Lilian H. Smith Library

Field Notes

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T01 – HAPLOS ENGINEERING TUT 0102
Introduction of Community

The Lillian H. Smith library is a Toronto Public Library branch with a focus on children’s literature (first floor), and hosts two special research collections, the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy (third floor), and the Osbourne Collection of Early Children’s books (fourth floor).

Reason for Selection

This community was ultimately chosen to follow up on for the field notes for two principle reasons:

1. **Form of Contact** - Out of the five communities that were contacted by phone and email, Bryce MacNaughton [1.1] (follow-up email extract [1.3]), the active services specialist and community adult outreach librarian, uniquely allowed a physical meet-up with our team. Additionally, the library is located at ~ 5 minutes walking distance from the Bahen Centre for Information Technology [2]. These factors correlated with our team’s fifth metric for a good community (second tutorial session) [3], and allows for a richer range of field note observations and resultant discussion.

2. **Distinctive perspective** – Amongst the communities contacted, the Lillian H. Smith library was the community in which I had more of a distinct perspective during the interaction. For instance, when contacting the Child Development Institute, the communication was done as a whole (eg. writing the email collaboratively), rather than individually, which limits the different perspective the team can bring about the community.

Summary and Evaluation of Direct Evidence

Two visits were conducted to the library. The first (Jan. 24) consisted of an conversational interview overt interaction with Bryce MacNaughton [1.1] and a tour of the building. The second (Jan. 26) consisted of a covert, naturalistic observation of the first and third floor, and a conversational interview with the department head of the Merril Collection, Lorna Toolis [1.2].

In the early stages of contact with the community, a formal, unstructured interview was used, as it is optimal in gaining a greater sense of the community as we let its members tell the story [4], and eliminate potential anchoring on our part.

From the first visit, we scheduled a meet-up with Bryce and conducted the interview with a tour of the first two floors of the library. Here is a summary (in text) and evaluation of the findings (in italics).

- **Location and Safety [5.1]**: Two security guards are employed at the library, and the principle reason was found to be because across the street from the library is CAMH, a centre for addiction and mental health, as well as its location in the heart of a major city. Bryce mentioned that patrons with substance abuse issues have risked the safety of staffs before.
  
  - This issue may be hard to tackle with an engineering solution as it deals with the physical location of the library. Furthermore, the development of an engineering solution puts the
jobs of the security guards at risk, which is something to consider when evaluating all of the stakeholder’s requirements.

- **Implementation of Technology [5.2]:** A large part of the librarian’s time is dedicated to helping older clients with newer technologies such as e-books. Bryce noted that although most of these older clients have the device necessary, it can be difficult to communicate to them instructions on very simple commands [5.2.1]. The tour also revealed that the library renovation is to enlarge the computer room in which to hold basic computer classes. [5.2.2 and 5.2.3]
  - *Developing a solution for this issue can be potentially beneficial for both the elders that use these services, and the librarians, who are currently understaffed, as Bryce identified that this takes up a lot of their time. The learning process can be a major difficulty for older users [7] and the solution should focus on aiding the independent learning process for the elders.*

- **Thin Spine of Books [5.3]:** All books in the library have call number stickers (Fig. 1), but some books that have especially thin spines are forced to have these stickers on the cover of the book rather than on the spine (Fig. 2). Bryce speculated that readers searching for a specific book would have a harder time finding their books as they would have to pull the book out to look at the cover. This is especially prominent in this library, as they specialize in children’s books, with classically thinner spines.
  - *This opportunity can be potentially solved in a very simplistic manner, but that might be the factor that leads to a more interesting solution as our team tries to optimize a design that already seems simplistic.*

![Fig. 1: Example of call number stickers](image1.png)  ![Fig. 2: Example of books with thin spines](image2.png)

The second visit’s naturalistic observation was made in the first and third floor. I began with descriptive content of strict observations [6 in red], and later included reflective content [8], where I made speculations and asked questions [6 in blue]. These observations helped support previously made claims. For instance, I noted the position of the security guards and the unkept appearance of many patrons, which correlated with what Bryce had said previously. These patrons did not seem to be of danger to anyone however, and the security guards never mediated during my observations.
On the third-floor Lorna told us of the preventive methods the library possesses to ensure the safety of rare books [6.1], such as keeping the books in a “cold stack” (dark and ~19°C), using book crates (Fig. 3), keeping a locker, laminating the books, and using buffer cardstock boxes for storing the books (Fig. 4).

