Connecting the Dots: Pedagogy and Student Beliefs about Reference Sources

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There is a need for educators to continually reshape examine and rethink pedagogy to meet the needs of students, libraries, and in accordance to new research. However, these stakeholders aren't entirely in agreement about what is important.

3 major upheavals:
1. in publication models (and as an extension, information seeking)
2. in reference models
3. In educational models

In light of these changes, what should they learn in the classroom?

Students: Using print resources helped them understand reference work, but didn't always jibe with their idea of online education (as advertised). Many thought print was more important to potential patrons.

- "The catalog search for an appropriate reference coupled with the actual exploration of the source for an answer was vital. I also learned a lot from asking questions at the reference desk and seeing how professionals tackled the questions."
- "Ideally, it would be wonderful if everyone taking the class could spend several hours getting more familiar with print sources. However, in the real world of online courses, many people do not have access to a strong collection collection of such materials nearby and may not be able or willing to fit trips to an adequate library into their schedules. Online research makes completing the homework assignments much more practical and is probably more in keeping with the way most people will be doing their research throughout the rest of their academic experience.
- "While it's easy to browse the online resources from home, I was not aware of all the great print resources we have available at our library. This class helped me explore those more thoroughly."
- "You can never really understand something until you see it in front of you"

Practitioners: Academic libraries are getting rid of lots of print, and publics less so. Both still think LIS students should be understand and be able to use print reference sources. They agree that the most important quality in reference is expert interpersonal communication.

- "We buy thousands of volumes…and students are not finding them. We haven't figured out a way to make these visible in the virtual environment. We're spending thousands and they're just googling stuff."
- "A lot of libraries are trimming down their print and going online. I feel like we should put more emphasis on online resources."
- Librarians agree: print directories, for example, are practically useless, but learning about print indexes is crucial.
- "It is important to expose library students to the Reader's Guide and print resources for a couple of reasons: for one thing,…from a history and library heritage perspective….but it's important to know how to use a print index like Reader's Guide because that gives you a good sense of how a subject heading system works and how the structure of primary headings and sub headings work."
- "It concerns me that you're teaching this class in university settings, where there should be a library, they're removing print…if you rely totally on databases and money falls through, you have nothing."

The Literature: Again, interpersonal skills are most important. Technology is emphasized more heavily. Virtual reference important. "Death of the reference desk." Might be more closely aligned with the academics' viewpoint.

- "I want you to graduate people who are steeped in the values and the philosophical framework that librarianship has in its approach to information…everything else is kind of gravy to me, because I can teach them most of the other stuff" (Stoffle, p. 26).
- "The Age of Also" "[If print resources are cancelled]…Commercial virtual reference rooms available on a subscription basis only to those who can afford them are a predictable development, and one that would inevitably widen the digital divide" (Morse, 80)
- "The most prominent problem was access to print sources in courses that are completely Web-based" (Adkins and Erdelez, 58)