Walking the talk: using digital media to develop distance learners' digital citizenship at the

University (UK)

Abstract

This paper describes the approaches that the Library at the Open University has taken to ensure

that distance learning students develop digital and information literacy skills for study, work and

lifelong learning. Librarians create learning objects and work with academics to embed them into

the online curriculum. They also deliver a programme of live online training and pilot new

approaches to engaging with the student community.

Keywords

information literacy, fake news, distance learning, digital literacy, digital and information

literacy, higher education, digital citizenship

Introduction

The University is the largest academic institution in its country, with 175,000 students studying part-time and at a distance. Most undergraduate courses have no formal entry requirements and the student body comprises a wide range of backgrounds and ages. The Library at the University is involved in leading on digital literacy and digital citizenship education for the University's distance learners in collaboration with colleagues in other units. In order to develop the University's distance learners' digital literacy skills a variety of approaches have been adopted. These include asynchronous online activities via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and synchronous teaching via online tools such as Adobe Connect and Facebook Live. This teaching is either embedded in the curriculum or standalone via library websites.

Library-authored DIL activities embedded in the curriculum

Over the years, the University Library has developed strategies for teaching large numbers of part-time distance learners (currently 175,000) digital and information literacy (DIL) skills. A team of Academic Liaison librarians advise academics on how to integrate asynchronous skills activities into the online curriculum to support students' learning at the point of need. This has proven to be a highly successful approach. They use the University's Digital and Information Literacy Framework (Goodfellow and Reedy, 2012), which outlines the skills and competencies students should ideally develop as they progress through their qualification, including understanding and engaging in digital practices.

Supporting the Academic Liaison librarians is a team of Authoring librarians, who are responsible for creating and updating XML learning objects developed to be embedded into the VLE. The Authoring team administer and maintain a large bank of these learning objects for reuse. Some of these activities include guidance on how to contribute to, as well as how to

consume, digital media and how to assess the validity of information from a variety of sources. For example, in an undergraduate Health Sciences course a librarian wrote an activity in which students are asked to compare a BBC News report entitled 'People feel healthier on the English coast' (BBC, 2012) against a National Health Service Behind the Headlines review of the same study (NHS, 2012). This activity aims to discourage learners from taking health information published in even the most seemingly trustworthy news sources at face value.

Library-authored freely available DIL resources

The University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas, and to "promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all" (Open University, 2018a, para. 2). In keeping with this mission many of the resources that have been created by University librarians to help University students develop digital citizenship skills are freely available online for the benefit of all. For example, critical digital literacy skills activities are a core element of the freely available online course 'Digital literacy: succeeding in a digital world', which was authored by a digital literacy specialist team within the University Library (Open University, 2018b). Section 3 of this course, entitled 'Asking the right questions' deals with critical consumption of online information. In addition, the same team created the award-winning *Being digital - a* collection of short and engaging activities, including an activity on 'Deciding what to trust online' (Open University, 2018c).

Synchronous online teaching of DIL skills

Working alongside the teams of Academic Liaison and Authoring librarians, the University Library has a team of Live Engagement librarians who design and deliver synchronous teaching and community building events. From September until the end of December 2017, the team delivered 62 synchronous online teaching sessions via Adobe Connect

with over 3,100 attendees in total. Most of these were delivered in the evening or at weekends, and recordings were made available for those unable to attend. Some of these sessions are open to all University students and staff, and some are targeted at particular student cohorts and embedded into the curriculum. The latter are developed in partnership with academics and designed to be timely and relevant to students. These sessions teach a number of DIL skills including evaluating sources. For example, one of the sessions highlights a tabloid newspaper article on bacteria on shopping trollies (Tanner, 2017) and asks attendees to evaluate it using an evaluation framework such as WWW (Who, Why When), PROMPT (Presentation, Relevance, Objectivity, Method, Provenance, Timeliness) or CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose).

Livestreaming

The Live Engagement team also deliver teaching and engage with students outside of the Library programme of formal training. The team frequently contributes to the University's livestreamed *Student Hub Live* events, which are a series of live, online and interactive events open to the University community (Open University, 2018d). Having developed considerable live broadcasting experience and used the Library's Facebook page to run live chat events, the team decided to try Facebook's live video capability to engage with students. Internal research conducted by the communications department revealed that 60% (or just over 100,000) of University students are on Facebook and are increasingly using it for peer support; gathering in closed groups to discuss their subjects and share study tips and advice. Being active on Facebook gives the University Library the opportunity to engage with hard to reach and potential students.

The team delivered their first session via Facebook Live in December 2016; a Question and Answer session for 30 minutes where students had the opportunity to ask anything about the library.

