Information Literacy Research and Practice: An Experiential Perspective

Christine Susan Bruce

Information Systems School, Science and Engineering Faculty,
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
c.bruce@qut.edu.au

Abstract. In this paper I explore some experience-based perspectives on information literacy research and practice. Approaching information literacy from the point of view of those experiencing it, is very different from the standard interpretations of information literacy as involving largely text based information searching, interpretation, evaluation and use. It also involves particular understandings of the interrelation between information and learning experiences. In following this thread of the history of information literacy, I reflect on aspects of the past, present and future of information literacy research. In each of these areas I explore experiential, especially phenomenographic, approaches to information literacy and information literacy education, to reveal the unfolding understanding of people's experience of information literacy. The evolution and development of the phenomenographic approach to information literacy, and the associated growing attention to a dual focus on information and learning experiences are highlighted.

Keywords: Relational approach to information literacy, informed learning, information experience, information and learning, phenomenography.

1   Introduction

Experience is profound. Consider the words of a schoolgirl who said: "They can teach us all they like about justice and injustice; I don't think we will really understand until we experience it". Though deeply embedded in our 21st century learning systems, she recognized the difference between the cognitive and behavioural emphases of our conventional systems, and the complementary power of experience. Perhaps just as powerfully, we can consider information literacy experientially; not as a set of technical and cognitive skills but in terms of how people experience it; and so, in this paper I would like to begin to trace the past, present and future of experiential thought about information literacy.

There are of course many different 'takes' on experience, and the phenomenographically inspired work which is the primary focus of this paper is only one possible direction. It is my hope that the examples contained here may show something of the value of an experiential lens, and encourage more attention to information literacy from experiential perspectives. Phenomenography is a research approach that considers variation in people's experience of aspects of the world,

for example economic or scientific concepts, or phenomena such as political power, death or information literacy. Following the phenomenographic tradition [1-2]:

- learning about information literacy is about coming to experience it in new and different ways;
- experiencing information literacy involves attending to particular structural features of it, and associating it with particular meanings.

Making information literacy possible then requires discerning the different possible ways of experiencing it, and developing ways of making it possible for people to experience in all, or the desirable ways.

In phenomenography, considering experience means that: '… one should not… consider person and the world as separate… people live in a world which they experience… the world we deal with is the world as experienced by people.. neither individual constructions nor independent realities; the people… we deal with are people experiencing aspects of that world – neither bearers of mental structures nor behaviorist actors….by learning how people experience the world we may learn what the world looks like, and what the world could look like.' (adapted from [1, p. 13])

In writing this paper I have come to realize that I am part of a scholarly community that appears, on the surface, to take the character of experience very much for granted, in the sense that experience is something that is rarely defined. It is rather described; perhaps following the best traditions of qualitative research! In essence, the research that I have undertaken, largely phenomenographic, is interested in people's experience, borrowing from the phenomenological traditions of lived experience especially as articulated by educationally focused scholars like Max Van Manen [3] and Steinar Kvale [4]. These phenomenologists suggest a renewed turn towards people's life-worlds, exploring their narratives about their lived experiences as data, and attempting to understand research participants' experiences. This means that existing theoretical understandings of the phenomenon are put aside as far as possible. The descriptions yielded in the research process are then used to depict the character of experience as understood by the research tradition at hand.

So what might the experience of information literacy look like? How might the experience of information literacy be described? It is not about how much exposure people have had to particular environments or skills, or about what they do; but rather about what it is that they are experiencing, and how they are engaging in that experience. I provide tiny windows into three recent examples to briefly illustrate. These short descriptions provide a picture of varying ways of experiencing information literacy in particular contexts. In these I suggest that our typical interpretations of information literacy, in terms of skill sets and standards, are not visible. In both the health and faith studies people's experienced meanings (the meanings they associate with information literacy) are associated with attending to information and learning in particular ways. We shall return to that point later.

- In a health focused study [5] information literacy was found to be experienced as striving for wellness, reaffirming wellness, knowing myself, protecting myself, screening knowledge and storing knowledge.

- In a faith focused study [6] information literacy was experienced as growing faith, developing relationships, managing the church, serving the community, outreaching beyond the community.
- In a discussion of the Native American experience [7] recognition is given to the 'communal nature of shared information experience which informs the Native American learning system… learning which reflects the understanding that lives are truly and profoundly connected to other people and the physical world… with knowledge being transmitted through ritual, ceremony, art and appropriate technology for use in everyday life...'

