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Web 2.0, virtual worlds and student's visual learning. By Dr Julia Gaimster.

Julia Gaimster's session was designed to showcase some of the visual learning tools she uses or recommends to students.

Her interest in this area began with her doctoral thesis looking at how students find information online and discovering that students are not good at creating strategies to find the information they need. Instead students invariably jump straight into searching rather than thinking about it, this lead to them spending far longer searching for information than analysing or using the information they did find. As part of her research, and expounded upon in her visual research methods in fashion book, Julia encourages students to create a strategy with includes setting time limits to their searches, thinking carefully about keywords, identifying the sources to be used and using checklists to mark where they've searched and what they've found – this also helps with the keeping records for referencing items. Through studying what students actually do Julia noticed that students do not use advanced search options to refine their searches, they have poor evaluation skills once they have found information and are generally poorly equipped for categorising and recording the results they do find which impacts on their referencing skills, particularly images.

Julia's mantra is that we need to be giving them tools to help them with this and her session at the conference highlighted a selection of tools she has found work with her students. Her blog topwebtoolz (http://topwebtoolz.blogspot.co.uk/) lists lots of tools that may assist students particularly those who prefer learning visually along with limited evaluations of the tool and why she's found it useful.   Julia also notes the need to be careful about usage of these tools, particularly with the rise in international and distance learning students as some of the tools, particularly flash based ones, may not be available in all countries or work on all platforms.   The tools mentioned during the session were ones Julia recommends for assisting students with presentation, creation and categorisation of work. However she also wanted to make it clear that the tools are not the ultimate that it's vital that students still carry out the research and follow up on leads, visiting galleries and museums to see original works where possible. She also makes sure students are aware of the need to network, rather than sticking to tight-knit groups for their networking it is becoming more important to network with a wide variety of people.