Capturing the Behaviors of the Elusive User: Strategies for Library Ethnography

Lynn Silipigni Connaway, PhD
Senior Research Scientist & Director of User Research, OCLC
connawal@oclc.org
@LynnConnaway
“...a way of seeing how individuals interact and behave in situations by utilizing different qualitative data collection and analysis methods.”

(Connaway and Radford 2017, 263)
Qualitative Research Definition

A type of scientific research that:
• Seeks answers to a question
• Systematically uses predefined set of procedures to answer question
• Collects evidence
• Produces findings that:
  • Are not determined in advance
  • Apply beyond immediate boundaries of study
What is Qualitative Research?

“...a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, & memos to the self.

At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”

(Denzin and Lincoln 2005)
ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND METHODS
Ethnographic Data Collection

- Interviews
- Diaries
- Observation
- Usability Testing
Ethnographic Interviews

• Incredibly detailed data
• Time consuming
  – Establishing rapport
  – Selecting research participants
  – Transcribing observations & conversations
Conducting the Interview

1. Thematizing: Clarifying the interview’s purpose
2. Designing: Defining the interview’s purpose
3. Interviewing: Conducting the interview
4. Transcribing: Creating a written verbatim text of the interview
5. Analyzing: Figuring out the meaning of data
6. Verifying: Determining the reliability & validity of the data
7. Reporting: Telling others about the findings

(Connaway and Radford 2017, 244)
5. Have there been times when you were told to use a library or virtual learning environment (or learning platform), and used other source(s) instead?

6. If you had a magic wand, what would your ideal way of getting information be? How would you go about using the systems and services? When? Where? How?
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 and 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 throughout 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.
“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 & observation as part of the group

(Connaway and Radford 2017)
Participant/Immersive Observations

- Unstructured observation
  - No predetermined categories of behavior
  - Flexible, exploratory
  - Notes should be recorded as soon as possible
- Structured observation
  - Predeveloped observational categories
  - Rating scales and/or checklists
  - Audio and/or video recording

(Connaway and Radford, 2017)
WebJunction Observations

Scenario and Task 1

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 and Radford, 2017, p. 274)
Mapping

Visitors and Residents Sample Maps
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

From Clark (2007), “Mapping Diaries, or Where Do They Go All Day?”, p. 49
Usability Testing

- Degree to which a user can successfully learn & use a product to achieve a goal
- Evaluation research methodology
- Observation & analysis of user behavior while users use a product or product prototype to achieve a goal

(Dumas and Redish 1993, 22)
Comprised of three parts:
1. Pre-session interview
2. Scenario and task structured test
3. Post-session survey

(Tang 2017, 278)
V&R Mapping App Usability Testing

TASK

• Think of around 10 websites you use or online activities that you regularly perform. Place each of these websites or activities on the map in a way that represents how you feel you use them (as a 'Visitor' or as a 'Resident') and the typical context in which you use them ('Personal' or 'Institutional').

PROCEDURE

1. Read the task aloud
2. Using the app, complete the task while thinking aloud
3. Indicate when they felt they had completed the task
Usability Testing: Methodology

- Artificial environment (laboratory)
  - Maintain more control
  - May provide more specific data on a particular feature
- Natural environment
  - Better holistic representation of real people doing real work

(Tang 2017, 278)
ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA ANALYSIS TOOLS AND METHODS
Ethnographic Analysis

- Use people’s own categories
- Avoid assuming what one will find
- Complementary to quantitative methods
- Retain ‘richness’/‘thick description’
- Numerous compatibility

(Asher 2017, 264)
(Connaway and Radford 2017, 282)
Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

- Contain all data sources
- Creating & applying codes
- Queries
- Visualizations
- Reports

(Connaway and Radford 2017)
• Draw on data...in service of developing new conceptual categories
• Develop inductive abstract analytic categories through systematic data analysis
• Emphasize theory construction rather than description or application of current theories

(Connaway and Radford 2017)
“A major strategy for analysis of qualitative data is the use of the constant comparative method, which embraces ‘constant comparisons’ defined as ‘the analytic process of comparing different pieces of data against each other for similarities and differences.’”

(Connaway and Radford 2017, 298)
Conversation Analysis
• Context & social conduct

Discourse Analysis
• The library within a larger social & cultural context

(Connaway and Radford 2017)
Challenges: Ethnographic Research

- Data collection & analysis
  - Costs and time
  - Bias
- Sampling
  - Not generalizable
Opportunities: Ethnographic Research

- Rich data and thick description
- Can answer why and how questions
- Provides information to support decisions about resources and services
- Can help motivate and increase buy-in for change
- Provides the opportunity to build relationships

(Connaway and Radford, 2017; Asher and Miller, 2011)
“The creative process is not like a situation where you get struck by a single lightning bolt. You have ongoing discoveries, and there are ongoing creative revelations. Yes, it’s really helpful to be marching toward a specific destination, but, along the way, you must allow yourself room for your ideas to blossom, take root, and grow.”

–Carlton Cuse
References


Questions & Discussion

Lynn Silipigni Connaway, PhD
Senior Research Scientist & Director of User Research
connawal@oclc.org
@LynnConnaway

Because what is known must be shared.