For me, working in the information literacy arena has always been about looking at the world through a particular pair of glasses; those that provide both an information and a learning lens; and in my case the learning lens is sometimes dominant, and the glasses have a strong experiential tint. The position I have come to articulate is that information literacy is about the experience of using information to learn; it is about people's different ways of experiencing using information to learn in particular contexts and settings, for particular purposes (from reading a bus timetable or choosing a school, to academic research). I see myself as an advocate for information literacy, which means that I promote, attend to, and attempt to bring about in collaboration with others, a realization of the capacity of information literacy to transform and empower. Coming to experience information literacy differently enables transformation and empowerment.

2   The Past

In 1974 Paul Zurkowski coined the term 'information literacy'. The impact of this conceptual leap is beyond measure. Many of us here have direct experience of its influence. Information literacy is a construct we now recognize as changing lives, academically, economically, politically, socially, professionally and physically.

When the ALA Presidential Committee On Information Literacy released its *Final Report* [8] the importance of information literacy as a changer of lives, its transformational and empowerment elements were emphasized. This position has always been central to information literacy advocacy, and has informed interest in research and practice globally. These motivators, relevance to the world around us, transformation and empowerment, are still central to us today.

As the information literacy agenda gained momentum, policies, standards, and other guidelines for stakeholders around technology, information provision and learning gained prominence. Speaking the language of bureaucracies became important for advocacy, and a supporting research agenda began to evolve. Information literacy began to be largely associated with information and technology skills.

In moving forward, two alternative orientations evolved. The first of the following two directions aims to shape others, while the second aims to understand and enhance others' experiences:

- educating or training people so that they conform to professional norms embedded in established systems and processes, or
- deepening our understanding of people, so that peoples' experiences of information literacy may be valued, celebrated and woven into the fabric of our society and its' systems.

The second direction is the key motivation for experientially grounded explorations and interpretations of information literacy that recognize the transformative and emancipatory potential of using information to learn. Such approaches are not focused on information or technology skills, but rather consider people's information and learning experiences; interpreting these from the perspective of ordinary people using information as part of their everyday lives.

2.1   Early Steps in Exploring Information Literacy Experiences

Our first steps in understanding people's experience of information literacy came from the explorations that came to be known as the *Seven Faces of Information Literacy* [9-11]. That project showed information literacy as being varyingly experienced as a) using technology to communicate and keep abreast of the field, b) sourcing information to meet a learning need, c) engaging in information processes to learn, d) making connections between information and learning needs, e) building a knowledge base in a new area of interest, f) extending knowledge, and g) making wise use of information for the benefit of others.

Each category involved different relationships between people and information in their work or everyday life. Across these experiences of information literacy people were experiencing information as objective, subjective or transformational (i.e. information as neutral, information as meaning making or information as life-changing). In the first two categories it is empowering to belong to part of a learning community, and in the last two categories using information opens up new possibilities for a community of others.

The most important lessons learned from that work were that:

- there was something very much in people's experiences that could be identified and described as information literacy;
- the meanings people associate with information literacy are richer than externally established processes, or skills, related to information need, seeking, access, evaluation and use. For example, the information processes people described were grounded in personal heuristics and did not look like conventionally advocated processes;
- each of the different ways of experiencing information literacy was focused on a specific feature, for example the first face focused on ICTs, the second on sources, the third on processes;
- information was experienced in varying ways (see above); and also
- the components of the ways of experiencing and how they were arranged or discerned in awareness was different for each one.

This early research was underpinned by interpretive phenomenology, and it is important to realize that the word 'conception' used to describe each of the seven faces was at the time the common phenomenographic label for representing a 'way of experiencing'. The different ways of experiencing, when taken together, represented the whole phenomenon of information literacy – that is, the different ways in which it was experienced amongst the community of participants. As that participant base was very broad, representing different disciplines, professions, workplaces, life circumstances, and academic and professional interests, the emergent model has proved to be very adaptable to a range of contexts. Its communicability and adaptability have given it a lengthier life span than I anticipated.

2.2   The Value of Attending to Experience

Attending to experience involves a change in how we look at the world. It brings about different approaches to information literacy and information literacy programs, behaviour and skills, policy, technology and our thinking about our professional and scholarly interests more broadly.

Different Approaches to Information Literacy & Information Literacy Education. Considering experience leads to different approaches to information literacy and associated programs, particularly learning programs [12], [9], [13]. The relational approach did not, and does not provide a preordained set of strategies. Rather, it provides a particular way of thinking about our professional interest. The relational approach needs to be interpreted and contextualized in a way that is often foreign to prevailing competency and measurement oriented perspectives.

The relational model suggests new ways of thinking about and describing

- information literacy – that are faithful to people's experiences, and that value their experience;
- information literacy education – in terms of enriching and expanding people's experiences, providing new experiences as well as making them aware of aspects of their existing experience;
- information – in terms of what is informing to the user, and how their experience of information varies;
- information literacy policy and programs – grounding these in different experiences or the possibility of different experiences.

