Information literacy and the serious leisure participant: variation in the experience of using information to learn

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Abstract

Introduction. This study reports on an investigation into the ways in which people engaged in a serious leisure activity can experience using information to learn (also known as information literacy).

Method. Data were collected through twenty two semi-structured, one-on-one, phenomenographic interviews conducted with identified serious leisure participants operating within the area of heritage (as defined by the study).

Analysis. Empirical material was gathered through audio recordings and transcripts of the collated interview data. Data were analyzed using structural and thematic coding methods.

Results. The study revealed that serious leisure participants use information to learn in four ways, acquiring new information, helping the learning community, self-renewal, and entertainment.

Conclusions. This study contributes to our understanding of information literacy as it applies to a person's everyday leisure world.

Introduction

It has been suggested that one of the keys to future social, cultural and economic well being is the creation of an information society populated by individuals participating in an on-going and fruitful process of life-long learning (Bolton & Kearsley, 2008). Central to that process will be the individual's experience of using information to learn and their engagement in activities that promote and connect or create opportunities. Two research domains, information literacy and serious leisure, emerge as being of central importance.

Where information literacy may be understood as a way of learning via engagement with information (Brown, 2005), serious leisure can be seen as the route through which an individual can create an identity, life and career and formed around their interests and passions (Stebbins, 1982). It is driven by information (Burns, 2001) and the subsequent career or life which the serious leisure participant builds will be determined by their ability to access, interpret, evaluate and utilize information. all integral components of information literacy.

This study was conducted at the point where these two research domains meet.

Despite serious leisure providing an ideal venue for exploration of everyday life (Sibley, 2000) and even less to examine it within the context of leisure. This study helps to fill that gap by providing an answer to the question, how do people engaged in a serious leisure activity experience using information to learn? In doing so it provides research that can be used to develop an agenda for educating library professionals and promoting the diverse nature of information literacy within an everyday community context. In addition it will help to broaden library professionals understanding of information literacy by presenting results gained from a non-academic setting that is situated outside the conventional workplace or educational contexts but involves those who belong to public literacies' principle clients. This, in turn, will help library professionals to more fully understand the complexity of information literacy and engage with the life-long learning experiences of their patrons. In addition, it adds to the growing body of research that examines information literacy in non-traditional contexts.

Information literacy: the focus of this research

One of the defining characteristics of information literacy is the lack of universal agreement regarding the way in which it should be defined and operationally approached. Consequently, there are two perspectives that guide all current understandings. On the one hand, there are those perspectives that guide all current understandings. On the other hand, there are those perspectives that guide all current understandings.

In addition to the three research perspectives there are three contexts in which information literacy is seen to operate: educational, workplace and cultural. Within the educational context, Lynch's (2007) exploration of the experiences of students in the field of education highlights the importance of the experiences of students in education and learning to map the experiences of students enrolled in higher education and their experiences of that process of education and learning. Lynch's (2007) exploration of the experiences of students in the field of education highlights the importance of the experiences of students in education and learning to map the experiences of students enrolled in higher education and their experiences of that process of education and learning. Lynch's (2007) exploration of the experiences of students in the field of education highlights the importance of the experiences of students in education and learning to map the experiences of students enrolled in higher education and their experiences of that process of education and learning. Lynch's (2007) exploration of the experiences of students in the field of education highlights the importance of the experiences of students in education and learning to map the experiences of students enrolled in higher education and their experiences of that process of education and learning.
The relational perspective to information literacy

To date, the main emphasis in information literacy research has been on areas such as skills-based instruction, protocols and standards, while little attention has been paid to examining the ways and means through which individuals engage with information (Brown, Hughes, & Somerville, 2013) in an experiential sense. Without a solid understanding of the information experience, as opposed to the behavioral interaction with content, information literacy programmes are being created without the awareness that intervention is one in which information literacy might be enacted (Brown, Hughes, & Somerville, 2013). Subsequently, when Information Literacy is thought of as primarily being through the lens of skills acquisition, education or utilization.

