



Participant-driven photo-elicitation (PDPE) is a research method that combines participant-generated images with follow-up interviews.

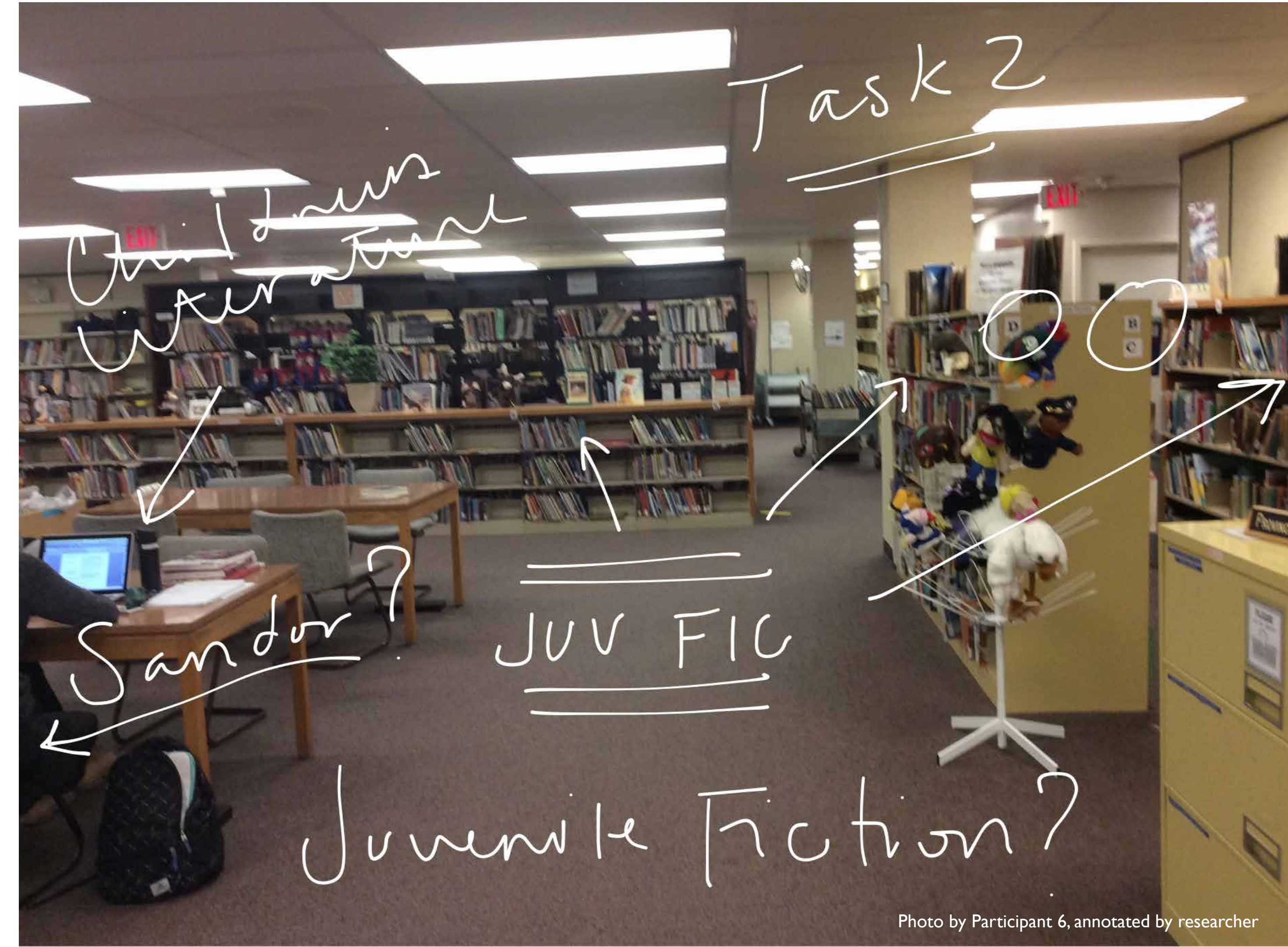
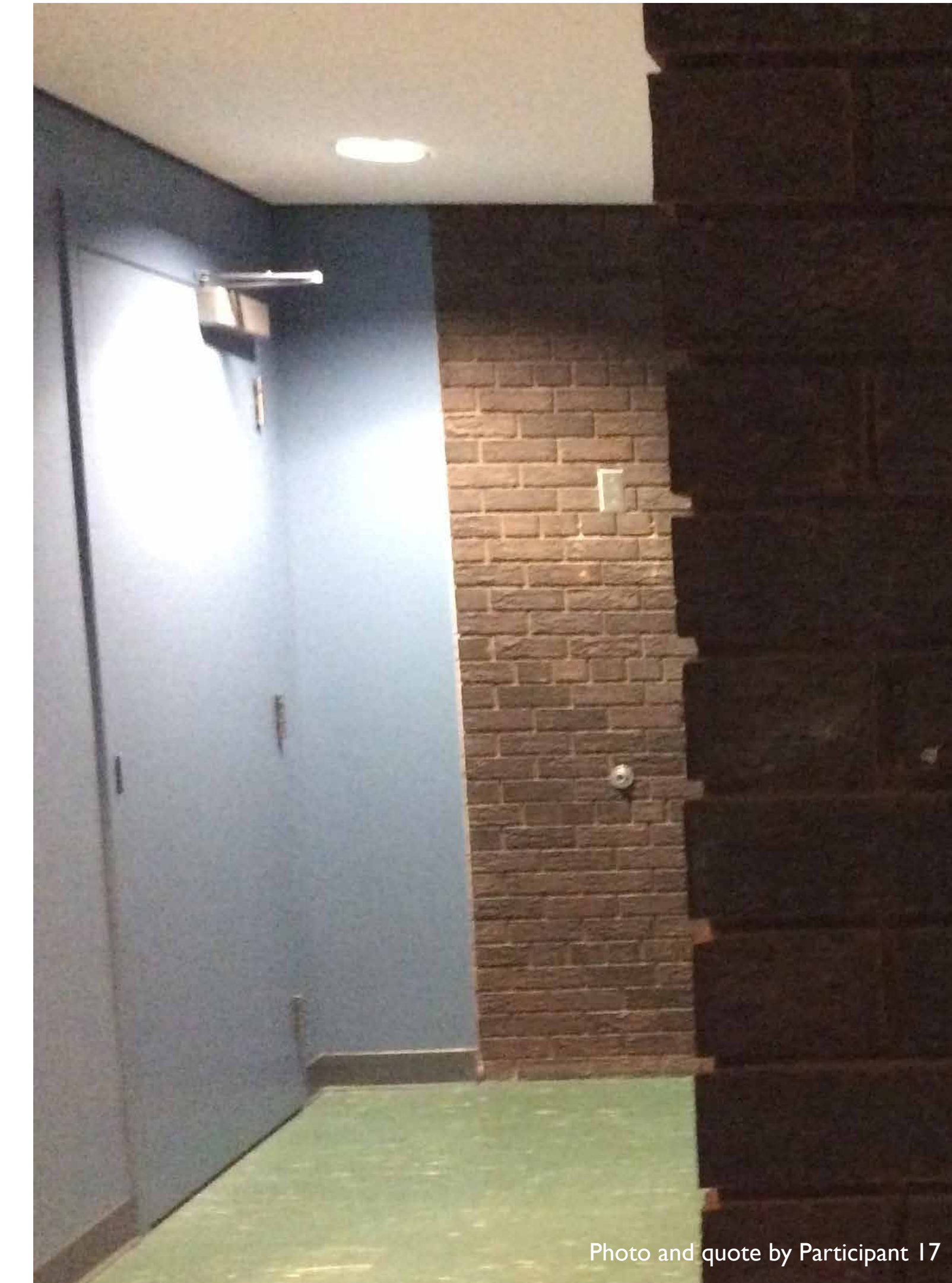
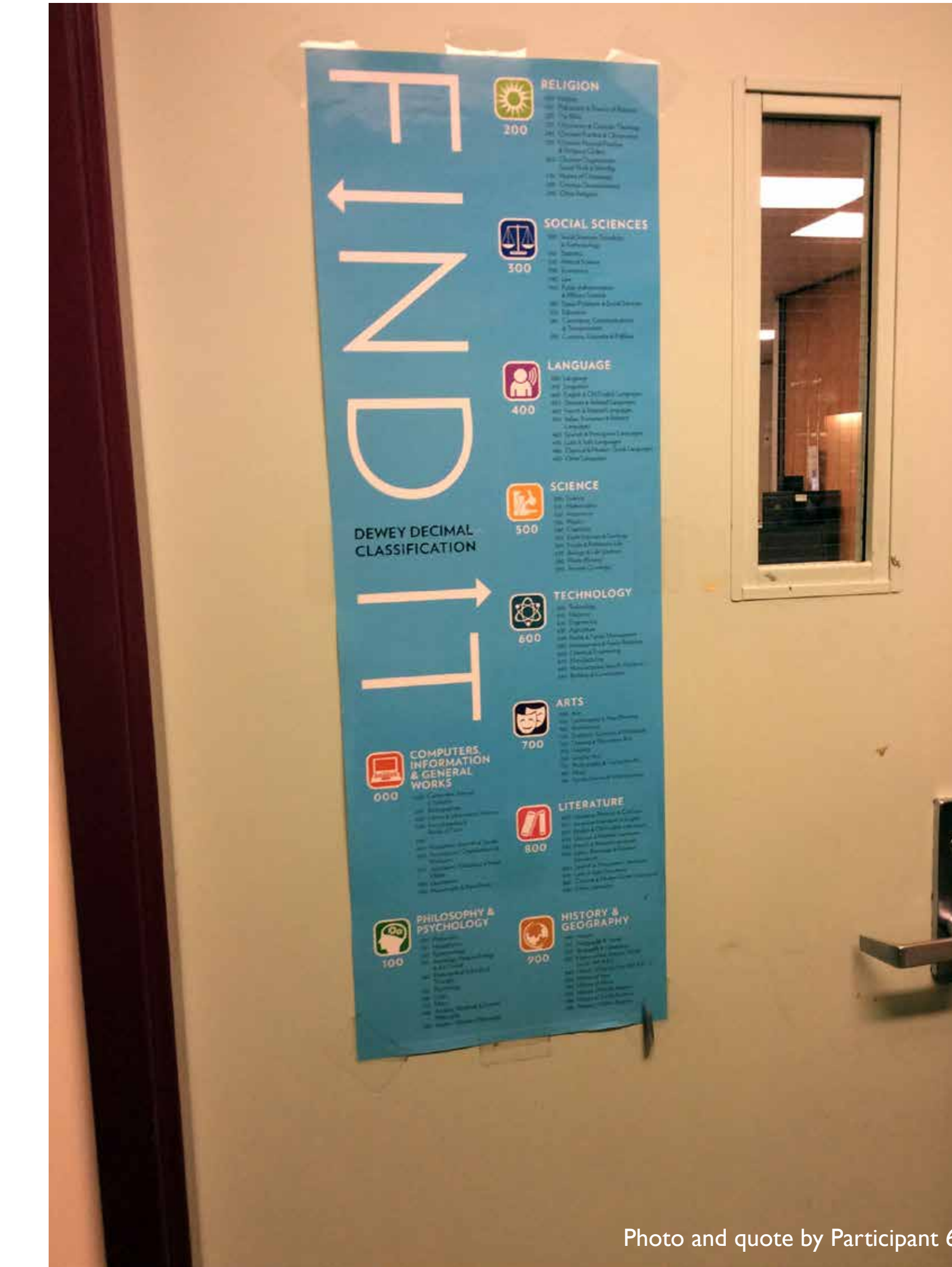