The relational model focuses attention on people's experiences of information literacy, and especially variation in their experience. The seven faces, and other categories describing experiences of information literacy, represent forms of information use[1] that make learning possible. Introducing people to different ways of

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[1]   Information use, as the term is used in phenomenographic work associated with information literacy is not meant to refer to a specific portion of an information process, but rather to reflect orientation towards engagement with information in a broad and holistic sense.

experiencing information use, as well as making them explicitly aware of their own and alternative experiences, is what makes learning possible. In this model, information literacy education involves helping people to move into a more complete set of experiences, so they are empowered to identify which is most powerful for the context at hand.

Different Approaches to Skills and Behaviours. Considering experience from a phenomenographic perspective leads to different ways of thinking about skills and behaviours. Ference Marton has always held that powerful ways of seeing are associated with powerful ways of acting [2]. In other words, how people experience something, in our case information literacy, influences how they might go about something in particular circumstances. If I were to paraphrase, I would probably say 'powerful ways of experiencing make possible powerful outcomes'.

This idea of powerful experiences is central to understanding the potential relationship between information literacy experiences and information skills. Borrowing a phrase from Patricia Breivik, I would say that skills of any kind, information skills, technology skills, or digital skills *are not enough*. My thoughts here are very much influenced by the thinking of Professor Jorgen Sandberg and Gloria Dall'Alba about competence [14-15]. Professor Sandberg describes people working on car engines, optimizing them, and distinguishes between those who follow the manual's requirements and those who orient themselves to how the driver might experience the engine, as they work on it. In each case the same skills are involved, but the people involved have totally different experiences and the quality of their work reflects this. We can think about information literacy in the same way; we can focus on the manual and the skills we think that people need, encouraging technically competent application of skills, or we can orient ourselves to the experiences of the people we serve, and recognize skills as serving those experiences.

This example shows us something of how experiences influence skills or behaviours. Experiences are deeper and more powerful; they contextualize skills. In exploring learning to search the internet, Edwards [16] found that students who scored strongly on tests for skills did not necessarily experience searching in powerful ways. The same set of skills may be applicable to different experiences, or completely different skills may apply in different contexts. It is the different ways of experiencing that capture the meaning of information literacy and it is these information literacy experiences that we would wish to advance and bring into awareness. Given wide variation, technical and conceptual skills may or may not be important to engagement in the experience. In some contexts, as with the engine optimizer, skill may be prerequisite, but it is only the baseline of what is required; in health information literacy, for example, being able to experience the body as a source of information about personal health is important, and in faith information literacy coming to experience art, music and narratives as forms of information vital to supporting spiritual growth is fundamental to information literacy.

Different Approaches to Standards and Policy. Considering experience leads to different ways of thinking about standards and policy. These insights from the seven faces have had some influence, for example, on the Australia New Zealand Institute

for Information Literacy standards which endorse a) the importance of reflection on experience, and b) the idea that the standards are not intended to reflect a linear model, but rather represent a range of facets which support lifelong learning [17].

Policy principles derived from experiential awareness direct attention towards considering the experience of information literacy, recognizing that such experience differs across contexts and communities. [18, pp. 540, 541-543]. Policy needs to encourage valuing, celebrating and integrating the experiences we discern into the fabric of systems and social learning.

Different Approaches to Technology. Considering experience gives technology a different place in research and practice. While the term information literacy originally stemmed from interest in people's ability to function in ICT (information and communication technology) rich environments, peoples' experiences of information literacy are not always technology centric[2]. The seven faces of information literacy show that while technology is present in all the faces, to be expected in an academic workplace, it shifts from being an important focus to being of lesser interest across the categories.

Early (and ongoing research) into information literacy experience[3] has revealed that emphasizing technology at the outset makes an assumption about peoples' experience that may not be appropriate. Not directly referencing technology provides insights into its importance in people's experience, may reveal whether they do or do not attend to it, and reveals what kinds of technologies are attended to. This suggests that starting with the digital may not be the best way to understand people's information literacy experience. In people's experience, digital technologies may be present, but may not always be central in their awareness; technology may also take non-digital forms. On the other hand, if our focus is information literacy experience within the context of particular technologies, then starting with the technology context is clearly appropriate.

3   The Present

The territory of information literacy research and practice has expanded considerably. Little more than a decade ago information literacy research and conversation was largely confined to the formal education settings [19]. In the years since then, we have seen a blossoming of attention to workplaces, national cultures and many communities. [4]

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[2]   Only one of the seven faces is technology centric.
[3]   Similar conclusions are drawn from sociocultural research; see for example the work of Anne Lloyd.
[4]   Our QUT team has had a strong focus on experiential approaches to information literacy research and practice. A wide range of focal points are appearing including - evidence based practice, web designers, public librarians, serious leisure, disasters, tourism, early career academics, teenage content creators, ESL teachers (from China), inquiry learning, indigenous knowledge and religious information literacy.

