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Pelikan's Antidisambiguation--Identity Literacy: Time to Teach It?

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As a part of coaching, you may want to explain how you're resolving problems and making decisions, or maybe not. If it seems like the person is still have trouble with their basic work, or seems overwhelmed, you probably don't want to. If they're consistently doing it very well, and have a handle on it, you probably should give them more information about how you're solving problems, and as they grasp this information, allow them more independence in resolving ones that you've explained to them.

From Coaching to Independence

As I said above, there are often good reasons to maintain a coaching relationship with a staff member indefinitely. In other instances, it may be advantageous to move them to full independence in doing their job. Those who are highly skilled and competent may be unhappy to have a coaching relationship indefinitely, while others may always be more comfortable with a closer working relationship with their supervisor regardless of their competence level. You may want to always be involved more closely with some aspects of their work because of its nature, or you may want or need to spend less time coaching them in order to be able to do other things. But there is a decision to be made here, and one that is best made with the full agreement of the staff member involved, as you can't make someone who really wants more direction be independent, nor can you make someone who wants to be more independent consult with you, so I highly recommend a direct discussion about this, and that you either agree or compromise about it, but reach an agreement that you both can live with.

Conclusion

When training is done well, it requires a lot of time spent planning, working with people, and checking work. While the time commitment may seem monumental, a skilled and competent technician will save a great deal of time in the future, so whatever process you use for training, it's time well spent. 🌲

Pelikan's Antidisambiguation — Identity Literacy: Time to Teach it?

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Check out the history of libraries in Wikipedia and you'll find, "The first libraries consisted of archives of the earliest form of writing...These archives…mark the end of prehistory and the start of history."

Examine the concept of Literacy and its history and you'll find that, "…early acts of literacy were closely tied to power and chiefly used for management practices, and probably less than 1% of the population was literate, as it was confined to a very small ruling elite."

In libraries, we pride ourselves in promoting literacy as a Public Good. We point with an objectively supportable justification at the history of the public library movement in the United States. I'd like to suggest, however, that we have still far more to do in the promotion of literacy.

We've expanded our definitions of literacy to embrace the ideas captured by mathematician **John Allen Paulos** in his book, "*Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and its Consequences*." From public libraries to university libraries, we find evidence that careful collection developers have taken care to include materials that intercept and assist people with literacy and numeracy at all ages and at all levels of accomplishment.

Today I'd like to propose the idea of Identity Literacy. Just as we teach and promote literacy and numeracy, perhaps the time has come that we should name and promote Identity Literacy among our students and clientele.

Social Media services are not merely the first place many people go when they fire up their computers. Facebook and Twitter are not simply where many people do most of their voluntary reading and writing. No — these services are in fact the source of choice to which many people turn to obtain, and even to establish, an online identity.

Identity Providers represent an immensely powerful industry. For many young people, the attaining of an ID from one of the important identity providers such as Google, Twitter, or Facebook marks a point of passage in the establishment of personal autonomy, approaching or on the level of getting one's driver's license. A university network ID is simply something one receives at New Student Orientation.

A university colleague of mine recently observed that, likely, persons we serve in the junior high school to undergraduate age demographic group are most likely to regard the identity we provide them with as a temporary tool, not adopted by preference, but used because it is required — to access the systems and services we offer. On the other hand, they regard their "social identities" as being owned by them, and as being a more-or-less permanent representation of themselves and their interests.

But when do the gigantic industrial providers of identity ever try to raise the Identity Literacy level of their customers? Those customers are the product they're in business to produce. They'd rather offer an Easy Button, with hidden hooks and barbs, so as to enrich their collection of marketable metadata. They're protected by the fig leaf of compliance: they publish their terms of service.

According to a U.S. Department study in 2003, cited in the Wikipedia article "Literacy in the United States," 21% to 23% of adult Americans were not "able to locate information in text," could not "make low-level inferences using printed materials," and were unable to "integrate easily identifiable pieces of information." It has become a truism that most persons don't read the Terms of Service displayed on click-through screens as they sign up for online services.

So in light of the Department of Education's notions of literacy as an ability to locate information in text, to make low level inferences using printed materials, or to integrate easily identifiable pieces of information, how will the "average" junior high, high school, or college undergraduate do if handed a printed copy of the Terms of Service of a modern Social Media Identity Provider? Will they be able to extract a cogent representation of the content of those terms of service? Could they read it and translate it back to you in the vernacular? Would they feel it's worth the effort to try?

Interestingly, it's a person's name (and its expression) that we often treat as a foundational building block of literacy. Historically, the fact that one could write and recognize one's own name was a rudimentary test of learning. The writing of a person's name, rather than making "one's mark" has been used by some scholars in attempts to estimate early literacy rates. Today we learn to write our names at a very early age. We applaud and celebrate the attention and seriousness with which a child turns to the effort to spell out his or her name. We preserve those first autographs alongside early interactions with clay or paint. Perhaps we value them so highly because they are among the first lasting evidences of a person's intentional engagement and interaction with the world.

In the early days of multi-user computing systems, one adopted or was assigned a user name, typically used simply within the scope of a single system. I can't even recall with certainty what my first computing identity was or how it was assigned, back when my goal was to learn something about these mysterious, often untouchable systems. My college had a PDP-11. Of course, I was also willing to try my hand at Wumpus, or Adventure, or Trek.

