Learning to Discover: Youth Information Literacy in the “I” Digital Age

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ABSTRACT
Today’s digital information environment is rich with varied types of information that is available anytime, anywhere at a user’s fingertips. While children and young adults constitute a high percent of the online population worldwide and are being characterized as “savvy,” or “born digital,” there is a need to examine how what has been considered a “distraction” in using the Web can be transformed into valuable information that these young users are able to capture and use at a later time. Existing models of information behavior in traditional environments may allow us to predict certain aspects of young users’ information seeking. However, most of these models do not account for information discovery or information encountering that occurs throughout the information seeking process. In this panel, researchers will discuss the changing nature of teaching, learning, and capturing young users’ information behaviors in the “I” digital environment. They will propose ways for developing holistic understanding of young users’ information behavior processes that encapsulate information discovery and digital inquiry.

Keywords
Digital information literacy, digital inquiry, iUser®, children, youth, young users, disruptive technologies.

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opportunistic information discovery, information encountering.

PANELISTS

The researchers report on the first phase of a study on the information behavior of 44 middle school students during an enquiry-based history project about. Using Kuhlthau’s ISP model (Kuhlthau, 1991; Kuhlthau, 2004) as the conceptual framework for the study, data were collected through observations and weekly surveys of the students, and in-depth interviews of 10 student volunteers. Through factorial analysis, we identified five major factors that characterized the students’ behaviors: 1) Goals and Objectives, 2) Knowledge and information management, 3) Consultation, 4) Positive emotions, and 5) Negative emotions. Based on these factors, we suggest an expansion to Kuhlthau’s ISP model. Results also show that students used Google and Wikipedia extensively, did not use the library, and chose to consult consistently with their teachers, parents and siblings, and to a lesser extent their classmates to complete their projects. While students, in general, were very confident in their abilities to complete their projects, they lacked certain information literacy skills that resulted in difficulties in formulating a thesis statement, which was the most important component of the project. These findings corroborate previous research that revealed the new generation users tend to surf and skim for information (Rowland et al., 2008), but may lack the deep level self-realization characteristics required during the information seeking process (Bowler & Nesset, in press).
Sanda Erdelez, University of Missouri

Information literacy and human information behavior have information seeking behavior as a shared domain of interest. There is also a conceptual connection between information literacy models and opportunistic discovery of information, especially the experiences of information encountering (Erdelez, Basic, & Levitov, 2011). In the context of student research projects, information encountering refers to situations when students search for information on one topic and come across information related to some other topic of interest. One of the goals of information literacy should be to prepare new generations of information users to use information effectively in an increasingly electronic information environment (Nutefall & Ryder, 2010). Through exposure to information encountering in information literacy models, students could learn strategies for coordinating their search experience by attending to opportunities provided in the information rich environment. Erdelez will discuss opportunities and challenges of introducing the concept of information encountering to youth through modification of information literacy models.

Ross J. Todd. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Todd first examines the problematics of both information literacy, and the digital natives/immigrants dichotomy that underpins the digital literacy agenda for children and youth in K-12 education. Against this backdrop, he will discuss selected findings from a recent New Jersey school library study (Todd, Gordon, & Lu, 2011) undertaken by the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISLL) that identifies core digital competencies enabled through school library instructional programs, from the perspective of school principals and classroom teachers, and which shed light on a more contemporary conception of information literacy in digital learning environments.

Dania Bilal. University of Tennessee.

Bilal will discuss the concept, iUser™ (Bilal, 2012) that is driven by the exponential growth of “I” technologies designed with users in mind. She will describe the characteristics of the iUser™ information behavior, needs, digital inquiry skills, information discovery, and information literacy from the perspectives of mediators (e.g., school librarians, teachers, parents). She will also share the mediators’ insights on teaching practices of inquiry-based information skills that harness, among other things, the evaluation, management, and use of information discovery during the information seeking process.

This panel will be moderated by Dania Bilal who will summarize the key ideas of the presentations and invite the audience to participate in a thirty-minute discussion of the ideas. Working with the audience, the presenters will also develop a preliminary agenda for exploring inquiry-based information literacy in the context of information behavior of the iUser™ generation in the “I” digital age. Attendees of this panel session will be encouraged to contribute thoughts on pedagogical issues, models, research methods, theories, and practices, among other things, to pursue by researchers and educators in order to develop deeper understanding of the iUser™ information needs, expectations, skills, and information discovery and use.

REFERENCES


