Sharing the virtual workload
Chat Reference in Canadian Consortiums

Joseph Blonde
Concordia University Libraries
Collaboration in Virtual Reference

Virtual Reference
- Computer mediated library reference service
- Real-time (chat, IM) / asynchronous (e-mail)
- Convenient, timely assistance for remote users

Collaboration among libraries
- Staffing
- Hours of service

Chat Reference Libraries
Collaborative Virtual Reference in Canada

Survey of CARL Libraries 2004
18 of 27 offering chat reference
6 in collaboration

Ask Away BC

Ask Ontario

Novanet
Research Interests

Virtual Reference practice
  • Adaptation, communication, clients
  • Grassroots level
Coordination
  • Funding, training, support, negotiation
Professional
  • Attitudes changing over time
  • Workload, learning opportunities, career
Sustainability
  • Measuring usage
  • Growth and Size
Research Project

“The qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge”

(Kvale, Steiner. Doing interviews. Sage, 2007)

7 steps of the interview process
  • Thematizing, Designing, Interview, Transcribing, Analyzing, Verifying, Reporting

Certification of ethical acceptability for research involving human subjects

Recruiting participants

Question script
Interview Participants

Type of Library

- University Librarians: 17
- College Librarians: 9
- Public Librarians: 3
- Coordinators: 13

Consortium

- Ask Away BC: 15
- Ask Ontario: 17
Virtual Reference Practice

Libraries
- Academic - university, college / Public
- Institutional knowledge

Interaction
- Constraints
- Communication strategies
- Chat interface
- Transcript
Virtual Reference in Collaboration

Infrastructure
- Coordination
- Policies and portals
- Back chat
- Training

Professional issues
- Enthusiasm
- Quality of service
- Professional development

Clients
- Client behaviour
- Usage & resource sharing
- Privacy
Research Challenges

Completing the 7 steps

- Analyzing
- Reporting

Why is reference practice important?