Where this research differs is in its adoption of a relational perspective of information literacy. Pioneered by Bruce, and realised in The seven forces of information literacy (2002), the relational perspective sees information literacy as emerging from the myriad of ways in which people engage with and relate to information (Bruce, 2003). The focus is on ‘the ways and processes through which learners engage with information’ (Bruce, Somerville, & Hughes, 2013, p. 2). In adopting this perspective, this study sets out in a life of finding ties that express more of the relationships that social science participants have to and with information than one that revolves around the ways in which they seek and use data.

Participants

Purpose sampling, a method commonly used in phenomenography, was used to recruit the interview cohort. This allowed for the acquisition of data specifically relevant to the research investigation and aligned to the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002). Participants in this study, twenty-two in total, were sourced from the South East Queensland and Victoria metropolitan region of Australia. No two participants shared the same specific leisure activity not were pursuing it within the same organization (e.g. a museum, gallery or other such establishment). As a result, all participants displayed unique understandings which through their leisure activity to take part in the study was split equally between males and females (something unusual in serious leisure studies) and there was representation across a broad age range from thirty to eighty two years. In order to determine that participants were genuinely engaged in a serious leisure activity a face-to-face pre interview, based on engagement with social science (including participation) was conducted. Suitable participants then engaged in one individual face-to-face interview during the course of 2013.

Participants in the study can all be categorized as belonging to the hobbyist branch of serious leisure engagement (Biddulph, 2002). According to Biddulph (2002, p. 245), hobbyists ‘look the professional after age of adolescence, although they sometimes have commercial aspirations and often have small publics who take an interest in what they do’. In addition, they can be classified according to the hobbyist subgroups of hobbyist activities: collectors, makers and tailors, activity participants (in non-competitive, rule-based pursuits such as fishing and barbequing), games (both competitive, rule-based activities and competitive and competitive swimming) and the enthusiasts of the liberal arts hobby. The participants in this study and their range of serious leisure engagement can be classified similarly. Of the twenty-two interviewees, six were engaged in liberal arts pursuits, five in collecting, one in spares, and seven in entertaining and leisure in making and tailoring.

It should be noted that this is not a detailed qualitative study of a specific type of serious leisure community. Neither is it a study of serious leisure as a research focus. On the contrary, it focuses on experiences within a particular serious leisure community at all engagements with a specific phenomenon – information literacy. That case has been selected in a selection of serious leisure group is not an indication of the study’s focus but, rather, on the thoroughness of the study itself.

Heritage: the participant context of this study and one avenue for serious leisure engagement

The participant context for this study was heritage. That area of engagement can be understood as dealing with the ‘converse of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities’ (SCOMOS, 2003) and consisting of artefacts both physical (objects) and emotional (language, stories, song). It refers therefore, both to a society’s historical past and its cultural present. As over eighty percent of Australians participate in at least one heritage activity during the course of each year with the majority participating in two or more (Gove, 2011) the heritage area is clearly a focal point for the majority of Australians and a valuable site for emerging research such as this study. To that end, Harri’s examination of the learning aspects available to serious leisure participants in the liberal arts hobbyist realm (2002) is worth noting. While Brunt’s focus on information behaviour differs from this study’s emphasis on information acquisition and expression it is the core activity within that sphere does resonate with the findings outlined in this study.

Data collection and analysis

The aims of a phenomenographic study is to uncover variation in the experienced meaning of a phenomenon (Marton, 1981). Information is gathered by way of interviews (Marton, 1981) in which participants are asked a series of questions designed to draw out their experiences and understanding of the phenomenon under examination. These questions need to allow the interviewees to respond without constraint and for a dialogue to be established between them and the interviewer.

The questions used in the study were:

- Tell me about your interest in heritage
- Can you describe a time you used information to learn about your heritage interest?
- What kinds of information have you used and do you use to learn about your heritage interest?
- What part does information play in pursuing or engaging with your heritage interest?
- How do you use information to learn about your heritage interest?

