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Chan, L. et al. 2002. Budapest Open Access Initiative. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Accessed: 18 November 2015].

Northern Collaboration User Experience LX, University of Huddersfield, 17th March 2017

**Sarah George, Subject Librarian, University of Bradford. Email:
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The User Experience LX (Learning Exchange) event was a friendly, informal workshop attended by about 50 people. Following a keynote from Andy Priestner there were five talks from librarians from around the country, interspersed with round-table discussions.

I had little prior knowledge of user experience (UX) and thus few ideas of what to expect from the workshop. It was a thoroughly fascinating day with a barrage of ideas and inspirational experiences – slightly overwhelming, but at no point did my lack of expertise stop me from understanding the proceedings. Audience interaction was lively both in person and on Twitter: #nclxux was trending by the afternoon, not bad for a small library workshop on what could be seen as a niche subject, especially as many of us had run out of battery by lunchtime (guilty!).

The day started with Andy Priestner issuing a call to arms to stop using our traditional methods of gathering feedback: he homed in on surveys and focus groups (both attitudinal methods) for particular ire. Survey answers are often what the participants think they ought to say rather than what they actually think and get you the extremes of opinion. They generally produce bland responses as people aren't that interested in the library (a hard but self-evident truth for a room full of librarians to swallow). Focus groups tend to produce the results the participants think the conveners want to hear, suffer from group-think and lack contributions from introverts. To illustrate the failings of these methods, Andy pointed out that surveys produced New Coke and focus groups almost prevented the re-birth of Doctor Who. Both methods suffer from 'the myth of the rational library user' whose decisions are entirely logical and thoroughly thought through, rather than being due to convenience, expedience and habit.

However, Andy and the other speakers did suggest an array of alternative methods: indeed, for me, the range of methods used and the diversity of settings was the most interesting aspect of the day. Among the methods discussed were:

- Observation. This can range from a observing a pre-warned student completing a particular task to free-form observation of an entire space or particular service-point. One of the simplest and most powerful methods, it can be undertaken at any point and can take very little staff time or effort.
- Touchstone tours. Ask a student to pretend that you are a new user and take you on a tour around the library, or ask them to tell you how to do a particular task. You emphasise that there are no "wrong" answers, you want their experience. Observing their priorities and methods can be most enlightening – the omissions as much as the inclusions. This can also be a virtual method – Keren Stiles from the Open University used screen-sharing to observe distance learning students doing their information searching as a way of evaluating their website.
- Love/break up letters. Ask students to write a letter to the library or a certain service, telling them why they love them or why they have to break up.
- Photo elicitation. The University of Teeside (Julie Archibald and Jackie Oliver) ran a photo competition asking students to submit photos of their favourite and least favourite areas of the library, and how they use them. The beanbags were very popular.
- Cognitive mapping. Ask volunteers to draw either a space or a task. They change pen colour after 2 minutes, which shows you their priorities (much discussion about whether this was useful, especially in task-mapping, which is likely to be chronological). This shows you their priorities: as with touchstone tours, the omissions are as interesting as the inclusions.

- Semi-structured search tasks. Users are observed using screen-capture software whilst conducting a search task
- Coffee and chat. Jeff Woods (Liverpool) used informal sessions to gather feedback – they lasted as long as the coffee held out.
- User diaries. Ask students to record their reflections on their use of the library or a particular task.
- Graffiti Wall / feedback board. A very popular method that at Teeside garnered more feedback than other methods put together. Staff need to be primed with wet wipes in case of rude words!
- Interviews. A more familiar method but more powerful when used in conjunction with other UX methods to frame the questions.

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Ned Potter (University of York) suggested the following procedure for anyone wanting to dip their toe into UX:

- Choose a space or demographic
- Carry out observation and cognitive mapping
- Use these to design questions for interviews
- Design changes using rapid prototyping
- Share the findings
- Start again from the beginning.

Another excellent aspect to the day was that all of the talks involved at least some experiences that could be reproduced with no funding and minimal staff effort: Andy Priestner recounted a very productive piece of research involving sitting at a library's entry gate for a few hours watching students trying to swipe in and recording problems. Even the project presented by Ned Potter, a massive 5-stage affair with hundreds of participants, had started as a small pilot of 20 students. Some of the changes made as a result of the studies were also minor but impactful, such as a charging cabinet for smartphones, a signage review, changing the arrangement of the furniture rather than moving it back every morning and providing blankets for use in the library.

We were warned that there are barriers to UX, not least that it is new and unpredictable and institutions will often be scared. Carl Barrow (Hull) listed a range of potential barriers, but many boiled down to fear of failure and lack of time. He left us with this thought: 'You don't need superpowers to do UX but you do need faith, time, resource and commitment'.

There is enormous scope for further work coming out of this workshop; personally I felt that the creation of a UX methods toolkit would be enormously valuable. Anyone new to this area could easily be overwhelmed by the number of available methods, so outlining how they are done together with the benefits and drawbacks of each would be extremely helpful. Particularly interesting would be highlighting methods that require little or no budget and those which do not rely on volunteer participants, both issues that have bedevilled many library research projects. Many thanks to all for a highly enjoyable day.

Resources

The storify at <https://storify.com/hudlib/northern-collaboration-learning-exchange-on-user-e> gives a good flavour of proceedings.

There is a full programme at <https://northerncollaboration.org.uk/content/user-experience-lx-bookings-now-open>