The phenomenographic branch of information literacy has revealed previously unnoticed patterns and textures in the character of information literacy. From this branch we[5] have developed a perspective on information literacy which is now called *informed learning* or using information to learn [13], [20], [18]. In addition to the seven faces of information literacy, the six frames for information literacy education and Mandy Lupton's identification of the different patterns of information use in learning are important to the architecture of informed learning.

3.1   The Six Frames for Information Literacy Education

The six frames for information literacy education [21] reflect the critically different ways educators approach information literacy education. They were developed to provide educators with a sense of the different approaches that may be adopted in designing and implementing information literacy education. While firstly reflecting alternative approaches to information literacy and information literacy education, they also point to experientially oriented information literacy program design, especially in the learning to learn, personal relevance, social justice and relational frames.

The frames draw attention to the need to understand when each frame may be appropriate, and place a spotlight on the different approaches which different parties involved in a project might bring to the table. They have been used extensively in professional development workshops for librarians, discipline-based academics, and other members of the teaching and learning community. Most recently the frames have been used by Drew Whitworth to analyse policy [22], and he is presently using them to analyse the information literacy trajectory as documented in scholarly literature.

3.2   Patterns of Information Use in Learning

Mandy Lupton's [23] research into the different ways of experiencing the relationship between information use and learning reveal three increasingly powerful patterns for learning. This work was conducted in academic contexts, however the insights are clearly transferable beyond those contexts. Working within two completely different disciplines, music and tax-law, Mandy identified the relationship between information use and learning as experienced in three ways: sequentially, where people identify useful information then learn from it; cyclically, where the process of identifying information and learning from it recurs; and simultaneously, where information use in all its aspects and learning are experienced as occurring together. The last experience seems to be particularly transformative. This is a similar finding to Louise Limberg's [24] when she identified particular approaches to information seeking that brought about more sophisticated learning outcomes than others.

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[5]   Informed Learning is the outcome of substantial research and thinking within the Queensland University of Technology team, informed by much research beyond that team.

3.3   Information Literacy and Information Literacy Education as Informed Learning

Informed learning is about the focus on people's experience of using information to learn in different contexts, and what it takes to make that possible. It represents those forms of information literacy and information literacy education that embrace holistic thinking about information literacy and learning, and is specially derived from the experiential, phenomenographic strand.

Informed learning advances the relational approach to information literacy and information literacy education by integrating the various aspects of the program of research and development that arose around the world subsequent to the seven faces project. The publication of *Informed Learning* [13] led to renewed interest in experiential thinking in information literacy research and practice, and I elaborate on some of this work below. Of critical interest to many has been the explicit articulation of the relational aspect of information literacy, in the sense that information literacy is not independent of purpose or context. Information is always used for some purpose, in some context. From a relational perspective it is accepted that learning is always about something. Similarly, information literacy, involving both information use and learning, is also always about something – it is purposeful and contextual.

Informed learning points simultaneously towards information use and learning[6]. Consequently, there has been renewed and explicit interest in the combined elements of information experiences and learning experiences as people have begun to explore informed learning, in both formal and informal learning communities.

Community learning projects undertaken to date, that I will describe later, are showing that we can gain enhanced insight into the experience of informed learning from settings which admit ways of thinking about knowledge which differ from dominant scientific and socio-economic values, thus opening up windows into the experience of a greater diversity of communities. In revealing these new ways of seeing, being and experiencing, these studies make available to all of us an expanding repertoire from which to draw.

Such insights should allow us to nurture what are presently less recognised approaches to information use, as well as develop understandings that begin to take into account the diversity of experience that enriches our society.

3.4   Deepening Perspectives from Practice

To reflect on the adoption of the informed learning approach to information literacy and information literacy education in practice, I turn to the wide ranging work of Dr Mary Somerville and her colleagues at the Auraria Library, the Center for Colorado & the West and the Faculties of the University of Denver, Colorado. In 2008 Mary Somerville integrated informed learning (together with soft systems methodology, design thinking and evidence based practice) into the leadership and management

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[6]   This is more easily understood if learning is seen to be a change in how we are aware of some aspect of the world; in this sense the terms information use and learning express broad interpretations of the underlying concepts.

philosophies and information practices of her library and has overseen its widening sphere of influence over the last several years [25-26]. In 2010, she was joined by Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence Dr. Hilary Hughes, who integrated informed learning into the Informed Learning staff development programs of the Auraria Library and into the classroom experiences of students at the University of Colorado Denver.

