
Introduction

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In 1977 Dervin admonished the library and information science (LIS) professionals to stop measuring library activities and start looking at the people who use the library to determine how they use it, how they find information, and how the information helps them. I suggest that this article was a “wake-up” call, challenging our field to adopt new research methods that would allow us to learn more about our clients than about, for example, the number of items circulated. LIS researchers have responded to this call. Powell (1999) and McKechnie and colleagues (2002) have documented the increasing use of research methods adopted from other disciplines. Over the years, *Library Trends* has devoted several issues to research methods. This issue joins the earlier ones and provides information on a variety of traditional and “not so traditional” research methods.

Before describing briefly each contribution, it is important to define “research methods” because as Williamson, Burstein, and McKemish (2000) pointed out, research methods and data collection techniques are sometimes difficult to distinguish. For example, observation can be both a method and a data collection technique. These authors state “a research method provides a design for undertaking research, which is underpinned by theoretical explanation of its value and use” (p. 11). Data collection techniques are part of the method.

For this volume of *Library Trends*, each author was invited to describe a particular research method and include examples of its use in LIS studies. Articles in this issue are arranged alphabetically by research method and include case study, content analysis, critical incident, discourse analysis, ethnography, evaluation research, life history, longitudinal design, meta-analysis, observation, observation of babies and toddlers, and systematic reviews.

Using a multiple-case studies method, Zach studied the information-seeking behavior of orchestra and museum administrators. Before describing her study, Zach provides a definition of a case study, its historical development, and its use in LIS research. She then briefly describes her study, including sample selection, data collection, and analysis, and her findings.

White and Marsh define content analysis and outline its roots. They describe the procedures involved in both quantitative and qualitative content analysis and provide detailed information on coding and analyzing the data. These authors include two valuable tables: one lists examples of content analysis in LIS research from 1991 to 2005, while the other summarizes the characteristics of qualitative and quantitative content analysis.

Radford has used critical incident technique in her studies of reference encounters. In her article she briefly describes the essence of critical incident technique and illustrates its value in her study of the perceptions of fifth and seventh grade students' encounters with public librarians. A copy of the questionnaire and the instructions to the people who administered it are included in her article.

Budd describes the two major families of discourse analysis, including linguistic-based analysis and culturally or socially based discursive practices. The potential of both families for LIS inquiry and examples from LIS literature are discussed.

Williamson discusses the undertaking of research using a constructivist philosophical framework and ethnographic techniques. A brief discussion of positivism and interpretivism is followed by a section on ethnography. She includes examples from two of her studies: the information-seeking behavior of women with breast cancer, and the information-seeking behavior of online investors.

In his article on evaluation research, Powell outlines reasons for conducting this type of research. After reviewing the general principles and types of evaluation research, he provides information on planning and conducting this type of study, data analysis, and writing the evaluation report. He also includes a list of additional readings on evaluation.

Labaree explores the use of life histories as a research method and the ways it can contribute to new understandings about the experiential relationships between libraries and clients. He covers the essential elements of life history research, describes how to design this type of study, and examines issues related to organization insiderness and internal validity and textual authority.

Davis defines "longitudinal design" as a flexible research approach that can be applied to a wide range of topics involving change over time. She illustrates the use of this type of research in her study of leaders who emerged in the archival profession during the 1980s when archivists developed the

first set of descriptive standards in response to trends in the automation of library cataloging.

In his article on meta-analysis, Saxton provides an explanation of meta-analysis and briefly describes its application in LIS studies. He also provides guidelines for reporting quantitative research, which will enhance the ability of future researchers to perform a meta-analytic study.

While there is considerable literature on observation, the focus of Baker's article is on the roles researchers can adopt in their attempts to gain an in-depth understanding of people in their natural environment. While LIS researchers have played various roles, no instances of complete participation were uncovered in the literature.

McKechnie discusses the practicalities of implementing participant observation in storytime programs for very young children. Included in this article is a list of recommended observation, child development, and research methods texts.

McKibbon outlines the steps involved in conducting a systematic review. This type of review has been widely acclaimed in the health sciences field and is beginning to receive attention by LIS researchers.

As in any edited work, there is some duplication of material. For example, a number of authors have discussed the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. No attempt was made to reduce the overlap because, as editor of this volume, I assume that readers will consult a specific article that relates to her/his individual interest. We hope that this volume of *Library Trends* sheds new light on the various research methods described therein. For any LIS researcher, this volume contains a wealth of information not only in the description of each method and its use in LIS studies but also in the numerous citations to seminal works on each research method.

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