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Go Ask the Freshmen: How Millenials Define Information Literacy and Their Own Skill Levels

Don Latham
Florida State University

Melissa Gross
Florida State University

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Don Latham & Melissa Gross

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Background

- Information literacy (IL) skills are crucial in today's society
  - AASL/AECT's *Information Power* (1998)
    - K-12 environment
  - ACRL's *IL Competency Standards* (2000)
    - Higher education environment
- These standards reflect how information professionals define IL
- Little research has been conducted into how students perceive and experience information and their own IL skill levels

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Research Questions

1. How do college freshmen define information literacy?

2. How do they describe information seeking in self-generated vs. imposed tasks?

3. How do they describe their own IL skill levels?

4. How have they learned what they know about information seeking?

5. How do they prefer to learn new or additional skills?

Theoretical Frameworks

- Competency theory (Kruger & Dunning, 1999) suggests that non-proficient individuals are less likely than proficient students to be able to self-assess their skill set accurately
  - Previous research suggests that competency theory applies in the domain of IL (Gross & Latham, 2007).
- Imposed query (Gross, 1995)
  - Self-generated tasks: in response to a personal need or interest
  - Imposed tasks: given by one person to another (assignment)
- Bruce (1997) studied how educators in higher ed understand IL
  - Very little research has been done into how undergraduates understand IL and their own IL skills

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Participants

- 20 second-semester freshmen at Florida State University

- Top 10% and bottom 10% of freshmen class targeted, based on admissions data: high school GPA and standardized test score (ACT or adjusted SAT)

- Students recruited via email solicitation

- Participants given gift cards to the university bookstore.

Interviews

- Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes
- Both researchers were present during the interview--one asked the questions; the other took notes.
- The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by a graduate assistant
- Both researchers coded the interviews and then compared their coding
- Analysis used constant comparative method

Testing

- Students took the test within one week after being interviewed

- Information Literacy Test (ILT), developed at James Madison University (JMU), measures information literacy, based on the ACRL Competency Standards and has been validated and tested for reliability

- Students were told that those who scored in the top 15% on the ILT would be eligible for a drawing to receive one of two $50 gift cards

- Response time analysis performed by JMU

Demographics

- 15 (75%) females; 5 (25%) males

- Almost all were 18 or 19 years of age

- 17 (85%) from the top 10% of their class; 3 (15%) from the bottom 10% of their class

- They represented a variety of majors (8 STEM, 5 business/economics, 3 music, 3 humanities, 2 education, 1 undecided) * [*Note: 2 people were double majoring]

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Results: ILT Scores

Overall, these students have "proficient" information literacy skills

- One student scored as advanced, with a score of 54 (90%)
- One student scored as non-proficient, with a score of 38 (63%)
- 18/20 students scored as proficient, with scores between 39 and 53 (65% - 88%)
- Therefore, the interview data should be considered as representing the views of <u>proficient</u> students

Perceptions of information literacy

- Students were unfamiliar with the term "information literacy"

- Students see information seeking as comprised of thinking and learning skills, more than as computer or library skills

- Success is ***finding what you need to know***, not the process, or the skills you use to get there

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Imposed versus self-generated information seeking

Imposed = Constrained	Self-Generated = Open
A limited number of acceptable resources can be used ("academic" sources needed)	A wealth of resources are available (though fewer tend to be consulted)
Deadline/Due date	You decide when you are done
Need to develop interest (especially if it isn't naturally there)	Motivated by genuine interest, even if that interest is casual
Product/Presentation required	Product not required

Imposed queries are facilitated by

- Assignments that allow students to make a choice or personalize the assignment in some way

- Domain knowledge or previous experience with a topic, even if it is a topic the student doesn't like

- Ability to develop an interest in a topic if such an interest isn't naturally present

Preferred resources: People

- People as a resource can take 3 roles:
  - **Informant** – someone who knows the answer
  - **Agent** – someone who will find the answer
  - **Tutor** – someone who will teach skill(s) needed to find the answer
- Choosing who to talk to:
  - Availability
  - Established relationship
  - Informal before formal relationships

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Preferred Resources: Internet

- For both imposed and self-generated information a search engine (Google) is the first stop

- Concerns about source quality are minimal
  - "*You hear teachers and professors tell you all the time, be wary of the Internet. But I've never really had a bad experience where I've had some, like, horribly wrong information or whatnot.*"

Self-views of information literacy

- Confident about their ability, but don't feel that they know/do anything special

- Computer skills and information seeking are activities they have been engaged in over the course of their life and have adapted to "naturally"

- Feel they stand out in terms of their ability to put in the effort needed to find information, persevere with the search, and draw on their interest in learning

- one student said, it is not the benefit of having the Internet, but rather, "the benefits of my curiosity"

What information skills would you want to improve or acquire?

- Some said library skills, but most couldn't think of anything

- For example one respondent said: "*What is there to know? "I honestly don't know how much greater information literacy needs to be, even on a higher research level… I think once you learn the basic level there isn't a ton of room for improvement.*"

Perceptions of attaining information literacy

How they know what they know

- – Most see themselves as "self taught"
- – Many credit a parent (usually mom) and friends or peers
- – Formal training, if it occurs, tends to take place in elementary school library
- – A couple of participants recalled a specific teacher in their first year at the university who made a point of teaching information literacy in the classroom

New skills are best learned

- When they are needed
- Face-to-face, one-on-one
- In a comfortable environment (from someone you feel comfortable with)
- With a chance to practice
- Classroom okay of it includes the above
- Rather than use an electronic tutorial, they are more likely to just ask someone for help

Future Research

- Identifying (and recruiting) the non-proficient

- Developing a model of student views of information literacy

- Moving from understanding to intervening and establishing a minimum skill level for non-proficient students

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THANK YOU!

Don Latham

latham@ci.fsu.edu

Melissa Gross

mgross@ci.fsu.edu

Questions?

Things to think about in practice

- The term "information literacy" did not resonate with these students
- They did have a good grasp of the characteristics of an information literate individual, but in broad strokes
- Instruction librarians may want to ask students to brainstorm about their information seeking process
- Many students are self or peer taught
- Motivation and the ability to develop an interest is an issue for imposed queries
- Students, regardless of skill are likely to see themselves as competent