SI 643 - Professional Practice in Libraries and Information Centers, Winter 2009

Joan C. Durrance, Joan C.

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Librarians & their Clientele: Anticipating Info Needs

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- T.D. Wilson, theorist
- Holistic approaches since the early 1980s
- Coined the term “information behavior”
- Develops models to show components.

Source: http://informationr.net/tdw/
Universe of Knowledge

Information System

User’s Life-World
Reference
Group

USER

‘Mediator’

‘Technology’

EMBODIMENTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Information Seeking Paths

T.D. Wilson
1981
Harris, R. M., & Dewdney, P. (1994)

- Barriers to information: How formal help systems fail battered women. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press. (Ch 2: Theory and research in information seeking)
Information Seeking Insights

• Information needs arise from the help-seeker’s situation
• The decision to seek help (information) is complex.
• Needs arise when a person recognizes a gap in the ability to make sense of something
• People seek information that is most accessible - (zipf’s law - principle of least effort)
• People tend to seek help or information first from their own experience
• In general people prefer
  – interpersonal sources
  – from people like themselves and those they TRUST
Information Seeking Insights

• Info needs, seeking & use are influenced by a number of cognitive, affective, & situational dimensions.
• Uncertainty may drive the need to seek information.
• People follow habitual patterns (strategies, systems, etc. that worked in the past)
• People seek help from sources thought to be helpful, trustworthy, reliable.
• Formal sources of help (systems) may be used less frequently than people.
• Information seeking models are, of necessity, complex.
• More information needs, seeking, use knowledge: SI 551
IMLS STUDY & METHODS

• Multi-year, multi site study to identify outcomes funded by IMLS

• Study Team site visit to Queens (2002)

• We conducted interviews with 15 selected QBPL, focusing on the New Americans Program & the Adult Learner Program

• We observed clients and staff at NAP/ALP

• QBPL Staff conducted short interviews (in clients’ language) with 30 NAP and ALP users
  – Reason using QBPL service
  – What hope to gain
  – What else would help
  – How learned about the service used
  – Families’ use of QBPL
QUEENS BOROUGH IMMIGRANT POPULATION

- NYC’s highest ethnic population-1M born (41% of Queens residents) born outside US
- More than half speak a language other than English; 14% say they do not speak English well.
- More than 100 languages spoken.
- Some from oral tradition cultures;
- Other immigrants speak and read several languages;
- Some hold advanced degrees.
- People have a variety of reasons/motivations for gaining English skills
- Immigrant needs vary considerably.
Queens Public Library
Immigrant Programs

• Google Queens Library New Americans Program
• Google Queens Library Adult Learner Program

• **Our Research Questions**
  - How do immigrants use and benefit from NAP/ALP?
  - How does “context” shape these outcomes?
  - Do NAP and ALP fit as info grounds?
INFORMATION GROUNDS

• Synergistic environment temporarily created by behavior of people who come together to perform a given task, but from which emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of info (Pettigrew, 1999)

• Info flow is a byproduct of social interaction

• Foot clinics, playgrounds, barber shops, beauty salons, quilting bees, places of worship …

• Info Grounds result from a confluence of contextual factors
QBPL NAP/ALP Contextual Factors

• Contextual factor #1: The immigrants of Queens, NY (diverse by nature; needs diverse; face barriers)

• Contextual factor # 2: QBPL & Its Immigrant-Focused Activities

• Contextual factor #3: Professional contributions of QBPL staff
QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY
NAP, ALP SUMMARY

• QBPL Service Delivery
  – 63 branches + 6 adult learner centers
  – Immigrants served through various programs:
    • New Americans Program (NAP; coping skills, cultural awareness)
    • Adult Learner Program (ALP, English lang/literacy)
  
• Activities of these two services include:
  – thousands of public programs/year on multiple topics (cultural programs, etc.);
  – ESOL classes at various levels;
  – tutoring;
  – conversation groups;
  – workshops on coping skills of various sorts),
  – collaboration with community organizations.
  – Extensive marketing using ethnic media.

• Users interact selectively, may use more than one component.
Information Ground

• Context rich, Temporal setting
• Instrumental purpose
• Social types, Social interaction
• Informal & formal info flow
• Alternative forms of info use
• Sub-contexts create grand context (outcomes model)
WHAT WE FOUND:

• Ranges of outcomes: building blocks + personal gains

• Immigrants and their families tended to become long-term QBPL users—

• Through social networks some are aware of QBPL before reaching US

• NAP/ALP assist users in meeting info, psych, social, and practical needs

• QPL’s programs appeared to function as an Info Ground

• Challenge for libraries: to design spaces that may foster social interaction
Figure 1 can be found in the “Queens Borough Public Library New Americans (NAP) and Programs Case Study Report” at http://www.si.umich.edu/~durrance/casesstudies/casestudyreports/QueensReport.html