Assessing information literacy instruction in the virtual sphere

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Introduction

Research question: How do relational cues such as greetings, introductions, softeners, and courtesy in IM chat openings influence engaged learning?

Why it matters: Awareness of how opening bids shape IM chat interactions empowers librarians to seize the teachable moment.

Theory: Relational cues frame opening bids as conversation and establish mutual roles of participants.

Data & method

• Transcripts (n=411) from one week of IM chat reference at two academic libraries (figure 1)

1. Institutional comparison

- Urban/Multicampus (n=241)
- Purple University (n=21,500)
- Larger (FTE=21,500)
- Private
- (In-state tuition & fees $30K)

- Urban/Multicampus (n=170)
- Green University (n=8,200)
- Smaller (FTE=8,200)
- Public
- (In-state tuition & fees $8K)

- Detailed, turn-by-turn qualitative analysis with NVivo software
- Coded students’ opening bids and librarians’ first responses for relational cues
- Ranked top 50 words longer than 4 characters (figure 2)
- Calculated duration from time stamps (figure 3)
- Assessed librarians’ efforts to engage students in learning (instruction) or to provide information (service) (figure 4)

2. Word frequency of opening exchanges showing relational cues

- Student openings
- Librarian first responses

3. Chat duration comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Chat</th>
<th>Average duration, all chats</th>
<th>Librarian provides instruction</th>
<th>Librarian provides service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chats opened with relational cues</td>
<td>7 min.</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No relational cues</td>
<td>9.9 min.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Percentage of chats in which ...

- Librarian provides instruction: 48%
- Librarian provides service: 35%
- Student enthusiastically grateful: 40%
- Other: 9%

Results

Discussion

• Librarians at Purple U. return more greetings (89% vs. 24% at Green U.) (figure 2).
• Chats are longer on average (29% at Purple U., 22% at Green U.) when students enter the conversation with relational cues (figure 3).
• Relational cues correlate with longer chats, more instruction, less direct service, and more enthusiastic gratitude (figure 4).

Conclusions & next steps

Students who open without relational cues display an instrumental understanding of the interaction.

Librarians should recognize abrupt openings as an opportunity to clarify mutual goals.

Librarians need strategies – and time to focus – to re-frame instrumental openings as collaborative learning.

Turn-by-turn analysis of these data will show:
• How librarians respond to student bids for instruction, service, and ambiguous bids.
• How their responses enact their professional identities as teachers or as service providers.

Further information

For data samples, coding definitions, and relevant literature, please see: http://researchguides.uic.edu/dempseyLAC

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