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Following the red thread of information in information literacy research: Recovering local knowledge through interview to the double

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ABSTRACT

To understand a complex social practice such as workplace information literacy and capture the nonnormative and nuanced local knowledges that are specific to the performance in a setting, requires that additional tools be added to information literacy researchers' methodological toolbox. One such tool, interview to the double (ITTD), is introduced and explored through a study that focused on understanding how aged-care workers developed their understanding of safety in the workplace. The addition of the ITTD technique was to recover local knowledges that are present in the daily routines of workers or available only at the moment of practice. The ITTD technique is described and its potential and limitations are also considered in relation to information literacy research.

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1. Introduction

Information literacy is a practice that connects us with information and knowledge about other practices that shape our setting and context. It manifests explicitly in our engagement with texts, and implicitly when we engage with others. When we draw on our embodied experiences to help shape solutions to problems, we are engaging with ways of knowing that contribute to our information literacy practice.

However, information literacy practice researchers are faced with a challenge when they move beyond the domain of text. This is especially true when examining the social and embodied aspects of information literacy practice in action. As the practice of information literacy is central to both formal and informal learning, then the ability to view it holistically and represent it as it is performed within context becomes an important task for information literacy researchers. How to understand its arrangements in education, workplace, or everyday settings is the focus of this article.

Seeing information literacy in the workplace or in everyday spaces is difficult because a practice is not a single unit or object, but composed of a set of activities that work together to produce a project or meet a specific end (Schatzki, 2002). This point is particularly salient in the workplace, where the information landscape and the specific knowledges that shape it are complex, messy, and distributed in a complex ecology of interconnections. The complexity of the workplace means that ways of knowing about performance and practice of work require people to draw from the material, semantic, embodied, and social spaces that structure the information landscape of the workplace; and,

in doing so, connect with the normative and non-normative sources of information that comprise those spaces (Lloyd, 2010).

The emphasis of information literacy research is often focused towards capturing and describing activities related to normative aspects of information literacy. There is less emphasis on capturing the non-normative aspects that are related to the knowledges that are embodied and embedded as part of everyday performance, and which make an important contribution to the performances of work.

Normative information sources reflect the epistemic or institutional view through which practice is operationalized and corresponds to the rules, regulations, and prescribed ways of knowing. This view is often represented as an outsider view (Gherardi, 2013) and, because of its explicit nature, is easily accessed by researchers.

Non-normative information sources are trickier to access and capture because they reflect the insider, or internal, view that represents the social and embodied aspects that shape performance and ways of knowing. Insider views are founded on ways of knowing that are articulated through collective action and the development of intersubjective agreement about where knowledge resides and what knowledges are important (Gherardi, 2001; Lloyd, 2006).

Non-normative aspects of information literacy reflect the *situated* and the *social*; these emerge through the shared understandings of people about ways of knowing how the information landscapes of a setting are constructed, and how information is negotiated and navigated within them (Lloyd, 2010). This way of knowing is part of the local knowledge of the setting and embedded in the everyday routine of people within it. Local knowledge is contingent and called upon at the moment of practice (Bonner & Lloyd, 2011), and is a source of expertise. It provides a point of view that can only come from being situated (i.e., being there at the same time, in the same place). It is accessed through

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routine performances and is highly nuanced (Yanow, 2004). Local knowledge about what activities and skills will enable participants to connect and engage with an information landscape develops in interactions with other people who are involved in the same programs, operations, or material objects.

2. Problem statement

The competent performance of work entails the capacity to draw from a wide range of social, material, and embodied knowledges. This requires that workers develop their ability to know and navigate the information landscapes of work. From a research perspective, recovering explicit knowledge about the normative aspects of information literacy practice is reasonably achievable. Recovering and capturing local insider knowledge about the activities that connect workers to local knowledge represent a different kind of challenge.

Making local knowledge visible presents a methodological challenge for the design of information literacy research, because it is embedded in everyday routine and often represented as nonverbal or nuanced knowing, and derived from practical reasoning (Yanow, 2004). From a sociocultural perspective, this means capturing information literacy practice that is embodied in the everyday practices of people in order to gain access to information that will inform the development of competence in the workplace.

A way forward is to follow the “red thread of information” (Bates, 1999, p.1048) to identify how information literacy is constructed as ongoing social practice and, in doing so, employ a wider range of techniques that may elicit local knowledges related to socially-situated practice. The metaphor of the *red thread* highlights the role of *information* as it weaves through and within the workplace, binding and connecting people who are collocated and connected by a shared understanding of the performances of work.

