INFORMATION LITERACY

In the Academic Library

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LIS 2000: Understanding Information; Fall 2017

Introduction

        The field of librarianship has undergone a huge amount of change through the years, mostly adjusted and shifted by the changes that technology have brought to the table. But, even with the changes, there are themes that have remained constant through time. The most vital of which is libraries commitment to research and education (Wilkin 2015, 237). The methods and tools used to achieve these ends has changed, but the spirit of the goals has remained the same. This is particularly the goal in libraries that are attached to schools, universities, and other research institutions. These embody the purest form of this commitment, but also are a great window into viewing the changes over time.

Background

        Librarians are not the only profession that are dedicated to these commitments, but may have slightly different motivations and means, there are even those opposed in other fields. One great historic example comes from the book "The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History". In chapter Darnton analyzes how book salesman, while for slightly different motivation, seek to disseminate information as broadly as possible (Darnton, 91). This truly took off during the enlightenment when people began questioning everything, he states, where librarians and these salesmen sought to spread books, including those others sought to suppress (Darnton, 92). It shows that this has been the goal for a long time. These positions have seen that knowledge is power, and that it is their duty to provide the knowledge that patrons and clients both need and want to empower them, it doesn't need to be restricted or controlled (Darnton, 111). These concepts are key for the goal of education and research. If information is restricted and controlled, then educating and researching is increasingly difficult and problematic, it not only reduces the sources but if done also would potentially skew a lot of information.

        Looking at these changes over time and how librarians have adjusted to emerging technology, practices, and beliefs to spread knowledge, increase education, and promote research. The library continues to push for these changes, and seeks to continue these practices. Modern technology has allowed for much easier access to information, we see almost an entirely new set of issues. Now, instead of having issues getting the information, people are inundated with an abundance of resources and information. Today, it's more a question of how to determine the validity and trustworthiness of resources. Librarians have always sought to spread information

literacy, but in the past, were the gatekeepers to this information, today users can bypass the librarian and go right to the source. By bypassing the librarian, users need to develop the skills to make these determinations themselves. This lends to a new role for librarian, maybe not entirely new but changing, to teach these skills and help provide frameworks for patrons to learn these skills.

Information Literacy

With the inundation of information, training patrons not how the need of, but how to evaluate sources and information is now a necessity. The concept of Information Literacy isn't truly new to librarians, but is showing new prominence and importance (Wilkin 2015, 240). It is important to begin by understanding what conventional definitions of Information Literacy are. The Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, defines Information Literacy as: "The set of abilities requiring an individual to recognize when information is needed, and have the abilities to locate, evaluate, and effectively used the acquired information" (2000). While this is a seemingly straightforward concept, getting patrons, especially in an Academic setting, to understand its necessity and increase understanding is difficult. Many involved in higher education especially make one giant assumption: that not only do they have a grasp of these concepts already, but that those around them do as well (Koltay, et al, 2014). Getting people to first admit they lack skills and then to embrace learning new concepts can be challenging.

Getting faculty involved in the instruction of information literacy is key; not only does this provide stronger support for literacy training, but also allows each discipline to tailor training to fit the needs of their discipline (Corrall 2009, 3). While the concept of information literacy is the same, different disciplines have different needs for using information, standards, and needs. One clear example would be looking at dates and how it would differ between scientific research and humanities. The importance of certain aspects will be stressed, such as how current research for science is far more relevant while humanities definitely are concerned, but more to provide context as opposed to knowing it is potentially replaced as scientific research would be. Librarians can address these differences, but having these skills engrained into students by professors with the support of library staff reinforces these skills to students (Koltay et. al 2104, 88).