This program of professional development focused on developing understanding of informed learning's dual interest in information use experiences and (content) learning. Practical outcomes included 'frameworks for collaborative planning and implementation of curriculum based informed learning, a revised policy document and planning process in the form of an Informed Learning Blueprint, and the creation of new promotional and instructional materials' [27, p. 73]. Close partnerships between library and academic faculty was emphasised, as was the view of the library as a learning space, resource and service, as opposed to a collection of resources of services that learners needed skills to access. To ensure a sustainable platform for capturing local knowledge about using information to learn, the library created an informed learning space on the organizational intranet. Staff contribute content as they work with like-minded faculty and other colleagues to build a campus wide informed learning community-of-practice.

Denver: An Informed Learning Library Workplace. In August 2012 I was privileged to visit Denver to engage with Mary and her team on sustained reflection about what it means to imagine and create an informed learning workplace and library. The team established early that questions like 'What information literacy experiences do we want to facilitate or make possible?', and 'What information and learning experiences are vital to further our own professional work'? were critical points of departure. In other words, the aim was not to ask 'what skills or capabilities do we want to develop in others?'

From this point we explored the use of information to learn in the technical Web team. That team creatively developed a SCRUM (project management) process, taking critical digital information for workflow and problem solving and turning it into an informed learning experience that was visible, physical, tactile and mobile. Through this colourful and concrete experience staff were able to learn about what each other was doing and influence the daily work of the team. It was an interesting representation of the information process experience in the Seven Faces model. The learning outcomes of problem solving and decision making also became visible as pieces of paper were shifted and jabbed into place across a board!

In reflecting on this approach, team members acknowledged that they had come to value their own professional experiences, in contrast with other contexts where only measurable or quantifiable data was admissible as evidence. This collective recognition illustrates an important dimension of informed learning which recognises information as 'that which informs' in different contexts thus admitting personal experience as information. Extending this idea, another team revitalized their thinking about learning spaces through exploring these questions: 'How can we redesign our library as experiential learning spaces? … perhaps even experiential learning spaces that enhance people's experiences of using information to learn!' Relatedly, for the science team, reflecting on the variability of experiences of using information to learn

evolved into dreaming about possibilities for creating information and learning futures that discover and transform campus constituencies' information and learning experiences.

Informed Learning in Classrooms. Working with Dr Carole Basile, an education professor, Hilary Hughes applied the informed learning approach to a First Year Experience course. They wove informed learning through the existing syllabus, adopting the narrative thread of an informed learning journey. Each week's class focused on a different topic relevant to first year students' needs, enabling them to develop knowledge of basic learning theory (content) whilst engaging with different types of information, to explore how they and other people learn with and through information (information use).

The students were socially and culturally diverse. Many were 'commuter' students who lived at home and were first in family to attend university. They were generally committed students; some were battling personal, financial and health issues. The course encouraged students to consider themselves as informed learners, on a journey of discovery about themselves and their learning environment; and to become aware of the different ways in which they and other people use information to learn. By building a community of fellow travellers, the unit supported collaborative and social learning. Assessment included the compilation of informed learning maps and treasure chests, which enabled the students to capture their information use and learning experiences, and establish a reflective approach [28].

Bringing Information Literacy Experiences to the Hispanic Community. At the Center for Colorado & the West, Mary and her team adopted informed learning principles to involve Hispanic peoples, displaced from the Auraria neighborhood, in building digital archives for their community [29]. Their work provides a striking example of systematically varying the information literacy experience and expanding the community's awareness of using information to learn. The team applied the Seven Faces model: raised *awareness* amongst the community that their experience was underrepresented in archival collections; identified that *available sources* provided little information and often misrepresented the community, and invited the community to engage in a process of *connecting with and* contributing resources of importance to them. The community built a *new understanding* of informed learning as they engaged with staff collaborating on the project; and *extended* the community's insight through producing a culturally authentic video 'Wild and Free' [30] promoting awareness of their digital heritage, and creating a script expressing informed learning through their cultural lens. Finally, the community created a video advising displaced Aurarian students about college scholarships to enable participation in higher education. These 'culturally informed learning experiences stimulated renewal of a Hispanic social action organization, dormant for 40 years, which ... advances civil rights, educational access and digital presence' (adapted from [18, pp. 533-534]).

These examples show the potential applicability of experiential thinking about using information to learn to a range of spaces, including academic and community contexts. They also reveal the transformational potential of expanding people's experiences of using information to learn.

3.5   Deepening Perspectives from Research

In this section I discuss recent projects highlighted earlier in this paper in a little more detail, and also an ongoing piece of work that explores using information to learn in the classroom. Each of the phenomenographic examples focus attention on the information and learning experiences that work together to comprise the information literacy experience. This is complemented by an outline of the experience of using information to learn in the Native American community.

