

Information literacy and educating the trainers: digital natives and digital immigrants

Those who have read Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* might recall that, when the (young) computer expert, Lisbeth Salander, is asked by journalist Mikael Blomkvist to act as his research assistant in the investigation of the Vanger mystery, she faces a methodology problem. Previously she has always had the name of a living person and a social security number and has always been able to find the subject, provided the individual is in a computer file – which everyone is. She starts with the simplest search she knows, goes to Google and enters the keywords [Magda] and [murder]. This gets her started but her search is a complex one that entails considerable creativity, including gaining access to archives by masquerading as a PhD student researching violence against women.

Research suggests that generational experiences are a major determinant of the form that people's information literacies take, with younger people like Salander being much more comfortable with the technology – and with a Google interface that is both recognised brand and benchmark. If we accept that one of the main roles of the LIS profession is the fostering of information literate communities and lifelong learning, then we accept that it faces considerable challenges, not just the complexity of our hybrid information environment, but also the sheer diversity of its client communities.

The challenge of delivering information literacy programs to a wide range of clients extends into LIS education because those entering our programs represent the same mix that libraries find in their client communities. Some of our face-to-face, undergraduate programs may contain sizeable percentages of school leavers but, with people reskilling and educational programs being available online, there are also a great many 'mature' LIS students. The challenge "is to provide learning space that is relevant to digital natives and those who exhibit the characteristics of digital immigrants both of whom work in virtual and real spaces" (Beard & Dale, 2008).

It is commonly assumed that the 'digital natives' have a head start when it comes to IL skills but recent research suggests that this is not necessarily the case. A US study found that college students are intimidated by 'findability' when conducting course-related research (Head & Eisenberg, 2000). The well-publicised report of the Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research contained some sobering findings for librarians – not only did it find no correlation between digital literacies and information literacies, but it also refers to worrying research from the US, which suggests serious problems for those college students at "the lower end of the information skills spectrum". They learn to 'get by' with Google and by the time they reach university age intervention is too late (CIBER, 2008).

Moreover, the Report raises "questions about the ability of schools and colleges to develop the search capabilities of the Google Generation to a level appropriate to the demands of higher education and research" (CIBER, 2008). Doubt about IL transferability is supported by research into workplace information literacy and other studies of the tertiary education sector.

A number of studies in recent years have presented a range of technologies that can be used for IL instruction and education, such as Second Life, podcasts, videocasts, virtual learning environments (VLEs such as Moodle, WebCT, and Blackboard), Facebook, RSS feeds, blogs, wikis, social bookmarking and tagging sites (for instance, Delicious), Instant Messaging, and file and photo and sharing sites such as Flickr and YouTube.

It cannot be assumed, however, that all learners will be

equally positive about each of these technologies. "Web generation students are more concerned with Facebook, YouTube, and iTunes than blogs, wikis, podcasts, or RSS feeds," (Godwin, 2009, p.266) Applications such as Second Life, on the other hand, are likely to be more of a barrier than a productive learning space in the case of many 'digital immigrants', whose digital literacies may need as much work as their information literacies.

The use of VLEs for on-campus as well as off-campus students, however, does create potential for the development of communities of learning, in which digital natives are only too happy to share their knowledge of and enthusiasm for the digital environment with those classmates who feel nervous about it – sometimes with a nudge from the educator, for instance, through use of social networking tools as part of assessment.

Sometimes we all need a nudge. One of the myths addressed by the CIBER Report was the notion that the 'Google generation' exhibits shallow, 'power browsing and viewing' behaviour in digital libraries. Well, says the Report, everyone from undergraduates to professors is guilty of this behaviour. We are not all Salanders or Blomkvists. Society, CIBER says, "is dumbing down" (2008), which brings us back to the need for information literate communities and trainers.

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