To these ends, many libraries are adopting or creating policies to address information literacy. In comparisons of these policies there are a few trends and key features. First, is that they often are not standalone and will reference a larger policy put for by another institution, as well as referencing a definition outside itself (Corrall 2009, 1). Often these policies are highly contextualized to fit the institutions policies and goals (Corrall 2009, 1). Finally, they use staff as enablers and advocates for literacy (Corrall 2009, 2). This provides two key points about the shift in academic libraries; libraries are finding methods to align themselves with greater institutional and national policies to help show usefulness, and a shift from silos to cooperation that is so key to new methods of teaching, learning and research (Lombard 2016, 282; ACRL 2000, 4). The shift towards collaboration is a must to achieve proper and complete instruction in information literacy.

While technology itself has created the need for the emphasis on literacy, it also provides a great opportunity to provide the very information needed by students, especially those in non-traditional settings (ACRL 2000, 4). While literacy training can prove a different set of challenges at a distance, there are options and tools that can be used. These tools don't have to be unique to online students though. It properly created, they can be used even by the traditional students to streamline and strengthen the training that should already be given in class and other settings (Corrall 2009, 3).

Information Literacy 2.0

One of the largest factors in the change in access to information is the creation of and expansion of the internet. This was only exacerbated with the creation of web 2.0, which created many new platforms for information to be shared on and new tools to access the same information (Koltay et al. 2014, 89). The biggest change is that it allowed people on both ends, researchers both seeking information and attempting to discriminate their knowledge the ability to bypass the traditional barriers and gatekeepers, and to spread information that may not have been accessible in the past (Koltay et al, 2014, 89). This new access is exactly what has created the need as without traditional gatekeepers, unreliable information can slip into research with ease. While these tools have proven to be incredibly useful with revolutionizing the research process, expanding collaboration and other positive changes, these concerns need addressed.

Adoption of these tools has not been standardized and studies provide conflicting data on who is adopting the tools. Some believe it is the younger generations who are braver, yet others

see older generations being more comfortable risking the use of untested methods (Koltay et al. 2014, 90). Librarians knowledge is perfect for providing the training, tools, and skills necessary to help navigate the vast sea of information available today (Corrall 2009, 6). This can be seen in how the Scottish government worked with librarians to create the Scottish Information Literacy Project (Corrall 2009, 6). This project shows that Information Literacy is seen as vital in all aspects of life. While it cannot be assumed that it is possible to have projects such as this undertaken in every country, it is a strong example of a new approach to embracing information literacy, and can be taken as an example when convincing more reluctant colleagues and administrations to help.

Overlap with Other Skill Sets

The true bounds of information literacy are difficult to draw as the usage is rather inconsistent. But, there are skill sets that information literacy either relies upon, works in tandem with, or depending on the institution may either include or fall under. The skills at the forefront of this are technology skills. Since new technology is often the source of these issues, knowing how to properly use the tech is vital (Julien 2015, 126). Much like literacy skills, this is a skillset that many assume they are adequately skilled in, but often could learn more. Identifying these skills, and other skillsets that patrons may need to accompany information literacy is vital to the success of literacy training (Lombard 2016). To best identify and train these skills the library and its librarians should find it necessary to return to collaboration, to work alongside experts who can best provide this training.

Information Fluency?

Some suggest rather than a focus on information literacy, instead libraries and librarians need to focus on what they deemed 'information fluency' instead (Lombard 2016). This furthers confusion in that some institutions have used these terms interchangeably, but Lombard suggests that while on the surface its seems to be interchangeable, that in fact they are different concepts and this distinction is necessary (2016). In this measure, fluency becomes the umbrella under which literacy is only a part. Here Lombard suggests that instead of looking at this variety of competencies and skills as separate entities, information fluency provides the umbrella under which tech, literacy, and other skills fall (2016, 282). This is somewhat of a reframing of the existing concepts, but one that could have powerful impact. Often when people hear the term literacy, it returns to the assumption that they are already skilled and therefore do not need this,

while there have been positive changes when fluency is used (Lombard 2016, 281). To include everything under one larger umbrella has powerful implications in terms of collaboration.