Using Information to Learn about Health. In another branch of the health information literacy study mentioned earlier we show how the two intertwining elements of the experience of information and the experience of learning unfolds across the phenomenon. We found that information may be experienced as stable and meaningful across time; complex, an object in its own right and needing to be governed; sourced internally as well as externally; influential, helping with lifestyle decisions; powerful, changing the community, and relevant across a wide range of contexts. Learning, as the experienced meaning of health information literacy shifts from the individual to the collaborative, becomes increasingly 'contextualised, controlled, personal, powerful and communal' [7].

Using Information to Learn in the Church. In the faith study, Lyndelle Gunton [6] explored variation in the experience of using information to learn in church community. Within that broad research object, information itself was identified as being experienced in different ways: received; personalised; shared within relationships; corporate systematic; personalised and responsive within the community; personalised and applied beyond the community. The learning experience across the phenomenon is seen to vary from solitary and reflective, to communal, evidence based and kinesthetic, the latter involving learning through practice, including acts of service. She has found that relationships are vital to the experience of information use in church community.

Using Information to Learn in the Classroom. Clarence Maybee [31] has recently been engaged in looking at using information to learn in the classroom. He examined intended experiences of using information to learn (what the teacher planned), enacted experiences of using information to learn (what the researcher observed as happening in the classroom) and lived experiences of using information to learn (what participants experienced). The investigation required deep engagement with the content being learned as well as the information use processes being recommended and experienced. While the teacher intended the content to be as vital to the learning experience as the way she was recommending that information be handled, some students did not experience this connection. We hope that the research will lead us to ways for teachers to help students recognize that connection.

Using Information to Learn in Hispanic and Native American Communities. In reflecting on engagement with the Hispanic community in experiences of using

information to learn, Mary Somerville [7] notes the central need to appreciate traditionally devalued information formats, such as folk art, storytelling, community dance, cooking and cultural music, to appreciatively discover and explore the cultural communities' informed learning conception and everyday information practices. She cites Ybarro-Frausto's and Mesa-Bain's statement [32, p. 10] that the Hispanic people have 'collected a compendium of embodied knowledge – information that is passed on by the body through rituals, cooking, dancing, and oratory; it is an image bank of sources, concerns and aspirations.'

Exploring the Native American perspective reveals that learning for indigenous peoples is about perception and creative thought guided by ideas of spiritual ecology, with environmental, mythic, visionary and artistic foundations [33]. The information experience associated with learning is deeply communal and shared (adapted from [7]), and involves "relationships to other people and to the land…love and emotions and the feeling we get out here in nature". Information experiences, therefore, are rich – "the beautiful outdoors, the love of family, the sounds, the tastes, the smells of things" [34]. The learning environment is highly contextualized: e.g., in the "Native American environment, the child is sitting in the lap of the grandmother and she is teaching the child the native language that the child has not been exposed to before and so she teaches it word by word, phrase by phrase: the dog is there - 'chuka' - … cat, igloo, and in the embrace of the child's grandmother. The child learns these words and these languages in a way that they are never forgotten." [34]

Reflections and Summary. We can see from the above that directing our information literacy research and practice towards informed learning encourages us to *identify both the* holistic nature of the information literacy experience (see the introduction to this paper), and the information and learning elements or aspects of the experience. Interestingly, the explicit consideration of the information and learning experiences has given me a fresh insight into the Seven Faces model. People have often commented on what they perceive as a difference between the first four, and last three categories in the Seven Faces; perhaps this is due to a higher degree of orientation towards information experience in the first categories, and towards the learning experience in the last three; although both aspects are simultaneously present in each.

4   Futures

What is required now to take forward the wider information literacy research and practice agenda? My suggestion is a philosophical re-turn towards our own experience and that of others; and deeper attention to working within and with communities. If we are to be serious about the empowering nature of information literacy, we need to continue to grow our understanding of people's experiences in their social contexts and cultures, further emphasize emancipatory and participatory approaches such as those found in action research, and further instantiate our insights within our research and professional practice. The future of information literacy research and practice may lie in:

a) theorizing differently;
b) contextualising and building praxis; and
c) experimenting with new methods, new media – imaginatively.

4.1   Theorizing Differently

In theorizing we need to begin by *questioning assumptions*. Information literacy may be the pillar of being educated, it may be the pillar of democracy, it may be the pillar of economic progress and participative citizenry. It may be the pillar of all that is valued by contemporary Western society. Despite this we cannot assume that people in all contexts and societies operate from the same ideological base, or that they value the same constructs. To question our assumptions we may need to consider, for example, that information literacy may be used for purposes other than good; that, for some, technology might be meaningless; that, for others, 'what is informing' might be totally undocumented, and un-stored. In some contexts and cultures it may be that what is most informing is not meant to be documented (see papers on health and faith for specific examples of what constitutes information and how it forms part of the learning experience).