In early 2017 they ran a session for Student Hub Live on fake news (Student Hub Live, 2017) and decided to build on these experiences and use Facebook Live to deliver a series of 5 minute videos on fake news in the lead up to the UK general election in June 2017, quickly creating timely video assets which could then be reused. The team used the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions infographic 'How to spot fake news' (IFLA, 2017) as a basis for a series of broadcasts every Friday lunchtime in May. To make sure the recordings were accessible to hearing impaired and dyslexic students, time was scheduled directly after the broadcast to create captions and transcripts using Amara (Amara, 2018). No interaction was sought with viewers during the live broadcast but the engagement came later via views and shares on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the Library website (Open University Library, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018). Librarians are now having discussions with academics about reusing these videos within the curriculum.

Next steps

The University Library's DIL work builds on longstanding research in the UK Higher and Further Education sector, for example, Learning Literacies in a Digital Age (Jisc, 2009). The skills University students need in order to be fully digitally capable graduates, and that University staff need in order to deliver positive learning experiences, continue to evolve: definitions, models and terminology around skills development will always need to accommodate new skills, behaviours and technologies. The Library has recently been taking part in a digital capabilities project (Jisc, 2018) which aims to enhance the digital capabilities of both

staff and students across the sector, by providing tools and support. The next step is to run a

project across the organisation looking at the digital capabilities of University staff in order to

drive and support planned institutional change.

The Authoring team are investigating new tools and technologies in order to develop a

showcase of DIL learning objects to use with academics. New activities about fake images (often

used to support fake news stories) are being developed. One activity will highlight the use and

abuse of images online and another will examine tools and strategies to help identify fake images

and discover their source.

Finally, in common with a lot of other Higher Education libraries, the University Library

is exploring different approaches to measuring the impact that their DIL strategy has on students

learning experience with the University.

References

Amara. (2018). *Amara: Caption, Subtitle and Translate Video*. Retrieved from

https://amara.org/en/

BBC. (2012, July 17). People feel 'healthier' on the English coast. *BBC News*. Retrieved from

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-18856680

Being digital. (2018). *Deciding what to trust online*. Retrieved from

http://www.open.ac.uk/libraryservices/beingdigital/objects/24/index.htm

Goodfellow, R. and Reedy, K. (2012). *Digital and Information Literacy Framework*. Retrieved

from http://www.open.ac.uk/libraryservices/pages/dilframework/

IFLA. (2017). *How To Spot Fake News*. Retrieved from

https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174

Jisc. (2009). *Learning Literacies in a Digital Age (LLiDA).* Retrieved from

https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20140614091049/http://www.jisc.ac.uk

/whatwedo/projects/elearningllida.aspx

Jisc. (2018). *Building capability for new digital leadership, pedagogy and efficiency.* Retrieved

from https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/building-digital-capability

NHS. (2012, July 17). Seaside living leads to health boost. *NHS Behind the Headlines*. Retrieved

from https://www.nhs.uk/news/lifestyle-and-exercise/seaside-living-leads-to-health-

boost/

Open University. (2018a). *Mission*. Retrieved from http://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/mission

Open University. (2018b). *Digital literacy: succeeding in a digital world*. Retrieved from

http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/digital-literacy-succeeding-

digital-world/content-section-overview

Open University. (2018c). *Being digital*. Retrieved from

http://www.open.ac.uk/libraryservices/beingdigital/

Open University. (2018d). *Student Hub Live*. Retrieved from http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/

Open University Library. (2017a, May 5). *Fake News Friday Week 1* [Facebook status update].

Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/OULibrary/videos/10154564677823225/

Open University Library. [XX_Library]. (2017b, May 19). *Our 3rd #FakeNewsFriday vid is up

on the library website! @Nicola_Beer's tips: Read Beyond and Check Your Biases*

[Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/OU_Library/status/865611994384257024

Open University Library. (2017c, May). *Fake News Friday* [YouTube playlist]. Retrieved from

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL20X7gnosgTI1Z-tCV34AXAUTqSZytept

Open University Library. (2018). *Facebook Live events*. Retrieved from

http://www.open.ac.uk/library/training-and-events/facebook-live-events

Student Hub Live. (2017, February 1). *Can you believe it?* [YouTube video]. Retrieved from

https://youtu.be/Twd1dD_Ek1A

Tanner, C. (2017, July 3). A supermarket shopping trolley has 361 times MORE bacteria than a

toilet door knob (unsurprisingly the ones at an upmarket store were the cleanest). *Mail

Online*. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4654458/Shopping-

trollies-361-times-dirtier-toilet-door-knob.html