From teaching information literacy to teaching information management? An information practice model for teaching and learning information competences

Information literacy is an umbrella concept coining together diverse skills and competencies needed to seek, evaluate, and use information. Information literacy frameworks and models (e.g., the well known Bix 6 model, Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 1990) generally outline the steps and procedures related to information seeking, searching and evaluation as parts of work and learning tasks. Within IL education programs and standards, there exists a clear tendency to view information seeking and searching as the core skills to be learned, in addition to information evaluation. Other information practices, skills and competencies such as synthesizing, monitoring, classifying or archiving information, have received much less attention. However, information searching is merely a sub-tasks within wider work tasks, which in turn are embedded in broader cultural-historical activity systems, that is, domains and domain practices. Information work is not merely about information seeking and evaluation of found information. Information management, as a field, has a broader outlook on information practices and information, in that it is interested in how individuals, groups and organizations produce, plan, collect, organize, control, disseminate, and dispose, of information, and in how information can be better managed to serve the goals of the practice that people are engaged in. O’Farrill (2008) and Ferguson (2009) suggested that a “marriage” between information literacy and information management is a natural development, given these fields’ joint concerns. I agree with this view, adding that the persistence of what may be called the sources and channels approach (Talja & Hansen, 2006; Sundin, 2008) to information explains both the focus on information seeking as an activity, and why, in addition to source landscapes and search techniques, information evaluation has been regarded as the core competency to be taught in IL programs, and why tasks as such as archiving and organizing have rarely been taken as objects of study in their own right within IL research.

I would argue that the failure to account for the more tangible hands-on aspects of information work affects the usefulness of the efforts to teach information competences. In terms of needs for developing competences and conscious guidelines for information handling, there may, in fact, exist more need for support for other information tasks than seeking or evaluation. Whether in terms of personal or household information management or management of work-related information (e.g., project information and documents), information tasks such as re-finding, filtering, and classification, may be more critical and require more effort than seeking and evaluation tasks.

Within IL research, information use is generally discussed in terms of citation of sources (ethical use of information), and in terms of evaluation of credibility and reliability of information. Within the information needs, seeking and use (INSU) research tradition, information use is generally discussed in terms of absorption or addition of found information to an individual’s existing
knowledge store. Hence, both fields lack definitions of information use that do not rely on mentalistic models where information use means processing pieces of information encountered within the minds of individuals (Kari & Savolainen, 2010). However, exciting and detailed studies of information use exist that have not gained much attention or been explicitly acknowledged as studies of information competencies or information use. Classic studies are, for instance, Ann Bishop’s (1996) study on the disaggregation and reaggregation of documents, Catherine Marshall’s (1999, 2007) studies on annotation and archiving practices, Paul Gorman’s and his colleagues (2001) studies on document bundles, Marc Berg’s (1996) studies on medical records, and Kalpana Shankar’s (2007) study on scientific recordkeeping, to name but a few. The fact that such studies do not always use the vocabulary of information (information seeking, information literacies) but may, instead, talk about reading practices, documentation, document work, recordkeeping, or simply, about collaborative work, should not stop us from noticing their relevance to efforts of supporting information work.

Our field lacks models that account for the broader scope information practices. A broader view of information practices will enable us to pay attention to and study information work in a more encompassing manner, and to develop ideas for supporting a broader range of information-related tasks. Talja and Hansen (2006), in their article on collaborative information practices, presented an early version of what can be called an information practices model (Figure 1). This model can be fruitfully used to extend the scope for exploring information work and teaching information competences, since it pays attention to a broader range of practices than information literacy and information seeking models.

Figure 1. A model of information practices (revised from Talja & Hansen, 2006, p. 129)
References


