Chapter 7.15

Reconceptualising Information Literacy for the Web 2.0 Environment?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter questions whether the shift from the Web as a vehicle for storing and transmitting information to the new Web as a series of social networking environments, requires significant changes in how students interact with information when they are studying within a formal learning environment. It explores the origins and growth of the idea of information skills development, the translation of this work into frameworks and sequential models and the adaptation of these models to take account of changes in information storage and transmission brought about by the Internet. The chapter then examines the changing contexts and changes in learning being brought about by the Web 2.0 environment and questions whether adjustment of existing information literacy models is a sufficient response to deal with these changes. We conclude that although Web 2.0 developments are not fundamentally undermining the nature of teaching and learning they do provide important possibilities for more effective information literacy development work. A non-sequential framework is offered as a contribution to supporting HE students when seeking to obtain, store and exploit information simultaneously in the informal social world of Web 2.0 and in their formal academic discipline.

THE RISE OF INFORMATION SKILLS

In the early 1980s a spate of books appeared in the UK containing a new term in the title: 'information

skills'. This term was the brainchild of a working party concerned about school pupils' competence in *"using libraries, exploring references and making notes"* (Marland, 1981, p7) and arose out of the Schools Council's desire to explore what a curriculum for a changing world might comprise. The working party report asserted that *"Individuals today have an increasing need to be able to find things out…never before have our lives depended so much on our ability to handle information successfully"* (Marland, 1981, p9). Narrow concerns about library skills and user education were replaced by a focus on students' problems in finding and using information to tackle assignments and conduct their research within a formal learning environment. This intervention was due to the interest in these skills by educationalists, who, working alongside librarians, ensured wider adoption for information skills and a clearer place for the concept within the learning process.

However, despite this development and the appearance of a number of books exploring the place of information skills in learning (see, for example, Markless and Lincoln, 1986, and Wray, 1985) the concept of information skills was far more widely accepted by librarians than by teachers. This resulted in heavy emphasis on competence in resource use and on finding information.

MODELS OF INFORMATION SKILLS

From the outset writers wanted to show the need for students to develop these 'new' information skills. The issue was presented as one of skills deficit and consequently led to a plethora of information skills frameworks and models, spelling out what students should be able to do. (Many of these models were later 'rounded up' and described by Loertscher and Woolls, 2002.) Model constructors conceived the requisite process as tying together distinct elements of information-related behaviour into a logical, sequential process which could then be taught (e.g. Marland, 1981; Brake, in Markless

and Lincoln 1986).

An important retrospective review of these models and frameworks (Eisenberg and Brown, 1992) concluded that

while each author may explain this process with different terms … all seem to agree on the overall scope and the general breakdown of the process … it appears that the various process models are more alike than different and it may be possible and desirable to begin speaking about a common process approach to library and information skills instruction. (p. 7)

The approach to information skills as a 'common process' to be applied to library research and information handling unfortunately tended to result in a disregard for the context of learning. Skills were perceived as generic; the sequential process outlined in the models was to be adopted at all ages and across different subjects. The process formed a 'curriculum' to be taught to students and applied by them whenever necessary. This view was hardly challenged in the early world of information skills although research on information behaviour in context and on critical thinking skills was calling into question the whole notion of easy transfer, which is also a well-established assumption in mainstream education (Perkins and Salomon, 1992).

Perhaps the most influential of these generic information skills models was advanced as the Big6. This model was created by Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1990); it was widely disseminated in book form and continues to be heavily promoted in the USA and internationally through their website and through an extensive programme of workshops. We will use this Big6 framework as the basis of our critique for the remainder of this chapter because it is one of the frameworks most widely used in USA and UK schools to support information skills teaching and because its authors were amongst the first to integrate ICT into information skills in a distinct and transpar-

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