As a typical of phenomenographic studies (Biddulph, 2002) these questions were adapted to gain a greater depth of response and reflection from the participants. Prompts included:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- Can you expand on that?
- Can you give me an example?
- Why is that important?

Each interview was audio recorded, with the participant’s consent, and then fully transcribed for future analysis.

Findings

In a phenomenographic study the outcome of data analysis is represented by categories of description that reflect the unique ways in which the phenomenon in question is experienced (Marton, 1981). Each category is described in regards to both the meaning and structure of awareness. The meaning, or referential element, describes what the individual is aware of in a particular phenomenon. Meaning is constructed when the phenomenon being experienced becomes distinct from and clearly defined against its contextual surroundings (Marton, 2000). The ability to discern these features of an experience that will allow for meaning to be ascribed is dependent on the individual's experience of variation (Marton, 2000). Variables enable the individual to experience an entity as distinct from other phenomena that will, in turn, allow them to assign a unique meaning to a unique experience.

The structure of experiences represents those elements resident in the foreground and background of awareness. Each category (in this study there are four) represents a unique structure of awareness that is formed and made real by three dimensions of variation (Marton & Booth, 1995). The structure of awareness includes the form, the background and the foreground.

Of the three elements, the form refers to those things that are the object or subject of one’s clear attention, whose function and form are all clearly defined and with which the awareness and understanding of them. The form is the thematic core of a person’s awareness and is central to the individual’s awareness and experiences of a phenomenon. The form emerges from the individual’s total awareness of their experienced situation (Marton, 1992) but consists of one particular way of which the individual is aware of it. The forms directly related to the phenomenon are considered to be within the internal horizons of a person’s awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997) and constitute their form. The background is that portion of awareness which is related to the object or subject in form and which informs our understanding of the object but which is not as sharply and clearly defined. It refers to those parts of the individual’s experience of a phenomenon which are clearly discerned but do not occupy their central focus (Booth, 2006). The margins, while related to the focal object or subject sit just outside our perceptual awareness so as to be an almost presence within our perceptual awareness. Just as the background represents those elements of experience (of a phenomenon) which are clearly defined but not the individual's central focus, the margins refer to those other elements that, while they may be relevant, do not form part of the individual’s delimitation of the phenomenon at hand.

It is possible for an individual to see a phenomenon in different ways at different times, depending upon the circumstances in which the phenomenon is encountered. That occurs when certain elements or aspects of the phenomenon are more, or less, clearly defined within a particular field of awareness (Marton, 2000; Marton, 2004; Marton & Booth, 1997). Subsequently, these elements or aspects can be seen as dimensions of variation occurring within the overall structure of experiencing the phenomenon in question. Therefore, when examining a phenomenon it is possible to discuss it not only in terms of the categories of description and outcome space but also in regard to the variation which occurs in each category experience a particular phenomenon at any given point in time. The margin is a picture of the similarities and differences between the categories and paves the way for a more detailed understanding of the intersections that exist between each category (Marton, 1992).
The categories of description: Serious leisure participants’ experience of using information in order to learn (Information literacy)

In a phenomenographic study, data analysis requires "becoming familiar with the data, identifying relevant parts of the data, comparing extracts to find sources of variation or agreement, grouping similar segments of data, articulating preliminary categories, constructing labels for the categories and determining the logical relationships between the category" (Eriksson, 2004). The researcher adopts the position of a listener and, therefore, does not address the data with a pre-determined outcome in mind (to do so would be to adopt the position of a teacher) but, rather, attempts to develop their knowledge and understanding by a close reading of the data gathered from the subjects.

In undertaking that close reading, the researcher attempts to unpack meaning and structure from the research data they have gathered, across the range of interviews and not on an individual-by-individual basis. The aim is to uncover a common descriptive pattern of variation in experience, rather than one that speaks only for the individual (Eriksson, 2004). In order to do that the researcher first identifies the similarities and differences that are apparent in the interview transcripts. Those similarities and differences represent the variation found in developing the phenomenographic study (Eriksson, 2004). In fact, it is the德尔内容 of variation that is to be explored. The researcher then looks for the underlying common descriptive pattern of variation, and to capture that the researcher maps the range of responses to the phenomenon in question. The categories of description emerge from this process.

