Information World Mapping: A Participatory, Visual, Elicitation Activity for Information Practice Interviews

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ABSTRACT
In an increasingly visually-oriented world, researchers within and beyond LIS can benefit from exploring, developing and applying creative methods for data collection and research participant engagement. Participatory, arts-involved methods can complement more traditional elicitation techniques, generating rich data that allows researchers to explore participant experiences with socially- and culturally-constructed information practices. This poster presents a novel drawing-based elicitation technique, Information World Mapping (IWM), which was developed to augment traditional qualitative interview methods. IWM combines elements of three established arts-involved methods: information horizons (Sonnenswald, Wildemuth, & Harmon, 2001), relational mapping (Radford & Neke, 2000), and Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997). Aiming to enable creative communication about the information world of the research participant as it relates to a social process of interest (e.g., making a health decision or completing a work-related task), IWM guides participants in generating drawings or maps of their personal information worlds, including key interpersonal and institutional relationships. These drawings are then used to facilitate elicitation of participants’ own stories about, and interpretations of, their information practices. A case example of IWM in practice is provided, based on a study of teenage parents’ health-related information practices.

Keywords
Information practices, information worlds, visual research methods, interview elicitation.

INTRODUCTION
In an increasingly visually-oriented world, researchers within and beyond LIS benefit from exploring, developing and applying creative methods for data collection and research participant engagement. Creative and arts-based methods, visual and otherwise, can complement more traditional (e.g., interview, survey) elicitation techniques, generating rich data that allows researchers to explore participant experiences with socially- and culturally-constructed information practices. This poster presents a novel drawing-based elicitation technique, Information World Mapping.

VISUAL ELICITATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
Social science researchers have long noted the ability of visual imagery to augment traditional observational methods of data collection. Anthropologist Collier (1957) noted early on that photographs could serve as interview aids, writing that “pictures elicited longer and more comprehensive interviews but at the same time helped subjects overcome the fatigue and repetition of conventional interviews” (p.858).

Advances in technology have increased the ease and accessibility of multi-media research, including arts-involved techniques. Contemporary arts-based research scholar Leavy (2008) asserts that “It is appropriate to use visual imagery when traditional methods cannot fully access what the researcher is after” (p. 227). Visual and other arts-involved approaches are increasingly applied in order to complement traditional data collection methods, allowing researchers to elicit richer information from study participants.

Arts-involved Research Methods with Adolescents
Use of participatory, arts-involved elicitation techniques may be particularly apt when interviewing adolescents, and a growing number of education research projects are thus incorporating arts-based methods (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). Experts in arts and human development have noted the exceptional resonance of the arts among youth populations; for example Emunah notes the “heightened creativity during adolescence” (1990, p.
102). Yonas and colleagues, found use of a visual elicitation method with youth to be “developmentally flexible and appropriate” as well as “fun, nontraditional, and provides multiple process and outcome opportunities” (Yonas et al., 2009, p. 7).

Liebenberg (2009) found that participant-generated images enabled boundary-spanning between researcher and participants across differences of culture, age, race and role, potentially reducing some barriers to adults carrying out research with youth. Bagnoli (2009) similarly found participatory visual techniques with youth to be an effective extension of the traditional qualitative interview process.

While it may be simpler to imagine the application of visual methods to concrete topics such as physically safe walking environments (Gallagher et al., 2010), several projects have successfully led youth to represent abstract concepts such as “their place at school” (Knowles & Thomas, 2002) and violence in their lives (Leavy, 2008, pp. 229–30). While information-related concepts beyond concrete sources may seem abstract to lay interview participants, there is reason to believe that they may similarly be represented via participatory, visual methods.

**Examples of Arts-involved Participatory Methods**

Relational mapping (Radford & Neke, 2000) is a drawing exercise used in psycho-social research, in which an individual is asked to draw a diagram of the relationships they have with others. Such maps often take the form of concentric circles, a “solar system,” or hub and spokes around the interviewee (Josselson, 1995, pp. 251–260), but may also be interpreted more loosely, taking on whatever form the interviewee envisions (Bagnoli, 2009).

The participatory visual method Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), which is currently quite popular within health research (Boydell, Gladstone, Volpe, Allemang, & Stasiulis, 2012; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Holm, 2008), has recently begun to show up in information practice research (Given, Opryshko, Julien, & Smith, 2011; Pollak, 2012). The method involves participant interpretation of their own photography, and is often used with aims of empowering or “giving voice” to marginalized populations.

In Sonnenwald, Wildemuth, and Harmon’s (2001) study of the information seeking of undergraduate students of low socio-economic status horizons, the researchers complemented their use of critical incident technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954) in interviews with a drawing task in which participants were asked to graphically depict the information sources in their “information horizons.” This drawing/writing task has been used to complement interviews about information seeking and sources, for example in Savolainen’s (2007) study of the information source preferences of environmental activists. Both Sonnenwald and Savolainen used the maps as stimulus for further discussion with interviewees, as well as creating schematics for preferred information sources based on the closeness and frequency with which various sources were cited.

**INFORMATION WORLD MAPPING**

Information World Mapping (IWM), a projective drawing/mapping exercise, aims to enable creative communication about the information world of the research participant. IWM taps into participants’ creativity in order to help them highlight and articulate their information-related relationships, places, and processes.

This novel, participatory, visual technique builds on Sonnenwald and colleagues’ information horizons task, drawing in elements of relational mapping in order to shift the focus from sources to practices, and leaving the format of the “map” open to interpretation. Rather than generating a list or model of information sources and seeking, the objective is to gain an understanding of information practices and processes within an individual’s information world. The scope is constrained not by type of information practice (e.g., seeking, sharing, avoiding), but rather by the non-information behaviour of interest – such as decision-making on a particular topic, or a given academic or work-related task – that is the focus of the interview.

The drawing that results is intended to guide a conversation about the ways information and information practices influence a given area of the participant’s life. The use of the images as elicitation devices rather than primarily as data for researcher analysis bears much in common with Photovoice, aspiring to give voice to the participants’ own perceptions and experiences, and facilitate the telling of their stories.

**Case Example: Using IWM with Adolescent Parents**

Information World Mapping is currently in first use within a longitudinal, mixed-methods study exploring the health-related information practices of childbearing and parenting youth. A participatory, visual exercise was deemed an appropriate elicitation technique for this study due to the developmental fit of arts-based techniques with adolescent participants, and the ability of multimedia elicitation techniques to both draw out richer data and reduce participant fatigue in interviews.

In a modification of the information horizons activity guidance script, this project asks interviewees, within the context of a longitudinal interview series, to “put yourself on this piece of paper, and then draw in the people and places and things in your life that provide health information to you, receive health information from you, or help you use health information.”

Interviewees are also provided with a brief handout that contained suggestions of “Things you might want to include in your information world,” including:

- How and where you look for information when you have a health question
• How and where you receive health information you’re not necessarily looking for
• People you share health information with, or give information to
• People, places and things that help you understand or use health information
Participants were invited, but not required, to talk while drawing. The interviewer facilitated follow-up discussion of the elements of the drawn map.

The poster will contain visual examples of story-elicitations that emerged via IWM that were not captured by traditional semi-structured and critical incident technique interviewing.

CONCLUSION
Information World Mapping is an emerging participatory, visual method for eliciting rich data regarding information practices in context.

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REFERENCES