Clearly information literacy cannot be constrained by our professional views, it cannot be constrained by assumptions about 'what is good', it cannot be constrained by reductionist attempts to search for order and ways of standardizing its character. While we need to generalize about our understanding of information literacy to communicate about it at some level, we need evolving theories, and we need perspectives that can be contextualized, adapted and that encourage us to think about people and their information and learning experiences in their diverse circumstances.

We can perhaps see that some of the fundamental constructs/elements of information literacy *Learning – technology – information – literacy…* are vital to any information literacy experience and yet they may have totally different meanings in differing contexts and cultures. Our exploration of information literacy must help this unfold. I would also suggest that we need to theorise and investigate important constructs such as transformation and empowerment, which are foundational to the information literacy and practice agendas but remain relatively under considered.

As our research and practice continues to unfold people's information literacy experience, we can move to bring together different worldviews and methods in our field and our informing disciplines to understand their complementarities; as well as conceptually separating them to understand what each has to offer. While we need to deepen our understanding of experience as a frame for information literacy research, we also need to understand the complementarities of different branches of research both within the information literacy domain and beyond it. How does information literacy research from behavioural, experiential, socio-cultural, discursive and other perspectives interrelate? How do different approaches and methods complement each other? How might results of studies work together to build a larger picture? How can the approaches and results from other fields continue to inform our field? Understanding complementarities will make possible what Brenda Dervin [35] calls bridge building dialogue, helping us to find the language needed to communicate

across boundaries. Dervin [35, p. 1] refers to 'disparate and disconnected discourse communities'. Is the information literacy community becoming one of these? Are we in danger of fragmenting from within? We urgently need to understand the complementarities of our methods and discourses, not just the differences between them.

4.2   Contextualizing and Building Praxis

Many people find experiential information literacy research difficult to relate to practice. Why is this? Perhaps it is because our organisations and our professional education largely gives us an orientation towards knowledge and skills. Formal educational systems want to be able to measure what skills and knowledge have been gained. Subscribing to an experiential orientation requires finding new ways to do things within the confines of systems dominated by a different paradigm. Nevertheless, the experiential paradigm has much to offer those interested in client and user-centred thinking, or learner-centred, professional practice and community-oriented education. It has a strong role to play in discipline-centred education when information experiences in particular disciplines are brought to the fore. Important intellectual partnerships need to be developed in pursuit of these directions.

Engaging with communities holding widely ranging beliefs and practices, is likely to yield new understandings, and understandings which are closer to the life worlds of those we work alongside and serve. Our information literacy research and practice must span 'the rich and the poor, the digitally enabled and the digitally disabled, the psychologically empowered, and the psychologically disempowered' [13, p. 187] and we must infuse the insights gained into our conventional spaces. Whether we see information literacy as independent of, or interdependent with the contexts and purposes for which it is used, we need to become aware of its character in a wide range of contexts.

In 2001 Dane Ward wrote that 'the future of information literacy rests in our hands'; Dane asked then a question which we must pose for ourselves again today 'Will we step out of our comfort zones...and meet the world where its problems really exist?' [36, p. 922].

Dervin and Reinhard [37, p. 5, 55] raise the question of the increasing irrelevance of research to policy makers and general citizenry. We must ensure that this gap is closed in information literacy research – we need to ask what does it take to ensure relevance across the entire field? This 'gap' is perplexing, as many information literacy professionals are scholars, often researching their practice. Many information literacy researchers commenced their work from problems of practice, often as practitioners, and work closely with the communities they are interested in. Despite this, it is difficult to see on how research is influencing practice, and also how practice and problems of the real world are influencing research.

Pragmatically information literacy futures are still in building key partnerships/collaborations amongst interested parties in all spaces, at all levels, academic and practitioner, scholars, funding agencies, in both local and global situations. Information literacy, however we describe it, is important in every aspect

of life, in every context. Fundamentally, we need to recognize that information literacy is about transformation, its capacity to make real what is important to people, and find ways of working together to achieve this.

It is within a deep research-practice connection and in adopting experiential, transformative, participatory and emancipatory approaches to our work, that we may begin to understand how different discourses meet, and the practical relevance of different theories, approaches and the kinds of results they offer.