After analyzing the interview data it was possible to establish four distinct categories of description relating to the ways in which the interview cohort (serious leisure participants) experience using information to learn. They are:

1. Acquiring new information
2. Helping others (within the learning community)
3. Developing personal awareness
4. Entertainment

These categories articulate the qualitatively different ways in which the interview cohort experienced the phenomenon in question (using information to learn). They are based on comparison and grouping of data representing expressions of consciousness. The categories are not general characterizations of the conceptions but forms of expressing the conceptions (Gunstone, 1997, p. 169).

In this study, three dimensions of variation were identified. These were:

1. Experienced identity
2. Information
3. Learning

Experienced identity emerged as a way of seeing oneself in relation to a particular context. It is not only to the individual but is, rather, organically representative of their experience of a phenomenon.

Information was experienced as providing the building blocks for the information. Information might be verbal, visual, visual or abstract but is not restricted to anything other than the embodied ability to express and communicate it as information. The only requirement for interpreting anything as information is that it inform the person engaging with it. Therefore, what is informed by information is not necessarily considered by another person.

Learning was experienced as something that occurred when, after engaging with information, the individual achieved a state in which their understanding of a particular situation, entity or phenomenon in general was represented in their own unique manner. What is learned is not relevant, except to the individual. The only concern is that after an engagement with information (in whatever form it constitutes it) the individual has attained a sustained state of understanding.

The following is a discussion of the categories of description that emerged during the study. Each category is described in terms of the meaning that was assigned to it. Supporting data in the form of quotes taken from the interviews is included to show how that meaning is an accurate representation of the responses provided by the interview cohort.

Categories of description

Category one: acquiring new information

When the participants experienced using information to learn as acquiring new information their focus was on skill and knowledge acquisition. This may occur, as the following quote illustrates, so individuals can fill identified gaps in their knowledge base and provide a degree of importance to their serious leisure career.

Our knowledge isn’t incremental so we always have to fill the gaps and build up our supply of new knowledge and information. If our only information is all we’ve got, new is fresh and it gives us momentum. (Interview No. 14)

New information relating directly to a person’s leisure activity is added to their existing knowledge base. In so doing, they are able to add new knowledge, keep in touch with new developments and deepen involvement with their leisure activity while progressing (in status as well as expertise) as a participant within their unique leisure community. You want to fill the gaps in your own knowledge base; learn new things so that you continue to move forward as an informed person. (Interview No. 16)

Within this category, the focus is on acquiring new information that will help the individual become a more capable, better informed and more expert serious leisure practitioner. What sits in the background, however, is the notion of being judged as a valuable member of the learning community.

Experienced identity

Experienced identity emerged in two distinct ways. The first is under the guise of a serious leisure participant. In that instance the person’s experience of information literacy (using information to learn) is colored by their serious leisure pastime, its rules, requirements, and expectations and the social world that is constructed around it. The second is an individual and social world that is constructed around the social world of leisure activities and the decision to participate within it. This is a world in which the individual’s social world is constructed around the social world of leisure activities and the social world of a serious leisure participant. The individual is perceived as someone who is engaged in a serious leisure activity and the social world is constructed around the social world of a serious leisure participant.

Information

Information was experienced as something that can be utilized to achieve a particular aim. That aim can range from learning a new skill to acquiring new information as the means by which to increase personal knowledge, and thereby deepen involvement in a serious leisure activity.

Learning

In this category, learning is multi-faceted. It takes place not only within the sphere of the individual’s serious leisure activity, but also in the personal, social, and cultural spheres. In so doing, the individual’s serious leisure activity is a unique entity within the social world of a serious leisure participant. Therefore, learning or education is experienced in terms of what the individual can learn for themselves about themselves, their serious leisure activity and the social world they inhabit.

