TITLE: **Youth and Libraries: Four Studies of the Information Behaviors of Today's Young People**

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Youth and Libraries:

Four Studies of the Information Behaviors of Today's Young People

ABSTRACT

Although the idea of today's youth as highly skilled, heavy users of information communication technologies (ICT's) who rarely set foot in a library has received much attention in the popular and professional press, most of these discussions of today's youth as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) are anecdotal in nature (Selwyn, 2009). Data-driven studies that examine how children, teens, and young adults really interact with ICT's and other information resources are relatively few.

This panel will bring together four recent studies of youth information behavior to create a broad, research-based picture of the true information behaviors, skills, and preferences of today's young people. The study authors will address questions such as:

- What are the information needs of very young children?

- How is library use tied to early literacy and early learning?

- What is the role of social networking in teens' everyday lives?

- In a world filled with different types of communication media, how do teens select ICT's for personal and school use?

- What are the effects of technology on reading motivation and engagement, and how can librarians use these tools to promote literacy?

- How do students' and librarians' search strategies differ?

- How can public, school, and academic libraries use ICT's and other information resources to provide improved library services to young people?

The presentations will begin at the preschool years and move up through early adulthood. In order of presentation, the papers will be:

Project VIEWS: Valuable Initiatives in Early Learning that Work Successfully (or Do They?)

Eliza T. Dresang

What are preschoolers' information needs and behaviors related to early literacy and early learning? For almost a decade public libraries, sometimes in partnership with schools, have concentrated on providing children's emergent literacy needs. But what have been results of these efforts for children? A coalition of 26 public libraries, the Early Learning Foundation in Washington State, and two universities (UWA and FSU) have set out to answer that question, funded by an IMLS Planning Grant, Project VIEWS. As part of laying the groundwork for the larger statewide effort, Eliza Dresang and librarians from the Pierce County Washington Library System are replicating a 2006 Carroll County, MD study. Pierce County librarians have trained 50 in-home daycare workers in the research-based literacy principles promoted by the library. Children, divided into experimental and control groups, have been given a one-on-one pretest in the form of a story with pauses for questions throughout. After six months, a post-test will be administered to the same children. This presentation will discuss the larger issue of how to assess the impact of information provision to the youngest emergent readers as well as report on the specifics of this in-progress experimental study.

A Study of a Web-Based Summer Reading Program and Reading Engagement

Carol Gordon

Research findings consistently report that student learning declines, or remains the same, during the summer months, and that the magnitude of the change differs by socio-economic status (Malach & Rutter, 2003). Traditional summer reading programs present graded book lists and limited choice, with a strong bias for classic novels. What would happen if adolescents designed a summer reading website, enhanced by Web 2.0 tools, that appealed to their reading interests and behaviors? How can a digital environment

promote reading engagement? Phase 1 of this study gathers data about reading interests, feelings, and behaviors from pre- and post- summer surveys and interviews of teens in two technical high schools. Findings include profiles of three types of readers, and serve to inform the design of Phase 2 of the project, which is currently in progress.

Youth Information Behavior as a Social Activity: High School Seniors, Social Networks, and Libraries

Denise E. Agosto and June Abbas

More and more public and school libraries are serving teens via multiple online utilities, including online social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace. However, we are only beginning to understand how teens use these tools. This study used a series focus group interviews with 45 high school seniors to investigate their use of social networking technologies for school and leisure purposes. The site for the study was a highly technological high school located in suburban Pennsylvania. Members of its graduating class have a unique perspective on the online social world. They have been around since the beginning of social networking and were born into a world in which digital connectivity is not a new thing, but the normal thing (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). The presentation will discuss the study's findings, including the participants' preferred media for social contact, and suggestions of how public and school libraries can best harness the power of social networking to reach teen audiences.

Do Students Really Search Differently? Comparative Usability Testing with Students and Library Staff

Nancy B. Turner

This study used usability testing to investigate how college students at Syracuse University and its library staff use the Library's website in different ways, particularly as they search for informational resources. This research seeks to articulate those differences, informing our process for designing a website that supports the research process of students and faculty and serves a range of information-seeking skills. In general, library staff used different strategies, selected different tools, and used facets and search limits in ways that were different than students carrying out the same tasks. Their "pre-knowledge" about library collections and differences in how search tools function informed their search strategies. Students were more interested in speed and assumed a robust, "Google-like" search functionality when presented with a search box. The research results have led to recommendations for website changes, particularly in the presentation and description of search and discovery tools. Findings may also necessitate the reevaluation of the search tools we make available and where those are placed on the Library's website. And for library staff, exposure to and reflection on different search behaviors--that of our students--impels us to consider the effectiveness of our own instruction and reference practices.

Conclusion

Together these studies portray the behaviors of youth ranging from preschoolers to undergraduates, and coming from a range of demographic and contextual backgrounds. They include consideration of the roles of public, school, and academic libraries in the lives of today's youth, and they offer suggestions for making libraries a more vital part of youth development. The session will conclude with a discussion encouraging audience members to describe the directions of their own youth-related research and to suggest avenues for future work in this vital area of library and information science research.

References

Malach, D. A., & Rutter, R. A. 2003. For nine months kids go to school, but in summer this school goes to kids. *Reading Teacher* 57, 50-54.

Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives.* New York: Basic Books.

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