Photo by Participant 6 showing the Children's Literature Collection in the OISE Library. The annotations, made by the researcher after the interview, represent the discussion about the inconsistent signage and troublesome terminology the participant encountered in this area of the library.



“Going to the stairs and I’m like, do I keep going? Well, I know because of the last time, but I feel like there could... like signage would be helpful, especially at the top of stairs, like saying ‘you just have to go one more, just go around the corner!’”



“I found this sign but yeah, it’s not really about using this library... it says “find it” so it seems like it should be, but no... I don’t trust that sign. I don’t trust it because it’s not, um, the same, like font as other signage, so I was like, well, it’s not particular to this institution...”



“Um, and then there was this huge row of empties, which confused me... I went back and took a picture of this because just that empty section does leave you feeling like, where am I?”

“Making it possible to know”

Library wayfinding and student experience

Research Questions

- How do users navigate the library?
- Where are they successful?
- Where do they encounter barriers?
- How do they perceive library spaces?

Method

I gave participants three tasks to complete in the library and asked them to take photos along the way. When they returned, we used their photos as stimuli for one-on-one interviews.

- 17 participants (all OISE students)
- 533 photographs
- 9 hours of interview recordings

Improving Wayfinding

My primary analysis focused on identifying themes related to barriers and successes that participants experienced as they completed the photo tasks. Key navigation issues that emerged were:

- inconsistent signage, troublesome terminology, “unknowable” objects and locations.

These insights have immediate applications for the wayfinding information system at the OISE Library:

- Identification and removal or replacement of inconsistent and unnecessary signs;
- Creation of clear, consistent directories across all floors of the library;
- Planning for a complete re-design of the OISE Library wayfinding system.

Student Experience

My second phase of analysis focused on the unexpected themes that emerged from the photo interviews about participants’ library experiences:

- Participants described a complex ecosystem of signs, spaces, objects, intentions, and experiences that make a library possible to know;
- Participants sought to find items, but they also wanted to “learn the library” and its systems;
- Participants framed themselves as intentional learners, which prompted me to put a learning theory lens on understanding student experience in the library.

Students’ thoughtful insights shed light on the things I had forgotten or take for granted about my library. Their input is vital for improving library spaces.

Acknowledgements

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Related Publications

Bedi, S., & Webb, J. (2017). Through the Students’ Lens: Photographic Methods for Research in Library Spaces. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 12(2), 15-35. <https://doi.org/10.18438/B8FH33>

Bedi, S., & Webb, J. (2017). Participant-driven photo-elicitation in library settings: A methodological discussion. *Library and Information Research*, 41(125), 81-103. <http://www.lirjournal.org.uk/lir/lojs/index.php/lir/article/view/752>

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