The third-floor research collection staff were especially concerned with maintaining the conditions of the rare books, as this is principally the topic that the stakeholders wanted to discuss. They also clearly expressed that they are not interested in digitizing the rare books [6.1.1], and even expressed some distaste in how much the e-book companies charge the libraries [6.1.2]. It is likely worthy to investigate further existing technology in maintaining the conditions of books, and their effectiveness.

Next Steps

1. Speak to the security guards and perform a semi-structured interview [4] and discuss the following:
   - How often do you get involved with the patrons of the library? Who are those who cause disruption (CAMH? Homeless?)
   - How to facilitate their jobs to aid them (rather than replace them) in keeping the library safe

2. Conduct more naturalistic observations, with a greater focus on the following:
   - The users of the children’s books – Do they take out the books to see the labels? Is the searching process significantly more difficult due to this factor?

3. Contact Lorna Toolis and ask for a tour of the Cold stack room.

4. Research the effectiveness of pre-existing book maintenance and restoration techniques.
Appendix

[1] Lillian H. Smith employee business cards and follow-up contacts

[1.1] Business card (Bryce MacNaughton)  

[1.2] Business card (Lorna Toolis)

[1.3] Follow-up email extract (Bryce MacNaughton)

University of Toronto Engineering Project -- Thank you

Jan 24 (5 days ago)

Hello Bryce,

We would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to give us a tour of the library. The meeting was very informative and helpful for us and our project.

For your reference, we have attached our team profile, and course profile in this email.

Thanks again.

Sincerely,

Team Haplos

Jan 27 (2 days ago)

You’re welcome - and good luck with your project. I’d love to hear about when when you have a proposal.

Take care.

Bryce MacNaughton
Librarian, Lillian H. Smith Branch
239 College Street, M5T 1R5
416-392-7739
l.macnaughton@torontopubliclibrary.ca

Table 3.1
Kinds of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Interview</th>
<th>Knowledge Required</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Formal Structured | Extensive          | Standardized
                      Easy to use
                      Easy to summarize
                      Data can be gathered quickly | Responses are limited to the questions included
                      Limited control over the interview by the participant | Summarizing population characteristics or trends
                      Gathering data for testing of hypotheses |
| Formal Unstructured | Minimal          | Creates maximum space for the participant to tell his or her story
                      Maximum control over the interview by the participant | Discussion can be wide ranging, easy to lose focus | First interview |
| Formal Guided     | Minimal            | Planned questions give a common starting point for early interviews | Danger of inadvertently limiting descriptions | First interview |
| Formal Semi-structured | Modest          | Allows interviewer to follow up on ideas raised by participants | Participants not necessarily all asked the same questions
                      More complicated to analyze | Later in a study to seek clarification
                      Focus groups |

Interviews for the Early Phases of Qualitative Studies

When sufficient knowledge is not available to guide the development of interview questions, a different approach to interviewing is required. In this case, the researcher must find a way to begin sketching out the dimensions of the information that will eventually be used to answer the research question. Two kinds of interviews are particularly helpful in this regard, unstructured interviews and guided interviews. Excerpts from hypothetical interviews using both of these formats are included in the Appendix.