Category two: helping others (within the learning community)

The Information literacy experiences are one of knowledge exchange within the context of the serious leisure learning community. Unlike categories one, three and four, category two contains a notable degree of attainment in which the individual directs their energies towards helping other members of their unique learning community to acquire and interpret information appropriate to their shared area of interest. In so doing, they not only help fill gaps in their colleague’s knowledge base but they also provide an avenue through which the serious leisure activity itself may be strengthened and, potentially, protected against future neglect.

The more information you build up and pass on to other people to inform them then the more solid and stable you make the thing you’re interested in. If it remains unknown and information is lacking or missing on then it’s easier for it to be lost and forgotten and misunderstanding. (Interview No. 10).

The focus in this category is on sharing information with other members of the learning community. This takes place between members of the serious leisure learning community and involves a reciprocal, communal relationship where the individual does not act solely as educator or disseminator of information. What sits in the background is the individual themselves and the benefits they derive from helping other members of their learning community.

In this regard, the background deals with the egotistic aspect of helping others to learn, sharing information and even being involved in a learning community to begin with all with the ultimate motive of what can be gained from that involvement. In such instances it would appear as if any focus on developing the serious leisure topic is done with the kind of activity to themselves. There does appear to be another particular concern for other members of the learning community and the attitude is that they are a necessary evil only so that the individual can achieve the goal station or status they have set for themselves.
Experienced identity

Individuals could be seen to display two distinct varieties or types of experienced identity. That is, the way they experienced the phenomenon in question was determined by one of two identities which guided their actions, attitudes and the experiential context of their engagement with the phenomenon. The two experienced identities that emerged from analyses of the data were ‘serious leisure participants’ and ‘serious leisure community member’. In a broader sense they can also be seen to deal with identity effects that are individualistic (the serious leisure participant) and communal (serious leisure community member).

Information

Information is experienced as something emerging from and intimately connected to communal interplay in which people learn from and educate one another. Similarly, it connects people through their interest in and response to a shared activity or phenomenon. In that regard, information broadens the learning community’s scope. While there are constraints of that might be a specific learning community topic, other parts may have a different concern but be tangentially connected by virtue of the information, which contextualises it in a different fashion.

It can also be said that information is experienced as something that is not bound by a specific physical representation. While there may be textual or visual means, it does not have to be something that can be seen in such a way. Information is experienced as being part of the learning community itself as functions as an information hub, not merely through generating physical data but by bringing together people who share a similar curiosity or an interest. In these cases, these people remain in isolation from one another. However, information is not merely seen as the means by which knowledge can be acquired or learning can be facilitated. On the contrary, it is also seen as the ingredient necessary for a person to deal with potentially antagonistic elements within their social world, something that fosters the learning community within which socialisation is of primary concern. The difference being, that within this category, the individual is concerned with the security of the serious leisure activity, not their own personal safety and well-being. Regardless, the experience of information is as a way in which to preserve some interest to the individual against future neglect in an interesting aspect to note.

Learning

In this category learning could be seen to possess several dimensions. While all fall under the umbrella of the learning community and are similar in aspect, each does represent a slightly different aspect of the learning community itself and the topic (or learning opening within it). First there is the social dimension, in which the individual learns about the community in which they operate (in this case that is the serious leisure learning community). That refers not to the serious leisure areas of interest but, rather, to the people involved with it and who form the learning community itself. Learning in this dimension represents a form of socialisation in which the individual must navigate a social world full of norms, rules and expectations along with human concerns outside of his or her own. What this illustrates is that learning for the individual as an individual, in which they acquire more knowledge about their particular serious leisure activity, but also for the whole community as a whole. In that regard they are learning how to be part of the learning community. In that regard, they are learning how to be part of the community and how to engage with them (by the community) and how to ensure that the community (which is representative of the serious leisure topics) survives into the future.

