

## ***Tapping into the information landscape: refugee youth enactment of information literacy in everyday spaces***

### **Abstract**

The development of information literacy and learning practices in everyday spaces is explored. Data for the study was collected using photo voice technique. Data analysis was conducted using photos and analysis of group transcripts. Participants describe how they *tapped* into social, physical and digital sites to draw information in the process of (re)forming their information landscapes, building bridges into new communities and maintaining links with family overseas. Media formats were identified according to their appropriateness as *fit for purpose*, suggesting that the enactment of information literacy was *agile* and responsive to need at the moment of practice. The results indicate that everyday spaces provide opportunities to develop information literacy practices, which support informal learning. Findings of the study conclude that information literacy is played out in a series of digital, vernacular and visual enactments, which shape the information landscape.

### **Topic Area; Information Literacy**

**Key terms: information literacy, refugees**

### **Introduction**

The idea that information literacy is a situated practice that is played out as a series of enactments, described here as digital, visual and vernacular literacies emerges through a study of how refugee youth experience the everyday spaces of their new communities (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016). Enactments refer to activities that take place in time or space, or the acting out of something in relation to a larger practice (Mol, 2002). Employing this conceptualisation, information literacy is enacted in everyday spaces through a range of information literacies which enable people to connect with knowledge about content (know-why) and competency knowledge which allows them to connect with their host societies.

The paper reports on the findings of *one* aspect of this study (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016) and responds to a question about how refugee youth engage with everyday spaces to create their information landscapes (Lloyd, 2006). The term *refugee* is ascribed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2015) and is used to describe people who because of war or persecution have fled their homelands without the possibility of returning.

A broader approach to information literacy as a way of knowing (Lloyd 2003) informs this study and the decisions made about research design. This approach suggests that researchers must include contextual and competency knowledge as part of their analysis as both is required to form or (re) form an information landscape and to understand how formal and informal, collective and individual learning occurs. The catalyst for information literacy lies in the need to meet the socio-cultural imperatives of the context (learning to and about work, education, and everyday activities) through the enmeshment of social and material practices. Implicit in this view of information literacy is the operationalization of this practice in relation to sayings, doings (Schatzki 2002) and relating's (Kemmis and Grootenboer, 2008) that shape a social site. Consequently, becoming information literate or developing competency in the practice of information literacy is predicated on the ability to recognise and enact the practice through a range of contemporary information literacies that reflect the ways of knowing which are valued, shaped and agreed upon by the community and which emerge through individual agency.

Of particular interest in this paper are the *types* of information literacies that were enacted by the participants and the range of information sources refugee youth connected with to learn about their

new communities and construct their own information landscapes. Specifically, we refer to how information literacies were enacted by young people in the study to build their capacity for resilience, growth and social inclusion. Foundational to these aspirations of growth and inclusion in the community, is the need to *tap in* – to develop ways to recognise, locate, and draw information from the host community or country. The enactment of information literacy by young people in this study emerges as agile and responsive to need and predicated on the ability to recognise and engage modalities of information.

### **Issues of Resettlement**

The focus of this research into everyday spaces is on refugees rather than migrants and the researchers make a clear distinction between the two designations. The designation of refugee describes people who have been forced to move countries and who because of this have left established social and economic networks. Migrants on the other hand choose to leave their homelands voluntarily. Unlike refugees, migrants tend to be better organised, have documentation, control the circumstances of their movement and often have family or other economic resources to support their transition. As a consequence of their ability to control their movements and their social, economic, political and cultural realities, migrants' information landscapes will be less fractured than those of refugees (Lloyd 2016, in press).

Interdisciplinary literature on resettlement indicates that structural and individual issues have been the focus of concern for researchers of refugee youth (Ager and Strang, 2008; Castles and Miller, 2009; Strang & Ager, 2010). Refugee youth are faced with a wide range of challenges in the process of resettlement, due to the forced nature of their displacement. Research into these challenges have noted structural issues such as social climate which influences the process of resettlement (Ager and Strang, 2008); the availability of resources that would enable young people to bridge the gap by developing cultural and linguistic competency (Ager and Strang, 2008); resettlement with family and others of the same culture (Bean, Derluyn, Eurelign-Bontekoe and Spinhove, 2007); and the ability to secure employment (Valtonene, 2004). Other issues noted in the literature include competency in the language of the host country (Olliff and Couch, 2005) which impacts on the ability to recognise or work effectively with information sources (Lloyd, Kennan, Qayyum and Thompson, 2013). It includes issues around belongingness and social inclusion, which can become contested when young people attempt to maintain cultural and familial alignment by remaining connected with their ethnic communities both in the host country and overseas, while at the same time attempting to build social capital in their host country (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Gifford and Wilding, 2013; Lloyd, et al 2013; Putnam, 2001; Wilding, 2009).

