Melissa Lafranchise

LIBR 202 Discussion Post 2 – Future of Information

Thoughts on information organization, skills, and value

Information organization
The video "Information R/evolution", by Michael Wesch, shows how information
has shed its traditional container over the last 30 years and the effects this has had
on how it's organized and accessed. From one perspective, of course, the web is just
another container, but it is quite different in that the display of information is not
tied to a single physical entity like a book. Therefore the organization and retrieval
of information isn't bound by the same traditional, pre-digital rules. Wesch says,
"there is no shelf . . . the links alone are enough" (Wesch, 2007, 3:10). We no longer
need organize information as if it were stored in a physical entity. Much of early
(and still much of current) web design was trapped by the seeming need to recreate
physical organizational tropes in the digital realm. The video provides the example
of Yahoo feeling the need to include categories to organize search results (Wesch,
2007, 2:32). Wesch goes on to reiterate that tags are enough, that links are enough.
There is no need for a hierarchy of categories. All information exists at one level and
can be accessed by a key word or concept from anywhere across the globe (and
perhaps from any time as efforts to digitize existing information contained on
physical media proceed). Morville comments on the restrictions that old
organizational metaphors can place on thinking and calls for "the exploration of new
metaphors and the courage to design beyond metaphor" (2005, p. 38). However, he
does caution that some metaphors related to physical space (i.e., navigation) are
beneficial in helping to orient humans in the often overwhelming world of web.
"When we enter these spaces, we bring our senses along for the ride" (Morville,
2005, p. 42). Those senses were evolved over millennia from our interaction with
the physical world and need to be both acknowledged and enabled in the digital
world.

The video also comments on the expansion of who is considered a viable creator of
information. Whereas in the past experts were required to create and disseminate
information, today everyone has the ability to do so. "We create more information
than the experts" (2007, 3:26) says Wesch. With everyone sharing their own
perspectives, we have seen a vast proliferation of data. With it comes the need for
each individual to evaluate and decide what seems most accurate, compelling, or
useful to them. The Internet and web have enabled the postmodern cacophony of
opinion, thought, and perspective that forces us to ask who has the authority to
decide what is right, correct, or helpful for others. The answer is that each individual
must decide for him or herself.

Information skills
This need to decide for oneself obligates educators to instruct students in the
methods to effectively evaluate information, hence the calls for improving

information literacy in recent years. "Educating learners on how to decipher credible resources and aggregate content has become imperative, and there is a need for university [and other] educators to fulfill the position of content guide" (Johnson et al., 2013, p. 8). Further, if everyone is also a creator and disseminator of information, then we all need to learn how to most appropriately organize and communicate that information for our fellow users. Tags can still be ineffective if they are poorly chosen. Morville highlights this dual nature in his concept of findability. He states, "findability is at the center of a quite revolution in how we define authority, allocate trust, and make decisions" (2005, p. 15).

Intrinsic to success in this digital age are self-motivation and self-directed learning. These skills are vital in a world where traditional authoritative institutions are not considered as sacrosanct as they once were, and in a world where individuals have the means to access a variety of equally authoritative or suspect sources. "As authoritative sources lose their importance, there is need for more curation and other forms of validation to generate meaning in information and media" (Johnson et al., 2013, p. 7). For example, as massively open online courses propagate and gain influence (Johnson et al., 2013), the need for a student to be self-motivated and self-directed is paramount as the student will be the one who must determine if/when/how he or she will learn.

Finally, from the standpoint of skills, computer and programming literacy needs to be taught from the outset of learning. It should be considered as fundamental as reading, writing, and arithmetic. In many ways coding languages are the new *lingua franca* for communicating about *everything*, and we must ensure our students are at least basically fluent in them.

Information value
As information evolves in the digital age, I do believe it's becoming a commodity, but I don't believe this connotes something negative. It's a commodity in that it is mass produced and therefore the cost is decreased. However, its value is not realized in a low or high acquisition cost. Its value is derived from how it's used by each person or group who creates or acquires it. The Long Tail metaphor (Morville, 2005, p. 12) can be generalized beyond economics; it shows the value of different types of information to a mass audience but doesn't measure value in terms of popularity. Further, I think that most people are now separating information from its acquisition cost (i.e., the cost of internet service, data plans, etc.). We intellectually understand there is a link but don't feel that link in our daily interaction with information. The value of information exists independent from the cost of accessing its storehouse.

References

Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Cummins, M., Estrada, V., Freeman, A., & Ludgate, H. (2013). *NMC horizon report: 2013 Higher education edition*. Retrieved from http://www.nmc.org/

Morville, P. (2005). *Ambient findability*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly.

Wesch, M. (Producer). (2007, October 12). *Information R/evolution* [Video].
     Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/