Secondly, there is the personal dimension in which the individual learns about him- or herself through engagement with the learning community. This self-discovery is made possible due to the individual’s engagement, not simply with their serious leisure activity, but with the learning community itself. This dimension comes from the fact that we learn about ourselves as we learn about others. In this regard, the learning that comes from the learning community itself. It is evident that as individuals grow within their learning community, their values (or) the serious leisure activity or topic and it functions as a way in which people can learn more about it. However, it also has the potential for the participant to learn more about themselves as people. Therefore, it cannot be said that attaining self-knowledge or self-awareness is strictly a function of or motivated by the learning community. It can be seen as a way to these individuals who operate in complete or almost complete isolation. Indeed, the learning community does not provide us with the support they need to maintain their individuality. The community’s focus is on those who participate in a specific leisure activity, either alone or as part of it. It is achieved through community-based relationships, thereby engendering a sense of belonging. Then, through that engagement, they become part of the learning community. Subsequently, what the individual learns about him- or herself may come via engagement with other members of the learning community, by way of personal reflective engagement in relation to the activity itself or in combination of both.

Lastly, there is the serious leisure dimension, in which the person learns more about their area of interest. All of this happens within the context of the learning community whether as part of a wider group or as an individual learning in isolation. The means by which learning occurs is dependent on the individual and their particular circumstances. However, as leisure is a choice (if it were not undertaken by choice it would not constitute serious leisure) so too is the way by which leisure is engaged with. Learning does not require a particular context, only that the individual is engaged and receptive.

Category three: developing personal awareness

In this category, the information literacy experience is one of culturalising inter-personal, inter-personal, institutional and cultural awareness on the part of the individual. As was stated, along with power there’s the political edge to knowledge and information. We are concerned with how to navigate the political context as well as socialize in these contexts. It is a valuable tool and ally as well as a tool to be used in these contexts. Information literacy is experienced as an intrinsic and necessary part of a person’s involvement in and with the social world of a community and culture. Therefore, knowing how to effectively navigate these worlds is dependent upon the person’s development of information literacy awareness (attitudes and skills).

As with categories one and four, the experience of information literacy is distinctly self-centred. That element of self is illustrated by the following quotation:

“This certainly helps to build up my self-esteem and I think the more you know the more confident you feel in yourself and that adds to your sense of self-worth and fulfilling. (Interviewee No.18)

However, unlike category one, it is difficult to call that experience egocentric. On the contrary, it presents as more akin to self-preservation than self-absorption.
The focus within this category is on the individual understanding their place within society. In knowing where they sit within the social world, what society’s expectations are of them and what requirements that entails upon them is an individual’s response for dealing with it. Indeed, the focus on what they lack. However, in order to identify what they lack they must also be aware of what they possess. That understanding, of their current state of being, sometimes part of the background to this category. The other part of that background consists of those who make up the social world in which the individual exists. It could also be argued that, within this category, the person’s serious leisure activity moves into the background. They are still very much aware of it, however, it does not command their focus as it does in other categories. However, what sits in the margins of their awareness became repressed because the background information is the academic dimension or application.

Experienced identity

The question of experienced identity is far clearer here than it was in categories one or two. Unlike in those categories, there is really only one clear experienced identity at play and it can be categorised as member of the or the serious leisure community. While there are members of the community who are experienced identity, as their relationship to themselves, their relationship to the world at large, to their serious leisure topic (although it is a primary concern), their relationship to other members of the community and their relationship to societal constructs. Situation and figured power and control they are only subtle manifestations of the social identity which dominates this category.
The individual speaks of him- or herself as being part of a society but not in any position of authority. The impression given is that they consider themselves to be somewhat marginalised only if in regards to a perceived lack of personal power and control over whatever orthodox devils their social world. Subsequently, they discuss their expectations of information, providing them with something they do not have but believe they require.

That being the case, it can be suggested that the individual’s experienced identity does not simply emerge through membership within a society, culture or community but is, rather, formed by their conception of themselves as possessing an almost pristine status within the social world. Othering them on their minor status they speak of their things in their own terms or is described as a perceived lack of power: political, social and cultural. In being marginalised, only if by their own perception, individuals see their information literacy experience as being the means by which they can challenge their lack of power, influence and control while potentially affecting a change in their circumstances or in their relationship to society.