However, while the corpus of interdisciplinary literature is growing, what is often missing is literature that focuses on how refugee youth people access and use information in an attempt to reduce the uncertainty that has been created by the transition and resettlement process (Fisher et al, 2016 is a notable exception). In the library and information science field, at the current time this appears to be a limitation.

### **Enactment and everyday spaces**

The concept of enactment is relevant to understanding how information literacy is practised, because it highlights the emergence of social (overt and nuanced), and material activities that enable and support access to information sources (Lloyd, 2006) within a social site. Information literacy is often viewed as something that is attained, and this attainment is often reduced to information skill development. When viewed as *an enactment*, the focus is directed towards understanding activities and materiality as constitutive elements of social practice. This view of information literacy allows us to delve deeper into the complex interactions that are foundational to questions about how and why information literacy emerges or is viewed in relation to context.

While information literacy research has been largely focused on the learning process within schools, it is also important to understand how it is enacted in everyday spaces. The concept of everyday spaces is informed by the work of Lefebvre and evokes “a sense of ordinary spaces and territories where routine and informal daily life occurs”, once specialised activities have been eliminated (Lefebvre, 1991; Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016, p. 2). We extend this concept to include digital spaces, which form a seamless part of everyday life for all young people.

The present analysis draws from these conceptions to present a more complex view of how information literacy is practised by refugee youth to support informal learning in everyday life practices.

## **Research method**

The rationale for this study was that young refugees (16-25) have been underrepresented in research among refugees resettling in Australia. This group has been identified as falling through the cracks of formal education (Olliff, 2010) and are underrepresented in further education and training (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016). A previous study (Major, Wilkinson, Langat & Santoro, 2013) reported that sporting, church and youth groups exposed younger refugees (12-16 years) to opportunities for informal learning by enabling access to social networks. The current study explored whether similar learning opportunities might also be available to refugee youth aged between 16-25 years, and how these everyday spaces supported the development of information literacies and learning practices.

Fifteen young people aged between 16-25 from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD) were recruited via a number of agencies that support refugee youth and their families in a region of New South Wales, Australia. Participants identified their country of origin as South Sudan, or Afghanistan. Not all participants had permanent residency.

To assess their ability to understand the project, participants were given a plain English information sheet and had the study described to them by a researcher. They were then asked to discuss the details, tasks and activities they would be engaged in for the study. This process enabled the researchers to determine whether language and comprehension was sufficient to make an informed decision about participation (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016). The project design and protocols took into account aspects related to photography, training of participants, participants' comprehension of the study, personal safety, and positionality in relation to researcher/participant and to representing the voices of youth with refugee status (Lloyd & Wilkinson 2016). The study and was approved by the University ethics committee.

Photo voice technique (Wang 2006; Julien, Given and Opryshko, 2013) was selected for the larger study to allow participants to visually capture representations that reflected their understanding of what information or information sources were meaningful to them and contributed to their learning. The technique employed in this study has been described in detail (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2016) and in other research conducted by the authors (Lloyd, 2014, Major et al, 2013).

In photo voice technique, participants are asked to take photos which are used as the basis of interviews. The technique is particularly useful for information focused research, because it is much easier to photograph forms of information or a situation where information was important to the participant than to describe it.

The method was considered appropriate for this study for two reasons. Firstly, it was appropriate because of the difficulty people have in describing their information literacy practice or the intangible sources that are important to their learning (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016). Secondly, it was appropriate

because English was not the participants' first language. Photo voice therefore provided a technique, which allowed the participants to convey meaning and promote greater understanding of experience (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016). The primary aim of this technique is to allow participants to be actively involved in the research process, to make decisions about which elements of their experiences and understanding are paramount to capture, to represent information through visual means and to facilitate deep engagement with the research process (Lloyd & Wilkinson, 2016)

Three workshops were conducted. In workshop one, participants were provided with training in the use of cameras and protocols they were required to adhere to while taking photos for the study. They then spent several weeks photographing the types of information and information sources that were important to them and the places where that information was located. Regular contact was maintained with participants via Facebook to remind them of the purpose of the study. This type of regular and focused contact was considered necessary to ensure that participants remained motivated and committed to completing the project and to develop a connection with the researchers that would make later discussion of the photos easier.