While an entire rebrand may not be necessary, thinking of information literacy as one piece of the puzzle is important. Librarians have traditionally enjoyed very strong control over the concept of information literacy, as it is their duty (Julien 2016, 127). Returning to the basis of the shift, technology has put a lot of the traditional power in the hands of the consumer, which while not against librarian's belief, changes the dynamics.

Institutionalization

One of the most difficult parts might be making these changes become long term. It is easy to create a program or plan for information literacy for the short term, but as staff, faculty and administration come and go it will be necessary to create a lasting commitment to these concepts. Sharon Weiner suggested 4 models for institutionalizing information literacy, each dependent upon a different scheme (201). These each refer to some key aspects of the importance of information literacy and concepts others have put forth.

The first suggested model is named the collegial model, which works primarily at smaller institutions (Weiner 2012, 289). Here, the faculty, staff, and administration are less hierarchical and therefore communication and collaboration are more fluid and informal (Weiner 2012, 289). These institutions would rely heavily upon the already existing network to collaborate and find ways that information literacy in its many forms can be integrated to the curriculum, institutional goals, and other aspects of campus life. These instructions will rely heavily upon the ideas of fluency laid out by Lombard, as they will be working together across the many subdivisions and attempting to provide the complete picture (2016).

The next two, Political and Bureaucratic models, both rely on the existing hierarchy and structure to create long term commitment (Weiner 2012, 290). Here it is less of a collborative process, and more either one individual providing a top down approach, or a group using their power to do so. In these institutions librarians would be more akin to looking at models of literacy such as in Corrall and Koltay's articles (2009; 2014). Here, information literacy is less about the collaborative aspects, and more about a top down systematic approach, teaching patrons what they need.

Finally, the model Weiner deems 'Organized Anarchy (2012). Here, the institution is loosely structured for a variety of reasons. In this situation, it is difficult if not downright impossible to create a campus wide consensus, so it becomes the task of using every available resource to flood the campus with literacy (Weiner 2012, 290). This would most likely be more akin to Lombard's fluency, as it would take seeking other resources and partners out, but also when possible simply using top down instruction to complete the job (2016). This model might prove the most difficult as it is the most varied, and lacking structure makes the goals unclear, and will have less support.

Challenges

Information literacy is not something that can easily be taught in a few sessions. Many times, a librarian isn't given more than a few sessions to instruct a concept that takes a lot of effort to master (Julien 2016, 128). This proves to be a challenge, as a librarian is then limited in what they can teach and master in such short time spans. Here is where again, collaboration becomes key. If the library can work with faculty, these skills become transferred in more than one session, and it is much easier to work on developing skills rather than introducing the concepts (Julien 2015, 129).

Another challenge is tied to technology and the assumption that information literacy skills are higher than what they truly are. With technology being so integral to accessing information, younger generations have a 'natural' ability with technology that is assumed, that extends into its use for collecting and accessing information (Julien 2016, 129). Here two hurdles must be crossed. First, finding actual skill, then actually beginning the teaching.

Conclusion

The most common theme across the variety of sources writing on information literacy is that it is neither a new concept, nor one that is easily tackled. The most common suggestion as libraries forge into the future is to find partners with whom the library can collaborate to help patrons acknowledge the skill sets needed to navigate the insurmountable amount of information thrown at them. Once these relationships have been created, they must be maintained and will prove to be vital and pivotal for the future of libraries and librarianship. As the power of gatekeeper to the majority of information has been taken from the library, librarians have already

found new creative outlets for their skills and will only continue to do so as society, technology and other factors change the landscape.

Librarians possess and unique and powerful skillset ideal for training and assisting patrons with sifting through the mountain of resources available today. The Academic Library is further positioned to be a key trainer, as it is already linked with faulty and other experts who can be vital allies for literacy instruction. Working to train patrons for literacy is instrumental in the libraries traditional dedication to education and research, which have been at the core of the library since its inception. In order to continue to work towards these goals libraries and librarians need to embrace these new roles, and work to predict and get ahead of the curve in terms of training.

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