Information

Information is seen as the ingredient necessary for a person to achieve social growth and personal development. To that end, information is not confined to tangible, visible data alone. On the contrary, it also includes information gleaned through social interaction, through observation of other individuals and/or groups, through practical or physical engagement with an in an activity or simply through an individual’s engagement with their social world.

Learning

Learning is experienced in four ways in this category: it is experienced firstly as a way to protect the individual against elements within society (as opposed to the social world of the serious leisure activity) which may not have their best interests at heart. It is experienced as a way of understanding how to act and behave within society without it being within a social world of the individual itself. Learning is also a means by which to understand the self in relation to society (as an individual in relation to the group) and a tool for navigating a complex social world. Learning, as has already been suggested, is a form of self-interest and that becomes clearer in this category. However, that self-interest is not purely egocentric or lacking in purpose. On the contrary, individuals see learning, within this category, as an integral part of self-preservation in their relationship and dealings with the social world.
Category four: entertainment

In the final category, the information literacy experience is one of personal enjoyment and self-fulfilment achieved through engagement with the person's serious leisure activity. Indeed, what is entertaining for the individual is also what attracted them to the activity in the first place (the belief that it may provide enjoyable and stimulating experiences) and keeps them involved with it. As such, as a consequence of personal enjoyment it is the motivating factor and the key driver in continued engagement with the serious leisure activity: 

"If it wasn't fun, I wouldn't still be doing it and it probably would never have done it in the first place. But it is a lot of fun, all of the things that go into making it fun are things that still make me happy today. (Interview No.36)

Information exists as the means of achieving that enjoyment. There is no concern with disseminating information, although this may play some part in the person's activities. Rather, information is for the fun, the person, only knowing as much as is entertaining and fulfilling. It provides a measure of enjoyment for them.

The focus within this category is on the individual being entertained through engaging with a serious leisure activity. Unlike categories 1-3, the emphasis is not on bettering either self or the learning community. There is no desire to be better off, fill gaps in knowledge (technical or non-technical) or improve oneself for the serious leisure activity. Rather, the focus is solely on the seriousness of the leisure activity and not on the means providing the participants with entertainment and a level of pleasure from engaging with an activity or an area of interest of their choosing. How the pleasurable outcome is achieved is not the individual's concern, rather that they manage to have fun.

There’s no real deep meaning or anything significant like that. I just have fun and that’s why I got into it in the first place and why I stay with it. (Interview No.27)

As a result, the experience of using information to learn is highly individualistic, self-centred and self-regulated. It does not matter whether any other person derives or can derive enjoyment and entertainment from a similar experience of information literacy. At all matters is that the individual perceives that experience as something entertaining and gratifying.

It is possible that the only statement that can be made about the pleasurable state is that it includes elements such as relaxation and stress relief and engages with other aspects that might give a person pleasure, such as time for knowledge, desire to resolve some part of their childlike, general curiosity and as a means by which to stay active at a later stage in life. In that regard, entertainment becomes not only a form of therapy but also a link to other stages within the individual's life-course. As a result, by virtue of possessing such highly personal and beneficial properties, entertainment as a category (within this study) becomes more significant and potentially complex than might first be imagined.

The entertainment experienced during information engagement might include learning new things about the chosen serious leisure topic, if it does (and the data suggests that it is likely in the case) then the topic itself will occupy a position in the background of their awareness. While an individual may be aware of it as a possible beneficiary of their entertainment it is not their primary concern and, as such, sits just outside of their focus (within the background of their awareness). Subsequently, as part of their pleasurable experience a person may choose to follow up on various areas of which they will be using the information they acquire and, potentially, the domains or area of interest that spawned the information. That awareness does mean either of these two entities will drive the individual's information experience within this category. Rather, they will be aware of but not necessarily moved by their presence. Entertainment, enjoyment and pleasure are their focus whilst the serious leisure activity itself merely sits in the background as a non-competing and non-intrusive presence.