In workshop two, participants returned with the five photos they had selected to represent the type of information and source that contributed to their learning in everyday life. Participants were split into small groups and each participant was asked to describe their photographs. A series of questions were posed about what the photograph represented, what sources of information were being identified, why the spaces were important to their learning and what learning was taking place. Other members of the group were then asked to comment on the photos taken by fellow participants leading to a discussion, which explored the themes of information sources, everyday spaces and learning. At the end of the group session, participants were brought together and all the photos were then presented and discussed. This technique provided for both emic (participant insider) and etic (participant outsider) perspectives to be incorporated into the data (Lloyd, 2015).

A third workshop was held where the findings and analysis were presented to participants and these were discussed to ensure accuracy of representation. The findings of the community phase of the project were then presented by the refugee young people and the researchers to the community of services providers.

Data from the focus groups and photos was analysed using a constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014). This process allowed common themes and perspectives to emerge through this stage of analysis. In the next section, the findings presented below represents *one theme* of the research project, focusing on describing information sources used by this cohort and how information literacy is enacted in everyday spaces.

### **Finding: *Tapping in*: Information sources and the enactment of information literacy**

The theme of *Tapping in* emerged from this study and describes how participants connected with information to support their everyday learning. A diverse range of media formats were identified according to their appropriateness, suggesting that the enactment of information literacy was *agile* and responsive to need at the moment of practice. In the process of tapping in, participants simultaneously actioned information literacy competencies that were required to build content knowledge. Tapping in was recognised as facilitating access to information that might not be explicit within the environment and required local know-how to access. Participants' descriptions were categorised as either social sources, physical sites (locations) or virtual sources, which influence the literacies of information, which were enacted.

#### **Tapping into social sources**

Participants singled out key people as sources of information because they represented a particular type of information (cultural, moral, practical information) or acted as a bridge to a primary or secondary source. This was expressed in the following way:

*Building connections and building relationships with people and sometimes you have things happening you can give them a ring and they can come help you out or they know someone who knows someone they can come and help you out.*

Identifying and then connecting with people allowed participants to locate information about local conditions. Learning about the community was considered an important information activity that while providing access to the mandated institutional sources of knowledge also gave access to more nuanced interpretations of institutional discourses.

### **Tapping into physical sites**

Participants nominated physical locations in terms of information potential, e.g., they obtained spiritual and moral information from attending church or faith based-groups or learning to play sport on the playing field. Also recognised were the secondary opportunities that physical locations offered to learning in everyday spaces. In some instances, it was the secondary information opportunity rather than the primary affordance that was considered more important by participants. Religious institutions, playing fields, art groups, the library, shopping mall or local park represented physical sites where secondary information about employment, about emotional issues such as first romances or parental issues could be discussed, where cultural differences, and norms could be observed and explored in the process of learning to act and fit in. The secondary role of the Church, which is primarily viewed as a source of moral and spiritual information, but also acts as a site for access to other types of information was a common example in the study. One participant describes the secondary opportunities:

*Mainly the Pastor ....but there's also people like before the church starts an elder that talks to you and the guy that does the food at the end, Brother...., he helps me out cause he is one of the students at (name of University) ... and he talks to me about courses I can get into next year 'cause I finish school next year and he said if I need help with anything as well because we had a 'my day' thing and he was there and I talked to him for a bit and he was just telling me about the different courses and what I require to get into them and whether or not I can do it.....*

The potential for physical sites such as churches to provide secondary opportunities was particularly evident in relation to keeping in touch with the world and with the congregation's views about events:

*Just talk about what's happening in the world like about plane crashes or something like that then Ebola then this ... thing in Rwanda maybe the genocide something like that and those who are suffering in Somalia, you know.*

### **Tapping into digital sources**

For the participants in this study, non-digital and digital spaces were seamlessly enmeshed and formed an integral part of the young people's lives. The capacity to use the internet to tap into wide and distributed global networks enabled participants to feel less disenfranchised, to remain connected to culture and maintain global affiliation with family, and communities overseas – to extend and anchor their world. Participants described how they actively evaluated the plethora of devices and formats determining which ones were 'fit for purpose'. This suggested a level of awareness, discernment and flexibility about the appropriateness of the tool or source and a preparedness to try other formats to accommodate need:

*It depends on what I'm going to do on Facebook, and it depends, also depends on the place I am in. So, if I'm going in for studies, I definitely use a laptop, but if I'm going in for social communication ...in most cases I use mobile....*

As an always-present source, Facebook was used to find out about the news in home countries, allowing participants to remain connected to family and maintain cultural ties:

*The reason why I chose this [picture] is most people get information through Facebook and Facebook being the most general source of social media, yeah, just created a good background to the young children with all the people and communication, relationships. Our friends and maybe getting, people getting ... getting friends, finding about the world is most things is done on Facebook.*

Online news services (particularly those from home countries) were considered a better information source. They provided a level of contextualization and accuracy, which was not often present in the local news services of the resettled country. Knowing about events in your country of origin, helped contextualise the conditions of family members who remained behind:

*I'd say overseas problems because recently I searched up about a disease that's back in my country area, in the country there, I searched that up and I've got that added to my favourites so like any, if it's ever been updated I'd be able to go on there and see what's recently happening and how the problems are solved, so that's good.*

### **Enacting information literacy**

Tapping in requires the development of information literacy practices. Participants described a suite of literacies (digital, visual and local), which supported their informal learning in everyday life. These are described below:

#### **Enacting Digital literacy**

In describing the online sources of information that support their everyday lives, participants referenced the enactment of digital literacy as being central to their information literacy practice. Digital literacy refers to the ability to use and understand information derived from digital information environment and to apply the skills of information literacy with an understanding of how digital environments are organized and when the use of digital sources is appropriate (Bawden & Robinson 2012; Glistner & Glistner, 1997, Lee, et, al 2013). Enacting digital literacy requires the skills of information literacy, but also includes the ability to employ technical skills related to computer use and networking skills. In this study, smart phones played an important role in the everyday information activities of refugee youth.

Participants described a wide range of digital spaces, with Facebook being the most prevalent and significant for maintaining transnational and global connections with family and friends. Other sources described included twitter and photo sharing through Instagram and Flickr.

Digital literacy skills (searching, chatting, hyperlinking etc.) were enacted when searching for information about jobs, or training opportunities, learning to drive, or just keeping up-to-date about world events. Some participants were involved in art-based projects and searched online for sources of inspiration for their art.

#### **Enacting mediational roles**

Participants also drew on the skills of digital literacy to enact mediational roles – acting as the conduit between technology and family members with limited language, literacy or technology skills.

The complexity of the online information environment and government policies of pushing information online, had placed young refugee youth in a position where they were often called upon to search for

information on behalf of their immediate and extended families that may not have possessed the information or digital literacies required to undertake these tasks confidently. This placed additional pressure on the participant group to act as intermediaries, points of reference and interpreters of the information environments for family and/or community members.

### **Enacting Vernacular/local literacy**

Connecting with local information and knowledges that are situated, contingent or drawn from local experience and expressed at the moment of practice is referenced through the enactment of local/vernacular literacy. Local or vernacular knowledge is contingent and called upon at the moment of practice (Bonner & Lloyd, 2011), and is a source of expertise. It provides a point of view that can only come from being situated, i.e., being there at the same time, in the same place. There may be an emotional resonance to this type of knowledge, which comes from the shared projects of alignment and affiliation.

Vernacular literacy is deeply embedded in everyday practices, is often learned informally and is therefore not systematised by an external authority (Barton and Hamilton 1998). In the present study vernacular literacy practices were expressed by participants as 'knowing whom to talk to' (in relation to finding out about employment), observing and listening:

*...sometimes listening to, because when you go there, there's some people come and sometimes they have all the information, so listening to them is not part of communication but it's part of knowledge.*

*You can find employment through people there especially in town, the best way to find a job is kind of who you know...*

Secondary opportunities were also accessed through this type of enactment. Participants recognised and mapped other people into the space and enacted vernacular or local literacy practices that were often highly nuanced and drew from personal knowledges of the local community. Participants listed finding out about careers, or employment as an outcome of secondary engagement.

### **Enacting visual literacy**

Visual literacy describes the ability to use and interpret images as information sources from a wide range of multimedia and print based sources. It requires the ability to recognise the information quality of the image and evaluate this quality relative to application. A participant reported how online basketball games helped to teach his brother the rules of the game:

*After I started playing basketball he got into basketball too and I bought the game and then he just played it 24/7 and didn't stop playing it until one day I just forgot and now he knows more than me. For me I realised that my little brother, everything he learned about basketball, he pretty much learned playing the basketball game NBA .*

Emerging from the present study is the idea that visual literacy has an observational quality not only linked to formal sources but also connected with everyday life. In a previous study, Lloyd, Kennan, Thompson and Qayyum (2013) observed visual literacy in connection with learning vernacular/local practices (e.g., watching for 'bin' days or observing local customs or traditions). In the present study gaming provided an avenue for visual literacy and afforded opportunities to watch (others) and learn about sport. This enabled participants the time to interpret information and to learn about the rules and strategies of the game.

