Thesis Summary

Tentative Title: Examining the Red Thread of Information in Young Children’s Hobbies and Interests
Anticipated Date of Proposal Defense: May 2016
Committee: Dr. Ross Todd (Chair), Marie Radford, Vikki Katz, Roger Hart

Summary of Research Project

Conducting research with young children (8 years of age and younger) has been articulated in the research literature as being notoriously difficult. Young children may not have the verbal language (McKechnie, 2000) or reading (Cooper, 2002) abilities to engage in the types of research methods that are typically utilized in the field of library and information science (LIS). Perhaps reflecting these methodological challenges, there exist gaps in the body of literature related to children’s information seeking and use. LIS researchers who have worked with children and young adults have focused on children between the ages of nine and eighteen years (Shenton, 2004a; Spink & Heinstrom, 2011), with comparatively little research completed with children eight years of age and younger (exceptions to this include the work of Shenton and colleagues (e.g. Beautyman & Shenton, 2009; Shenton, 2004b; Shenton & Dixon, 2003); Cooper, 2002, 2004; and Spink, Danby, Mallan, & Butler, 2010). Additionally, LIS researchers have tended to focus on children’s information seeking and use in educational contexts (Case, 2012; Todd, 2003). However, according to Hogan (2005), “we often confuse children’s language ability with their general intellectual ability, and... when we attempt to make ourselves understood to children we find them to be more competent than we expected” (p. 34). The dissertation research described here will address these gaps in the literature by examining young children’s engagement with information in relation to their hobbies and interests, drawing on research methods utilized in the field of childhood studies.

Writing about information literacy, Bruce, Somerville, Stoodley, and Partridge (2014) state that researchers and practitioners “need to continue to challenge ourselves about how we avoid or limit the influence of existing or dominant understandings of information and learning when researching under-represented communities and contexts” (p. 183). ‘Information experience’ is a relatively new framework in LIS used to understand how people engage with information, and can be “conceptualized as the way in which people experience or derive meaning from the way in which they engage with information and their lived worlds as they go about their daily life and work” (Bruce, Davis, Hughes, Partridge, & Stoodley, 2014, p. 6). This framework allows for the conceptualizations of information and information sources of the population under study to be the focus of the research, rather than the researcher’s conceptualizations.

Children’s engagement with information in their everyday lives remains a largely understudied area in LIS. The dissertation research proposed here seeks to address these gaps in the current literature by exploring the ways in which children conceptualize and engage with
information related to their hobbies and interests. By gaining an understanding of the ways in which children seek and use information in order to satisfy their own curiosities, parents, librarians, teachers, and others who work with children will be better able to assist them in their pursuit of information, not only in relation to their own interests but also in more formal learning environments such as the classroom.

My proposed dissertation research will seek to address the following questions:

1. What is experienced as informing to young children when engaged in their hobbies and interests?
2. How is this information related to their hobbies and interests experienced by young children?

Much work has been done in the field of childhood studies to find new and creative ways of engaging young children in the research process. James, Jenks, and Prout (1998), leading researchers in this field, suggest the use of what they describe as "task-centred activities" (p. 190) as research methods better able to elicit children’s opinions/thoughts than standard interviews, questionnaires, and other traditional research methods. These task-centred activities can take any number of forms, including drawings, mapping, photography, games, drama and role play (for further discussion regarding the use of creative methods in research with children, see also Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; and Veale, 2005). This type of research approach not only allows for children to communicate in ways more suited to their age and abilities, but also provides for an engaging experience for the child participants (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Hill, 2006; Leitch, 2008). In addition, childhood studies researchers often incorporate multiple methods into their research projects; according to Garbarino and Stott (1992), “the more sources of information an adult has about a child, the more likely that adult is to receive the child’s messages properly” (p. 15).

