
6. When you decide to seek help from a librarian, how do you decide which format to use?
“I was on the site (VR) at 2 or 3 in the morning and it felt personalized. I don’t know, I felt like I was the only person the other person had to talk to and they took the time out.”

(Seeking Synchronicity focus group participant)
“I’ve always thought that the library was a good source if you have a few months to spend on a paper.”

(Seeking Synchronicity focus group participant)
“It’s like, it’s like, you don’t want to go “So which shelf are you pointing at?” Because, I mean, once they do their famous point, it’s just like…”

(Seeking Synchronicity focus group participant)
DIARIES
Diaries

• Keep directions minimal and open
• Offer participants a variety of ways to report
  • Written
  • Photo
  • Video
  • Audio
• Data can be rich and detailed, but is self-reported
• Does not require researcher presence

(Connaway & Radford, 2017)
1. Explain a time in the past month when you were SUCCESSFUL in completing an ACADEMIC assignment. What steps did you take?

2. Think of a time fairly recently when you struggled to find appropriate resources to help you complete an ACADEMIC assignment. What happened?
USU7 Diary May 2011

Good Evening Dr. Lanclos,

Here is my journal for this month:

I'm constantly doing quick researches on random things that come up through-out the day. Now that I have an itouch, anytime I have a question or something my friend's want to know, I like to look up the answer through the internet.
1. My friends and I wanted to know the history of bloody Mary. I searched "the history of bloody Mary" in the google search box and the first website was wikipedia. As much as they say not to use it, wikipedia is always the first website, so of course I'm going to go there since it makes researching so much easier. When I got to the page, it referenced the drink more than the history and origin itself, so it didn't help much. But I decided that with the brief history it gave me, it was enough.
2. Most of the time when I'm searching things up that is not academically, I don't go too much in depth with the results of the search. The only time I have lately is when I was looking for a wedding venue in Florida that was near the beach. It started out complicated because I wanted a place near Tampa, but nothing would come up. So I had to search for botanical gardens on the west coast of Florida that was a good distance from the beach, and it was very hard. Even though I specifically searched up botanical gardens, random gardens would come up and I had to go to each website to see which ones allowed weddings there. It was hard to find something specific that met my criteria but after 30 minutes, I finally found one.
OBSERVATIONS
“Perhaps the most convenient method of studying the consequences of this law will be to follow the reader from the moment he enters the library to the moment he leaves it…”

(Ranganathan, 1931, 337)
Participant/Immersive Observations

• Move into the setting as deeply as possible
• Disturb participants as little as possible
• Participant observation
  • Open, direct interaction and observation as part of the group
• Structured vs. unstructured

(Connaway & Radford, 2017)

Image: https://www.flickr.com/photos/njla/3306454031/ by NJLA: New Jersey Library Association / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
You are interested in taking free courses from the WebJunction course catalog. Please go to the first task.

Please go to webjunction.org before proceeding
You are interested in participating in free courses and webinars offered by WebJunction.
A. Find where you can enroll in free library-specific courses and webinars.

(Connaway & Radford, 2017, p. 274)
MAPPING
Cognitive Mapping

-Participant draws a map of the area of interest
-Fast and easy to conduct
-Small time commitment from participants
-Can be ambiguous or difficult to interpret
Mapping Diaries

- Give participants a map & ask them to record their movements
- Can use maps as basis for individual interviews

(Clark, 2007, p. 49)
Mapping

Visitors and Residents Sample Maps
http://oc.lc/vrmap
NOVEL MIXED METHODS
Researching Students’ Information Choices (RSIC): Determining Identity and Judging Credibility in Digital Spaces

• 4-year IMLS funded National Leadership Grant #LG-81-15-0155
• Research questions:
  • Do STEM students differentiate among different types of digital resources at point of selection?
  • How do STEM students determine the credibility of digital resources?

Image: https://www.maxpixel.net/Australia-Skyline-Architecture-City-Port-Sydney-3939261 / Public Domain
http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/RSIC
Student Perspectives

• “What’s a preprint?”
• “I don’t really know if New York Times is a journal or a magazine.”
• “I know this is a blog because it’s by a person that wrote it.”
• “This is a journal … because of the feel of it looking like a scholarly article.”
• “This one’s a blog. Or is it a journal. Or is it a book? It’s a journal.”
• “This shouldn’t be so hard.”
WorldCat Discovery & Access

- Mixed-methods research
  - Combine log analysis with user interviews
- Two types of log analysis
  - Match session log with user
    - Use as guide for interview questions
  - Aggregate statistics
    - Categorized types of “requests” and “click events”
- Divided by type of institution
“…so looking at it had the poetic forms and then we've got the call number. So I knew that it was on the shelf so I could read it and read it effectively. That must be what it was because otherwise, I would have done an ILL request, and it would be in my office…”

(Faculty Member)
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES
Challenges: Research Environment

- Reduced funding opportunities
- Scholarly value
- Practical implications
- Weak relationships with other disciplines
- Limited communication of research and outputs
- Inconsistent quality
Challenges: Research Environment

• Data collection and analysis
  • Costs
  • Bias
  • Inaccurate and incomplete
• Sampling
• Massive amounts of data
• Evolving technologies

Image: https://www.flickr.com/photos/travisjuntara/8146930619/ by Travis Juntara / CC BY 2.0
Opportunities: Qualitative Research

- Rich data and thick description
- Can answer why and how questions
- Provides information to support decisions about resources and programs
- Strategic planning from a user perspective
- Can help motivate and increase buy-in for change
- Provides the opportunity to build relationships

(Connaway & Radford, 2017; Asher & Miller, 2011)
“By focusing on relationship building instead of service excellence, organizations can uncover new needs and be in position to make a stronger impact.”

(Mathews, 2012)
95% of teens have access to a smartphone; 89% have their own (twice as many as 2012)

Teens report being online constantly

Teens prefer YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat

Facebook use has fallen dramatically (Pundsack, 2018)
Be Proactive!

- Study young people to plan services
- They don’t adopt every new technology
- They use what’s familiar and what their peers use
I would like to thank Brittany Brannon for her assistance in preparing this presentation.
References


References


References