## **Discussion**

In shaping their landscapes, participants in the study identified and then *tapped into* a complex range of sources to connect with the local community, learn about social conventions and get a feel for their new communities. They found out about employment, connected with faith, maintained their international cultural connections with family and friends, supported the information needs of family members and connected with their peer groups.

In addressing the research question of how refugee youth engage with everyday spaces to create their information landscapes (Lloyd, 2006) the practice of information literacy emerges as a series of enactments (e.g., digital literacy, visual literacy, vernacular, media and print). Refugee youth in the study evaluated these information literacies as *fit for purpose*, and adapted them to support, enhance and progress their everyday learning as well as their integration into the community. This suggests that young people in the study developed (1) the capacity to recognise forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that reduced their uncertainty and could determine the (2) primary and secondary opportunities of a site.

Engaging with and understanding a new environment required participants to get a feel for the game (Bourdieu, 1990, p.103; Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2016) and to recognise social conventions, which may hinder the ability to make sense of information or enact information practices in ways that are meaningful. These rules often appeared to nuance local knowledge and were accessed through intermediaries who as social sources were able to interpret the rules and regulations. Over time, the opportunities of the landscape and activities enabling access became recognised (and mapped) allowing participants to meet their information needs, reduce uncertainty and develop information resilience (Lloyd, 2015).

The findings of this study illustrate some important aspects of information literacy that may be critical to advancing study in this field. These are:

1. In everyday spaces, information literacy is a complex social practice and analysis must evoke and acknowledge this complexity. Consequently, an analysis of information literacy requires two phases: the first to identify and map the socio-cultural landscape that participants inhabit, experience and interact with; and, the second to identify how this practice emerges as an enactment. The concept of enactment is central to this kind of analysis, because it highlights taking into account the socio-cultural practices that prefigure the emergence of the practice in context and shape its enactment. Encountering new information landscapes meant that refugee youth were required to enact new types of information practice/s to: 1) recognise information important to new situations; 2) maintain connections with old landscapes to keep connected; and 3) create a new landscape that combined 1 and 2.
2. The complexity in everyday spaces promotes a different way of thinking about information literacy. Refugee youth in this study demonstrated that everyday spaces (both physical and digital) promoted the development of information landscapes that were richly textured and complex compositions of social, corporeal and epistemic information sources. To access these modalities and to become information literate required the enactment of a range of literacies which accommodated information in all its expressed and unexpressed forms.
3. Finally, understanding the richness and intricacy of these complex practices requires analytical depth. In complex information societies, information literacy is foundational to contemporary literacy practices, which have access and use of information at their core. Highlighting enactment of information literacies and the social or material activities, through which they emerge, makes information literacy practice visible and consequently teachable. This approach foregrounds the role of information and an information perspective, drawing attention to how people experience



and make meaning of information landscapes and how landscapes are used to inform everyday learning and support the development of resilience.

## Conclusion

This paper responds to a specific question, which forms part of a larger study (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2016) about how refugee youth support their learning and develop their information literacy practice. Of interest was how refugee youth experienced periods of establishment and built information landscapes by drawing content knowledge from a variety of sources, in addition to contextual competency knowledge about how to search for information, what sources existed and how they should be accessed. For the young people who participated in this study, resettlement required them to re (form) their information landscapes, to accommodate new sources of information and ways of knowing, while at the same time ensuring that they were able to maintain their cultural connections and ties. Engaging with information through a variety of formats was a central activity that supported integration into the community and aided in maintaining alignment and affiliation with family and community members.

The use of photo voice provides a unique and powerful technique to the methodological toolbox of qualitative researchers in library and information science. While limitations do exist, so do opportunities exist to explore the scope and application of this technique. The present study has demonstrated that the technique can be used to deal with complex concepts such as *information*.

Finally, by drawing attention to how information is enacted through a range of literacies, an attempt has been made to strengthen analytical concepts that can be used when researching and exploring information literacy, highlighting that the dance of information literacy research is in itself an enactment which may have social and material elements and always has information at its core.

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