Unstructured Interviews

The objective of an unstructured interview is to begin a relationship with the study participant and create a space within which the participant feels free to tell his or her story. The participant thus has maximum control over the interview process (Corbin & Morse, 2003). As shown in the unstructured interview included in the Appendix, the interviewer using this format does not have any “questions” that are “asked” per se, but requests information by introducing some very broad topics for discussion within the context of a general conversation. For example, if the research question were focused on the experience of becoming a parent, the researcher might begin the interview by saying “Please describe something that has happened to you that would help me understand what becoming a parent...
Field Notes Day 1. (January 24, 2017)

Specific Challenges

4. Staff across the street have mental health issues.

4. A lot of patrons have substance abuse issues.

5. Issue for staff. (5.1)

- Children's books thin space. (5.3)

- Need to put call number. (5.3)

- Need to put on leave. (5.3)
[5.2.3] occasionally unsafe
2 full-time security guards -> high security
leather benches

Bookshelf
1st floor: normal library (can borrow)
2nd floor: children, 3rd floor: adult
3rd floor: research collection (can) public, but
can't take it out

4th floor: Osborne collection of early children's
books (research)

- Different length of audience
  - a lot of subcommunity
- William: 1st children librarian
  - 4 shelf children's literature collection
  - fairly well-used by families and children

- Public libraries: almost always in use
  - a lot of half-filled shelves
- Many books
  - not a lot of half-filled shelves

- Small size: 10-15 students for children
  - also allows the librarian to see everything

- Space: needs higher shelves
  - Go through collection and loan for damaged books
  - out of date, unpopular

- Non-fiction books
  - newspapers, magazines, and new materials

- 10 benches -> break up into 6 areas
  - head of areas order books for whole area

- Basement: program room

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Field Notes: Observations

1st Floor

- Security Guard
- One security guard stands by the doors and does not enter the rooms. No other guards.

- What is the 2nd Security Guard? 2nd security guard operates separately from the 1st one.
- No evidence of second guard...

- Guard sometimes seen carrying many bags (lights, backpacks)

3rd Floor

- Room with large, high ceiling.
- Some books and papers are scattered on the floor.
- Some books are in plastic bags.

- Book collection seen.
- Books are well-organized.

- Some books mentioned:
  - "The Theory of Everything"
  - "The Origin of Species"

- Books not allowed to be taken out.

- Possible use: quiet study space (mainly to use out books)
- At 2:30 am, ~5 people had (all wearing independently)

- Main collection: Science, Fiction, Speculation, and Poetry

- Cold storage: books kept in the dark and cold so they last longer
- These books are not made to last very long so need to be kept in specific conditions

[6.1]
[6.1] 6.1

[6.1.1] Not interested in designing the books

[6.1.2] Books used 15-20 times to the library compared to individual 10X.


Acquisition of computer skills by older people requires new learning of an unfamiliar mechanism. Finding and gaining access to appropriate opportunities in the community can be a major difficulty. Another obstacle to the acquisition of computer proficiency stems from the possible learning barriers attributed to later life (Hummert, Nussbaum, & Wiemann, 1992). Older people are sometimes seen as slow in adoption of new technologies. These stumbling blocks to participation in cyberspace may distance older adults from computer technology and, inadvertently, may further marginalize them from the mainstream of modern society.

General Guidelines for the Descriptive Content
- Describe the physical setting.
- Describe the social environment and the way in which participants interacted within the setting. This may include patterns of interactions, frequency of interactions, direction of communication patterns (including non-verbal communication), and patterns of specific behavioral events, such as, conflicts, decision-making, or collaboration.
- Describe the participants and their roles in the setting.
- Describe, as best you can, the meaning of what was observed from the perspectives of the participants.
- Record exact quotes or close approximations of comments that relate directly to the purpose of the study.
- Describe any impact you might have had on the situation you observed (important).

General Guidelines for the Reflective Content
- Note ideas, impressions, thoughts, and/or any criticisms you have about what you observed.
- Include any unanswered questions or concerns that have arisen from analyzing the observation data.
- Clarify points and/or correct mistakes and misunderstandings in other parts of field notes.
- Include insights about what you have observed and speculate as to why you believe specific phenomenon occurred.
- Record any thoughts that you may have regarding any future observations.

[9] Additional Site Pictures