Information literacy programs and research: reflections.

Although in the late 1990s there was much discussion as to whether the idea of information literacy was necessary or had longevity, global interest in the phenomenon has increased rather than diminished. Information literacy standards have been developed and become widely accepted in educational systems. Research centres for information literacy have been established. Conferences continue to be held around the world with information literacy as a special focus. In Australia a series of Information Literacy conferences were followed by the Lifelong Learning Conferences, and presently early research in the field is being showcased at the RAILS conferences. The Prague Declaration (National Forum on Information Literacy, 2003) and the Alexandria Proclamation (National Forum on Information Literacy, 2005) were issued from expert meetings convened jointly by UNESCO, the US National Commission for Library and Information Science and the National Forum for Information Literacy. More recently, the International Federation of Library Associations collected and presented international perspectives (Lau, 2008); UNESCO issued papers (Catts & Lau, 2008; Horton, 2007) and conducted many train-the trainer programs under its auspices. In 2009, US President Obama established October as an information literacy month and Purdue University created an information literacy endowed chair held by Professor Sharon Weiner.

In the midst of all this activity, what has happened to the way in which we interpret the idea of information literacy in the last decade or more? The label of information literacy has certainly become widely applied, especially to library based programs and remains more popular in formal learning environments. Unfortunately, the interpretation of information literacy as a set of skills and competencies remains the primary driver for the vast majority of information literacy programs and research, reflecting the strength of that paradigm particularly in educational and workplace settings. Nevertheless, attention to alternative ways of thinking about information literacy, especially thinking about information literacy as the experience of using information in particular contexts has continued to grow. At the same time continued emergence of new technological environments has led to the idea of information literacy being broadened to incorporate digital literacy or multi-literacies. While technology continues to challenge our interpretation of information literacy, in the end it is how information is used, and the empowering experience of information use that lies at the heart of interest in information literacy.

Ultimately information literacy is about peoples' experience of using information wherever they happen to be. Information literacy is about people interacting, engaging, working with information in many contexts, either individually or in community. Emerging technologies may transform the kinds of information available and how it is engaged with. Nevertheless, we continue to need to understand the experience of information use in order to support people in their information environments. We continue to need to develop programs which reflect and enhance peoples' experiences of using information to learn in ever widening and more complex settings (Bruce, 2008; Bruce & Hughes, 2010).

In the last decade we have seen continued and increased focus on the important contribution that libraries have to learning, in public, school, academic, and special libraries. In academic libraries this has involved the establishment of positions such as library learning coordinators, or academic skills specialists, sometimes with the library adopting responsibility for many aspects of learning support. This dual focus on information and learning is vital to supporting learning in all contexts. In many ways information and learning are inseparable. Their conceptual separation is challenging, and I believe that information professionals with a deep interest in learning are well placed, first to distinguish the role of information use in learning, and then to enhance learning through attention to

effective information use in workplace and community as well as academic settings (Bruce, 2008; Bruce, Hughes & Somerville, in press, 2012; Elrod & Somerville, 2007).

Information literacy research continues to have a high profile and has become well established, internationally, as a field. The 'Seven Faces of Information Literacy' (Bruce, 1997) generated interest that I could not have foreseen. What were the main messages of the Seven Faces?

1) People experience information use in different ways, and not always in the ways that information professionals might expect
2) People experience information in different ways, as objective, subjective or transformational, and what they consider to be information also varies.
3) Peoples' different experiences of information use are not personal characteristics, but rather ways of interacting with the world, including their information worlds which change according to need, context, and their personal awareness of what is possible.
4) To help people with their information literacy we must broaden? their awareness of the different kinds of experiences available to them.
5) Information is always used for a purpose.

Two key lines of research have since emerged both in Australia and internationally, the phenomenographic (Bruce , 2008) and the sociocultural (Lloyd, 2010) which contrast with the traditional skills and competency based approach. This body of work over the last ten or more years has confirmed the view raised in the ALJ 2000 article at the turn of the decade, that information literacy does not have a life of its own, its many dimensions are closely related to the contexts in which it is experienced. For example, students learning to search the internet (Edwards, 2006), fire-fighters using information (Lloyd 2007, 2009), students learning tax-law and music composition (Lupton, 2008), teachers of specific disciplines (Boon, Webber & Johnson, 2007), international students at university (Hughes, 2010), older Australians using health information (Yates, 2009; Yates et al 2012), information use in the church community (Gunton, 2011), and teen content creators using information to learn (Harlan, Bruce &Lupton, 2012). Also of importance have been the development of the Six Frames for Information Literacy Education (Bruce, Edwards & Lupton, 2006), and the idea of informed learning (Bruce, 2008) which highlight the value of the phenomenographic approach to information literacy education.

In Australia as indicated above, in the United States (Maybee, 2007; Julien 2007) the United Kingdom (Andretta, 2007) and Europe (Francke, Sundin and Limberg, 2011, Limberg 1999) the experience of information and information use has emerged as of considerable interest in information literacy research and practice. While much of this work has stemmed from an interest in the relationship between information use and learning, it also points to the importance of researching information experience to gain a broad understanding and interpretation of people's engagement and interaction with their information environments. Such a focus on experience offers a holistic understanding of peoples' engagement with information, taking into account the interrelations between people and their broader environments in a manner which considers people and their world as inseparable. It also provides deep insights into the ways in which people relate to their informational life-worlds. (Bruce & Partridge, 2011)

Within this broad interpretation of what it means to attend to experience, the position of phenomenographers and socio-cultural researchers may be distinguished as follows: phenomenographic researchers are interested in variation in experience and sociocultural researchers

are interested in the co-construction of experience, that is, how people come to agreement about the meaning of their experience.

Two Australian research groups, at the Queensland University and Charles Sturt University have developed major research strands in this area. Within these two groups, the strong relationship between academic groupings and the practitioner community is reflected in increased numbers of doctoral scholars researching problems critical to practice, as well as collaborations on funded projects. Across a wide range of contexts the application of learning theory has continued to transform research and practice (Lloyd & Talja, 2010). For researchers interested in beginning to explore the field, a recent text *Exploring methods in information literacy research* (Lipu, Williamson & Lloyd, 2007) has made a highly valuable contribution to the set of available resources.

I would like to close this reflection by suggesting that Australian and international attention to information literacy now points to the need for information experience to be delineated and strengthened as a research domain. We need to develop our understanding, profiling and theorising of information experience as a specific domain of interest to information literacy research and practice as well as to information research more widely. To achieve this we need to:

- deepen our understanding of **experience** and information experience as theoretical constructs and how they are interpreted differently in information (user) research;
- build our understandings of information experience as an alternative frame for information research;
- understand more fully what it means to adopt an information experience, in contrast with an information behaviour, perspective on information research;
- explore ways of understanding the relationship between information experience research and information literacy research;
- understand what different research methods and world views reveal about people's experience of information use and the idea of information experience as a theoretical construct;
- understand what different research contexts reveal about people's experience of information use and the idea of information experience;
- identify models and studies that are focussed on experience and draw them together as representing a coherent domain, even if presently not articulated;
- examine and synthesise the currently disparate/fragmented thinking and theorising on information experience;
- explore possible theories of information experience. (Bruce and Partridge, 2011)

Continuing to fuse our interest in information use and learning, with deeper and more elaborated understandings of information experience that may underpin the work, can only deeply benefit information literacy research and practice. The end benefits of such work must always of course be to the wider community of people whom we serve.

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