The value of this work lies in the introduction of a data collection technique known as interview to the double (ITTD) as one potential solution to this issue in information literacy practice research. The strength of this technique rests upon its ability to capture information that is only called upon at the moment of practice and is central to the performance of work.

3. Locating information practice

The concept of information practice draws from the field of practice research (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schatzki, 2002). The general practice has been described as performative; situational and social; and emphasizing relationships and interaction between people, within communities, and in relation to material objects (Gherardi, 2001; Lloyd, 2010; Orlikowski, 2002; Østerlund & Carlile, 2005; Schatzki, 2002). Exploring a practice provides insight into the social, material, and economic dimensions of the setting and the “spatial, casual, intentional and prefiguring relations” (Cox, 2012, p. 177) that exist through the practice as a social site (Schatzki, 2002). This suggests that meaning and intelligibility are inherent within practice (Schatzki, 1996) and represented by a range of explicit and tacit knowledges that combine together to operationalize work and influence positionality. Practice approaches draw from the concept of situated action, to understand how activities are situated in a particular space and in relation to particular objects or performances (Suchman, 1987; Gherardi, 2013). This approach attempts to understand the “texture or web of practices” that connect an organization internally and externally, enabling organizations to reduce uncertainty by ordering “the flow of organizational relations” (Gherardi, 2013, p. 2). Framed through this perspective, information literacy can therefore be understood as a practice that connects other practices by facilitating a flow of information through a range of activities and skills, which connect together to form a way of knowing (Lloyd, 2010).

The shaping of information literacy practice occurs through the practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) that shape a setting. This theory highlights what practices are made up of: namely sayings, doings (Schatzki, 2002), and relatings (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Sayings (what is said), doings (how is it done), and relatings (how it is referenced) are entwined in the setting projects, which in turn reflect the various traditions, histories, or ways of knowing that are valued and legitimized. Practice architectures create the conditions that enable or constrain the way a practice, such as information literacy, will be performed or conducted. These conditions emerge through the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements which compose a site (Brennan Kemmis, Ahern, & Middleton, 2012; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Lloyd, 2010). The theory of practice architecture can help us to inform research into information literacy practice by focusing on the way information and information sources are situated within a landscape, and the dialogic and cultural activities that people routinely use to inform their working practice.

3.1. Information practice

As information literacy is viewed as a practice, and as an example of information practice, it is also prudent to connect the concept of practice with the work that has been undertaken in the areas of information practice. The concept of information practice is a central issue for researchers with an interest in understanding how and why social conditions enable or contest information behaviors related to information creation, access, dissemination, and use within a given setting

As a research concept in information studies, information practice has been explored and described by a number of researchers (Cox, 2012; Lloyd, 2010; McKenzie, 2002; Savolainen, 2008; Talja, 2005). These researchers have drawn from a range of sociocultural/theoretical approaches that situate information practice as a social practice that is constituted within a setting and reproduced in the ongoing routine actions of people as they interact with each other. Within the information practice research field there is some discussion of what constitutes an information practice. The approach has been characterized by Talja (2005) as “a more sociologically and contextually oriented line of research” (p. 123) where the focus is on the social and dialogic construction that underpins information seeking and use, as these activities are operationalized within a given setting, and according to the social conditions that inherently shape the setting.

Savolainen (2008) describes information practice as a “set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, see, use and share the information available in various sources such as television, newspaper and the Internet” (p. 2). From this perspective, an information practice approach acknowledges the social and cultural conditions that influence the production of information and information behavior, but continues to confine the practice within a cognitive paradigm

Lloyd (2010, 2012) views practices from a broader perspective that encompasses social, embodied, and relational aspects. From this perspective, practices are composed of a constellation of activities (e.g., information sharing, information seeking and searching, collecting) that together reflect the inherent cohesive social order, arrangements, and knowledge domains of a particular site. These aspects influence ways of knowing how information is produced, reproduced, circulated, accessed, and used; and entwine together in a network, which forms a social site that promotes and legitimizes certain types of social practices, knowledge, and activities over others.

Lloyd (2011) views an information practice as:

an array of information related activities and skills, constituted, justified and organized through the arrangements of a social site, and mediated socially and materially with the aim of producing shared understanding and mutual agreement about ways of knowing, and recognizing how performance is enacted, enabled and constrained in collective situated action. (p. 285)

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