Ways of experiencing Information literacy: perception and practice amongst Information Management postgraduate students.

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Abstract

This study employs the phenomenographic concept of the structure of awareness to examine the experience of information literacy. It argues that the context in which information literacy is experienced affects the aspects of this phenomenon that are conceptualised and practised. The sample consisted of 27 students studying part-time for the MA in Information Services Management in London, and working as librarians or information managers. An iterative process of development led to the creation of an outcome space consisting of four categories of description on the students' experience of information literacy: Functional Literacy, Provision, Lifelong Learning, and Education. The categories are ordered hierarchically both by the purpose and context of the information goal and by the information relationship that underpins this goal. First, 'Functional Literacy' involves a binary relationship between individual and information which underpins everyday information goals. Secondly, in 'Provision' the information relationship expands from binary to ternary involving a three-way interaction between user, information professional, and information to address a range of information goals. Thirdly, 'Lifelong Learning' involves a binary relationship between the students and open-ended, complex information goals. Fourthly, 'Education' involves a ternary relationship whereby the educator fosters the development of independent learners by exposing them to open-ended, complex information goals. The multiple-context approach generates a more comprehensive outcome space for the students' experience of information than previous phenomenographic studies because it establishes the context-specific aspects of the phenomenon that are the focus in each category of description and enables the examination of the dynamics of the changes that occur within each category (classified as 'transformation') or across categories (classified as 'transfer'). It is argued that this multiple-context outrome space is better suited to inform future investigations exploring the experiences of information literacy education from the perspective of learners and of librarians who are charged with its delivery.