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Discovery: The Information Literate WorldCat

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Discovery: The Information Literate WorldCat

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Locating, synthesizing, and evaluating information is the heartbeat of information literacy. Using a high-powered discovery layer can assist in the mission of information literacy. However, in order for this partnership to come to fruition, traditional teaching practices must be re-examined to accommodate new technologies. This paper will define discovery, explore instructional practices, and investigate emerging teaching practices concerning the integration of information literacy instruction with discovery layers. The author of this article will use WorldCat local as the primary discovery layer for this study. As defined by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), WorldCat Local is a "webscale discovery solution that delivers single-search-box access to more than 1.071 billion items from your library and the world's library collections." William Allen White Library at Emporia State University adopted WorldCat Local as its discovery solution after reviewing several discovery layers services. WorldCat Local was selected due to its continually evolving nature when dealing with the electronic resources and physical collection.



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Abstract

Locating, synthesizing, and evaluating information is the heartbeat of information literacy. Using a high-powered discovery layer can assist in the mission of information literacy. However, in order for this partnership to come to fruition, traditional teaching practices must be re-examined to accommodate new technologies. This paper will define discovery, explore instructional practices, and investigate emerging teaching practices concerning the integration of information literacy instruction with discovery layers. The author of this article will use WorldCat local as the primary discovery layer for this study. As defined by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), WorldCat Local is a “webscale discovery solution that delivers single-search-box access to more than 1.071 billion items from your library and the world’s library collections.” William Allen White Library at Emporia State University adopted WorldCat Local as its discovery solution after reviewing several discovery layers services. WorldCat Local was selected due to its continually evolving nature when dealing with the electronic resources and physical collection.

What is Discovery?

The word discovery can be defined in many different ways. The Merriam-Webster dictionary calls it “the act or process of discovering.” In librarianship this basic definition for the word discovery is mingled with library technology and defined as such:

“Discovery layers are online services that allow library users to search for library resources (at the level of books and individual articles) and organize them or narrow their searches through faceted browsing capabilities” (Grotti & Sobel, 2012).

A discovery layer collects its information from a centralized index and provides access to content via a single search box similar to Google, Yahoo, or Bing. Discovery layers also provide facet limiters which narrow search results similar to eBay and Amazon (Hoepfner, 2012).

Not Federated Searching

Remember in the mid 2000’s the new revolutionary search tool that would sweep the library nation called “federated searching”? While federated searching was a great idea in theory it frustrated users and librarians because of its sluggish delivery of search results and limited access to remote resources (Helfer, 2005). Discovery moves beyond federated searching. Unlike federated searching, which uses real-time retrieval from multiple systems, most discovery tools retrieve information from a single knowledgebase populated with library resources. This approach gives patrons faster and arguably more accurate results when searching. However, the manner in which results are delivered is part of the concerns expressed by librarians as it relates to locating, synthesizing, and evaluating information (Grotti & Sobel, 2012).

Why Discovery?

With threatening budget cuts looming, adoption of library technologies can seem to move at the pace of a tortoise. Nevertheless, libraries are receiving pressure from powerful places to adopt better ways of searching for library resources. Search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo set the standards and models in contemporary search technologies (Fagan, 2011). Enter discovery, which behaves similarly to Google, Bing, or Yahoo, searching down to the article level and finding resources to meet user needs. It’s that simple, right? Wrong. Just like technologies before it, discovery layers present the following set of challenges and questions:

New Challenges with WorldCat Local

- How do we teach discovery?
- Pre-search Boolean operators are gone.
- Pre-search limiters missing.
- Relevancy Ranking of results is unclear.
- Too many results for our users.
- Where is information literacy?

Where Do We Start?

Based on the challenges listed above discovery layers can be intimidating to any information literacy instructor. However, given the nature of information literacy and the ACRL competency standards, discovery layers present librarians with a rare opportunity to use the challenges of discovery layers to enhance information literacy instruction. In other words, use what you already know. The common concerns about WorldCat Local can be solved through information literacy skill building (Grotti & Sobel, 2012). For example, discovery layers tend to yield countless results when performing a search using the single search box, leaving users frustrated and overwhelmed. At this moment users can be taught how to narrow their search results down using the information dissemination timeline (see figure 1).

(Figure 1)

Information Dissemination Timeline**Embrace Discovery**

Grotti and Sobel (2012) suggest a tiered approach to teaching information literacy with Worldcat Local. Because of the nature of most discovery layers, a tiered approach can be the best way to introduce discovery layers and information literacy simultaneously. The tiered approach, similar to pyramid teaching models in education, builds on prior knowledge or basic skills (Miller, 2002). Tiers are implemented to identify and assess various levels of learning, which can jointly transform the educational process of information literacy at the student, teacher and librarian levels.

In tier 1 the instructor should build on prior information literacy knowledge. If no prior knowledge exists then the focus should be on basic information literacy skill building. Using discovery catalog tools helps build basic information literacy skills. WorldCat local supports the building of basic skills through a single interface, for example. Students learn the exploration and navigation of a contemporary search interface, basic keyword searching, interlibrary loan, how to use citation tools, and format basics all from a single interface (Fagan, 2011).

While tier 1 concentrates on basic information literacy skills, tier 2 focuses on the application of basic skills and transitions into the evaluation of information. Discovery layers can be used to accomplish the charge of teaching the evaluation of information, beginning with the relevancy search results of the discovery layer (Miller, 2002). Since the relevancy search with discovery platforms yields at times over thousands of results, instructors can use the opportunity to teach the information dissemination timeline, teaching the assessment of format and evaluation of the resource (Grotti & Sobel, 2012).

Tier 3 is the highest, and final level of information literacy. These skills are taught within a curriculum beyond the “one shot” sessions (Grotti & Sobel, 2012). With the discovery layer of WorldCat Local students can employ the create list feature for group research projects, use the author profile search to critically evaluate an author and authorities on a subject and critically evaluate discovery tools.

Conclusion

Librarians possess a unique set of research skills that are diverse when compared to other academic disciplines. It is this ability combined with proficiency in multiple facets of technology that transitions traditional information literacy instruction, which focuses on locating, synthesizing, and evaluating information into transliteracy instruction. Transliteracy is best defined as:

“the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks.” (Thomas, et al, 2007).

Transliteracy for librarians and instructors of information literacy can be defined as the unification of information, digital and media literacy. Therefore this type of instruction does not replace information literacy but rather employs multiple facets of literacy for the twenty-first-century. Subsequently, through transliteracy librarians can turn the flaws of discovery platforms into our greatest assets in teaching information literacy in new ways.

Discovery is not the end of libraries but a new chapter in using technology. As librarians and information professionals, we are sanctioned to engage our patrons in every sphere. We are leaders who teach information literacy skills that transfer one network to another. Discovery is the library equivalent of where our patrons are every day, online. We have an opportunity to once again transfer information literacy through a new technology. Let's embrace it with all that we have.

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