4.3 Experimenting with New Spaces: Embracing the Tranformative and Emancipatory

In our world, how can information literacy help? Into what spaces should we be taking our interest in information literacy; into what new contexts, new paradigms, new methods, new contexts? How can information literacy research and practice help address hunger and poverty? What might we learn about technologically advanced environments; what is enhanced and what is lost? How can it help people confronted with tragedy, in both digital and non-digital spaces? We need to ask what are the issues of today and how does IL contribute? How can we bring the emancipatory transformational power of information literacy into people's awareness? In health literacy, for example, we see the enriching importance of learning communities, in religious information literacy we see the empowering nature of relationships.

To find deeper meanings for information literacy, to increase its relevance we need a return to the principles of advocacy, focusing attention on the transformational and empowering character of people's own information literacy experiences, sharing these experiences and making it possible for them to enrich the wider community. We need to move more strongly to critical paradigms, embracing, for example, action research[7] and other emancipatory practices.

When, for example, was the last time that empowerment was considered as a potential key construct for information literacy in research? I am currently working with a doctoral candidate from Indonesia, Stevanus Wisnu Vijaya, who is in the midst of an ethnographic exploration of Indonesian migrant workers' experience of empowerment in online communities. He has explored research into empowerment in many contexts and is working to understand more deeply the empowerment experience of his social media connected countrymen. Such work has significant potential in the information literacy arena because of its intention to reveal how empowerment occurs for a substantial but seldom studied group of people using information. It has potential to shed light on inquiries into other less understood populations' emancipatory and transformative experiences.

In the formal education setting, Anne Whisken [38] is using an action research approach to help school teachers adopt an informed learning approach. She reflects that she has had to change her view of her role as bringing expertise about information literacy to the curriculum design table. She has had to come to see herself as facilitating ownership of the information literacy agenda amongst teachers, helping

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7   Mark Hepworth and Drew Whitworth have been engaging in this direction.

them to consider questions like "How is information used in your subject area? What disciplinary information practices do you want your students to have? What experiences will you design so they can learn them?" She has come to learn to ask questions such as "What learning is taking place as students are using this information? What are they learning by using information from this source, in this format, for this purpose, at this level, in this language, for this audience? What are they learning about this subject, about information use in this subject, and about the use of information generally?" Through adopting an action research framework, Anne's teachers are becoming empowered to revitalize their curriculum and their professional personas, as well as empowering their students to experience different ways of using information to learn in their subject areas.

So we may ask how does information literacy change lives, how do we help people change their lives, how does it empower, how does it transform? These are matters which experiential research is well equipped to handle. Limiting our focus to standards, indicators, and skills is unlikely to help us address these bigger/transformative questions. Will lifting our heads to address these things, in both research and practice, empower and transform us as researchers and practitioners?

5   Conclusion

Today I have pursued the development of experience-based information literacy research, attempting to reveal some past contributions and present directions. In doing so I have sought to highlight diversity and to suggest the need to celebrate this diversity and integrate it into our social and technical programs and systems. In looking at the future I have proposed not only a renewed orientation to experience in research and practice, but also the development of an integrated understanding of what it means to unify or harness together those agendas that are drifting apart, in the interests of the many and diverse communities we serve.

The position that I have come to, in adopting a phenomenographic experiential approach, and working with many colleagues aligned with at least aspects of that position, is that information literacy is about people's varying lived experiences of using information to learn, within their cultural and social contexts.

We need to celebrate the diversity of these experiences, recognize and appreciate them, to ensure that the breadth and depth of people's experiences are valued. We need to work hard to ensure that (social) systems, policies and technologies recognize how people learn and grow; and reflect and enhance peoples' information and learning experiences, to enable personal empowerment and equitable social participation

For me there are critical ideas involved... 'experiences, especially *information* experiences and *learning* experiences, diversity, valuing, reflecting and enhancing'. I am hoping there is a sense of 'renewal' that stems from the language of enhancement and empowerment.

To be most effective with our information literacy agenda, I suggest that we embrace the idea of experience and seek deep insights into peoples' information literacy experiences. Why? To give us fresh understandings of the information

literacy experience and use these as forms of evidence to influence our practice (both as researchers and practitioners). Experience based research provides a picture of the kinds of information literacy experiences that are possible, and that we may want to encourage people to explore. We might say it provides a different and rich evidence base. This reinforces Pat Breivik's view when she wrote that information literacy is 'complex, messy and political….deeper, richer and more complex, than we had originally perceived', and exhorted the 'brave of heart' to recognize this in moving forward. [39, p. xii].

It is my belief that bringing together our interest in information use and learning, with deeper and more elaborated understandings of people's information and learning experience can be of service to information literacy research and practice. It is vital of course that our projects and programs benefit the communities that we serve and that inspire the projects and programs we pursue (adapted from [40, p.337]). Such insights might further enable us to appreciate the potential influence of adopting such lenses to both research and practice. In this paper, in tracing some research into people's experiences of information literacy, I hope to have illustrated one such direction.

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