Following the suggestions of these and other authors, the proposed dissertation research will make use of several task-centered activities within interviews with children between the ages of 4 and 8 years. This proposed research will utilize the task-centred activities of drawing, mapping and photography. While a full discussion of the proposed research methods is outside of the scope of this research statement, in each of the three methods listed above, the materials created by the children will be used as the basis for semi-structured interviews with the children about the ways in which the people, places, and things captured in the drawings, maps, and photographs relate to their interests and related information activities. The data collected during these interviews will be analyzed for common themes in representations of information sources, information seeking, use, and sharing, as well as the affective components related to their engagement with information using the constant comparison method (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

At the doctoral workshop, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the methodological challenges posed by both the population under study and the methods of data collection and analysis. I would also like to discuss the challenges associated with working with the emerging framework of information experience.
References


Sarah C. Barriage
4849 BPO Way • Piscataway, NJ 08854
(732) 407-3307 • sarah.barriage@rutgers.edu

Education

PhD, Library and Information Science 2013 - present
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ

Master of Library and Information Science 2010 - 2011
University of Western Ontario
London, ON

Bachelor of Arts (Honours), Psychology 2005 - 2009
Queen’s University
Kingston, ON

Publications

Journal Articles (Peer Reviewed)

Barriage, S. (in preparation). “I know it, but I don’t know the word to call it” (Gavin, age 3): Exploring the information experience of young children in a daycare setting. To be submitted to Library & Information Science Research.


Book Chapters


Other Publications


Conference Presentations

Published Conference Proceedings (Peer-Reviewed)


Conference Presentations


Goebel, N., & Barriage, S. (2013, July). Considering the impact of a human library on lives and undergraduate research. Poster presented at Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference, Saskatoon, SK.


Research Experience

Research Assistant 2014 - 2015
Principal researcher: Dr. Rebecca Reynolds, School of Communication & Information, Rutgers University
Analyzed video data regarding middle schoolers’ collaborative inquiry and resource use.

Data Collection Assistant 2010 – 2011
Principal researcher: Dr. Victoria Rubin, Faculty of Information & Media Studies, University of Western Ontario
Collected, organized, and analyzed information regarding innovation rhetoric and social media use as represented on library websites.

Research Assistant 2007 – 2009
Principal researcher: Dr. Jill Jacobson, Department of Psychology, Queen’s University
Recruited and scheduled participants, administered various forms of testing to participants, acted as a confederate, coded data, and performed data entry.

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant, Rutgers University
Assisted in undergraduate course “Retrieving and Evaluating Electronic Information” Sp. 2015
Assisted in undergraduate course “Gender and Technology” F 2014

Grader, Rutgers University
Graded student submissions for undergraduate course “IT and Learning” Sp. 2016

Work Experience

Public Services Librarian March 2012 – June 2013
Augustana Campus Library, University of Alberta
Provided reference services to undergraduate students and faculty, planned and delivered information literacy one-shot sessions across disciplines, collaborated on collection development, established and maintained library’s social media presence, updated and
maintained LibGuides and library webpages, trained library staff members, and participated in other special projects as needed.

**Library Assistant**

*September – December 2011*

**Pride Library, University of Western Ontario**

Provided reference services to users of this campus resource centre and participated in special projects as needed, including processing and cataloguing a special collection of comic books and graphic novels.

**Student Assistant**

*August – December 2011*

**Graduate Resource Centre, University of Western Ontario**

Provided reference services and basic computer support to graduate students and faculty, and participated in other special projects as needed.

**Librarian Intern, Learning & Curriculum Support**

*March – June 2011*

**McLaughlin Library, University of Guelph**

Provided reference services to students, staff and faculty, conducted library tours, participated in library instruction sessions, conducted background research on digital learning objects, and provided assistance in other special projects including the development of an information literacy service delivery model.

**Awards**

**Outstanding Practicum Project Award**

*Spring 2015*

**School of Communication & Information Doctoral Fellowship - $25,000/annum**

*2013-2014*

**OCULA Student Award**

*2012*

Presented to the winner of the Ontario College and University Library Association Lightning Strikes session at OLA Super Conference, as decided by audience votes.

**Professional Memberships and Activity**

**ASIS&T, Member**

*2014 – present*

**Progressive Librarians Guild, Member**

*2011 - present*

  **Coordinating Committee Member**

  *December 2012 - present*

  **Co-Founder, London, ON Chapter**

  *September 2011*

**Ontario Library Association, Member**

*2011 - present*
Contact Details

Participant

Sarah Barriage
PhD Candidate
School of Communication & Information
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
4 Huntington Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey USA 08901
Tel: (732) 407-3307
Email: sarah.barriage@rutgers.edu

Advisor

Dr. Ross J. Todd
Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Library and Information Science
School of Communication & Information
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
4 Huntington Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey USA 08901
Tel: (848) 932-7602, Fax: (732) 932-6916
Email: rtodd@rutgers.edu