Graphic Recordings from the 2015 Charleston Conference

by **Leah Hinds** (Assistant Director, Charleston Library Conference)
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The **Charleston Library Conference** is excited to report that **Greg Gersch**, a graphic recorder from the Washington, DC area, created works of art from information presented in sessions at the conference on Thursday, November 5. We are thankful for a Platinum Sponsorship from **bepress** (*http://www.bepress.com/*) that made this possible. We also thank **Melanie Dolechek**, Executive Director of the **Society for Scholarly Publishing**, for her invaluable assistance onsite providing guidance and industry-specific information to **Greg** as he worked and asking questions and talking with attendees.

Greg used large canvases, approximately 8x4 feet, to capture the main ideas and takeaways from the conference through graphic art. He recorded the plenary presentations from **Courtney Young** (Head Librarian and Professor of Women's Studies, **Pennsylvania State University** and 2014-2015 **American Library Association (ALA)** President) and **Jim O'Donnell** (University Librarian, **Arizona State University**) as they were presented live on stage. During the afternoon breakout sessions he was stationed in the lobby area collecting notes from attendees and asking questions to summarize their "Aha!" moments.

Larger images are available on the **Charleston Conference** Website (*http://charlestonlibraryconference.com*) and for more detail, but you can see some of the excerpts below.

And the ultimate answer to the question, "Where Do We Go From Here?"

"The **Charleston Conference** has always placed emphasis on innovative and out-of-the-box thinking. This year we are going to try using a graphic recorder who will listen to speakers and transcribe the Eureka moments and insights visually. This should be perfect for the **35th Charleston Conference**," said Conference Founder and Convener **Katina Strauch**. "We would like to thank bepress for sponsoring this exciting new approach. We will be sending a digital image of each of **Greg Gersch's** masterpieces to the attendees following the conference and hope that this will serve as one of the touchstones to continue conversations long after the conference is over."
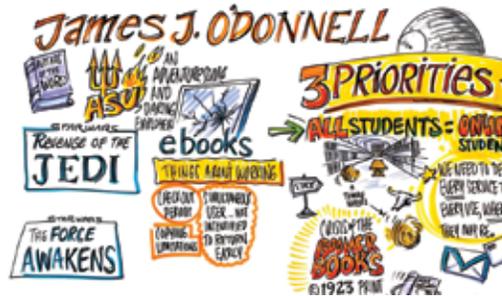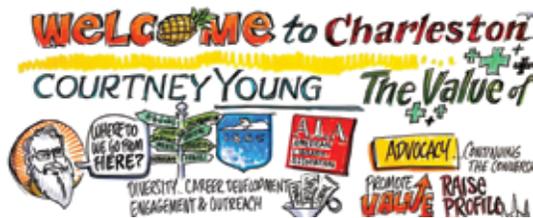
These games, especially Adventure and Trek, used a lot of printing paper, so it was wise to ask the computer lab person if it would be alright to play them. I can remember feeling that I'd really stepped into the future when the lab got a video terminal which presented what before had been printer output in beautiful green characters. Now one could explore **Will Crowther's** creation without regard for the amount of fanfold printer paper one was piling up behind the terminal.

Many *Against the Grain* readers will remember CompuServe, America Online, and other early commercial computing services. A CompuServe ID was a mark of the forward-looking person. Originally seven digits in length, later eight, nine, and ultimately ten digits, these IDs were generated in advance. Starting in 1989, CompuServe enabled email access using the ID in the form of "xxxxx.xxxx@compuserve.com."

It was through such vehicles that we could first explore the unregulated world of the bulletin board. The extent to which such communications were assumed to be anonymous, or nearly so, had an influence on the way some people would express themselves. A person might adopt a persona, and establish it as a comfortable "*nomme de plume digitale*." Some people felt empowerment in the discovery that they could actually, finally, be the stinkers they really were.

As deep as the cesspool of human depravity and criminality is the Internet's capacity to harbor it. In the libraries we've struggled with the tensions between our ideal of providing access and providing a protective environment in which people can learn and grow in safety. I've seen reminders on placards near publicly accessible computers, there to remind people, for example, not to enter certain types of information into a Web page's text entry form. In the restrooms of these same libraries, we might find a reminder, taped to the mirror, that washing your hands helps prevent the spread of flu. Such efforts are well intentioned, but perhaps demonstrate in their simplicity an inability to take on the multi-faceted, difficult domains of cybersecurity or public health policy.

I think the challenges of cybersecurity are exactly what we should take on in our schools and universities. We have Drivers Education programs because untrained people can cause grievous harm to themselves or others behind the wheel. I'm not suggesting that one ought to need a license to surf the Web, but might we not at least include in our curriculum content designed to help people understand the nature of the network, its characteristics and the threats it can carry, and how to navigate it so as not to endanger themselves or others?

I have sometimes observed in Bibliographic Instruction a tendency to focus upon the operation of a particular interface rather than on the broadly applicable underlying information science inherent in search and retrieval across all interfaces. At most, and only perhaps, an explanation of Boolean operators might be provided (and described as "advanced" searching — perhaps because that is what the interface calls it). But the difference between "And" and "Or?" Not so often. And left aside are proximity operators, wildcard searches, even the usefulness of examining a search result set to understand why particular records were returned. "Well, most people don't want to bother with all that," I've been told. Ok — maybe it's not our jobs to elevate people's understanding of how things really work.

But we ought to be able to show anybody what a sophisticated modern spear phishing attack looks like. We can promote the idea that complex passwords, changed at reasonable intervals, are simply what it takes to be a responsible citizen of the net. We can suggest that a Friend is something more than someone you Like and who Likes you back on Facebook. And as ever and always, we can create an environment in which it's not an imposition to ask people to think.