As the focus within this category is solely personal, dealing with personal entertainment and the enjoyment gained from being entertained, information engagement (information literacy) is only constituted as a pleasurable act. Any information experiences that the person may constitute as not being pleasurable are pushed to the margins of awareness.

Experienced identity

In this category the question of experienced identity is unclear. When dealing with something that is both sensory and emotional, such as pleasurable entertainment it is difficult to say that the individual experiences either of these things by way of a particular identity. It could be that these elements are experienced by way of engagement with a serious leisure topic, in which case the dominant identity (the experienced identity) would be that of serious leisure participant. On the other hand, it could be that pleasure is achieved through engaging with information in a social setting or through connection with others who share a similar interest. In that case pleasurable activity would serve as the more likely classification.

What gives pleasure is not in question. For the participants in this study, it is their engagement with information in all its forms and functions which provides them with this experience. However, while they might be categorised as pleasurable seeker, this does not suffice as an identity. Individuals gain pleasure by engaging with information but not by seeking pleasure. On the contrary, pleasure is the direct result of their engagement with information and it is in the reason why they continue their involvement with the serious leisure activity. Subsequently, classifying participants as mere information seekers ignores the pleasurable aspect to their information engagement and places them as pleasurable seeker ignores the primary identity of their pleasure. In this regard it could be that this category is more closely aligned with category one (acquiring new information) and is actually a subcategory of it. Or, it could be that dealing with an intangible such as pleasure we are presented with a situation in which it is not possible to say which comes first, seeking pleasure or seeking information. That said there does appear to be enough distinction in this experience of information to recommend it as a unique and separate category in its own right.

Information

Information is experienced as an ingredient in the entertainment or pleasure seeking process that keeps the individual actively interested in their serious leisure topic. However, participants did elaborate on which part of the information experience they found pleasurable. In discussions, participants spoke of all information as being entertaining, no attention was paid to the data in exactly what attention or how information experience that they might have considered to be less than enjoyable. As the participants explain it and as they constituted their response to the questions posed, all information (not just the serious leisure activity itself) is pleasurable and entertaining. Similarly, there is no attempt made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others. It is that no attempts made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others. It is that no attempts made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others. It is that no attempts made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others.

Learning

Learning is experienced as a component of entertainment but not as the motivating force behind engagement with information. As with experienced identity, it is difficult to categorise the way in which learning occurs, pleasurable entertainment operates within a category of entertainment and pleasurable entertainment itself. While learning may occur it will manifest itself in a different fashion to the other categories. In those instances learning was a dimension in which the individual made big or small a better serious leisure practitioner, a more valuable member of a learning community or a more capable and informed member of society. In this category, however, the importance of the process of the information experience that they might have considered to be less than enjoyable. As the participants explain it and as they constituted their response to the questions posed, all information (not just the serious leisure activity itself) is pleasurable and entertaining. Similarly, there is no attempt made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others. It is that no attempts made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others. It is that no attempts made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others. It is that no attempts made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others. It is that no attempts made to categorise which form of information is more or less enjoyable than others.

Table 1 below presents an overview of the dimensions of variation which emerged during data analysis (as outlined above).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of variation</th>
<th>Category one</th>
<th>Category two</th>
<th>Category three</th>
<th>Category four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Leisure participant</td>
<td>Active member of learning community</td>
<td>Member of society</td>
<td>Pleasure seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Leisure activity focused</td>
<td>Shared learning experience</td>
<td>Understanding social roles</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Information seeking</td>
<td>Safeguarding the future of the leisure topic</td>
<td>Personal growth (person development)</td>
<td>Self-fulfilment (entertainment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Summary of the dimension of variation identified in the study

Conclusion

This study has shown that serious leisure provides an ideal way to examine certain literacy-sense concepts, such as information literacy. In addition it illustrates the richness of the everyday life or community context for information literacy and library science research.

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References


