Sharon L. Comstock, Ph.D., M.A.

Library Content Strategist, Oak Park Public Library

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Information Behaviors of YA Entrepreneurship: Lived Literacies and Economic Empowerment

A Case Study of Legitimate Literacies: Teens' Small World and the School Library
Dissertation, August 2012
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
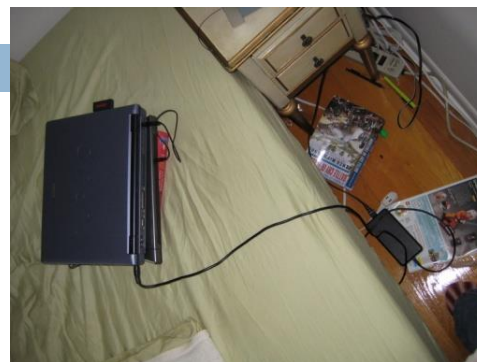Committee: Drs. Bertram (Chip) Bruce, Ann P. Bishop, Delwyn Harnisch, and Umesh Thakkar

Information Behaviors of YA Entrepreneurship: Lived Literacies and Economic Empowerment

- *What do we know about the information behaviors of young adult entrepreneurs?*

- *Do our current ways of teaching information literacy within schools match current teen information behavior research?*

- *What might be the implications for how we as library educators teach our library students to support entrepreneurial thinking (when in their professions as new librarians)?*

Gestational Research Questions

☐ What does "information literacy" mean to high school students in the context of their own information behavior?

☐ How do both the:

(1) expressions of information literacy as described by high school students; and

(2) everyday life information behaviors of a high school student in his own home

relate to the information literacy discourses used in the formal school environment and expressed by school librarians?

Literature Review: Context

- Information literacy landscape (AASL and ACRL)
  - IL and ICTL fluencies
  - "System" vs. "Process" (Limberg & Sundin)
    - Constructivist (Kuhlthau; Todd)
  - Culture of assessment and school library impact (Lance; Farmer; ETS ICTL)
  - Critical theory applied to I(CT)L in higher education (Doherty; Whitworth); not K-12
- Everyday Life Information Seeking (Savolainen) and Youth
  - Often over-emphasis on school environments and prescriptive (Fisher notes; e.g., Fidel et al.; Bilal; Gross); identifying students in positions of lack
  - ELIS research in a diversity of settings (Dresang et al., Tannock; Hughes-Hassel, Todd & Edwards; Julien; Meyers et al., Fisher et al.)
- What is still needed is what Chelton & Cool described as "specifying the meaning of 'success' in the acquisition of information literacy," from youths' perspectives that takes into account participatory literacies (Jenkins, et al.: Coiro et al.)
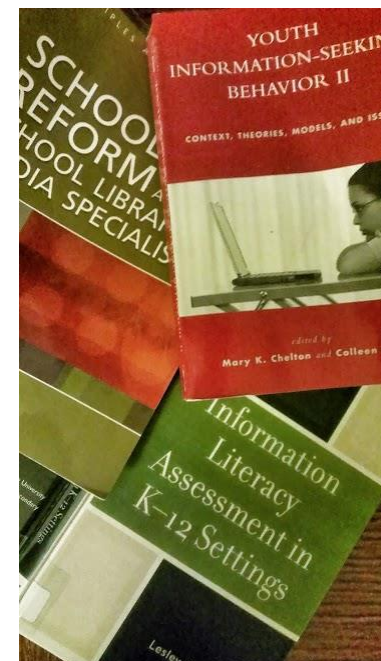
Context: YA Experiential Literacies

- **Information behaviors** in formal (school and school library) and informal (home, work, hobbies) environments
- **Information tasks**: domain specific (school, family, hobbies, work, social/play: linked to YA self-identified roles)
- **Theoretical frameworks**
  - Everyday life information seeking (Savolainen)
  - Critical theory (Foucault, Fairclough, Luke, Kapitzke)
  - Experience and community (J. Dewey)
    - Inquiry learning, solving problems in a community
- **Methodologies**
  - Mixed-methods: survey, interviews, observation (school library)
  - Ethnographic case study
  - Discourse analysis

Year in a Life of a Teen: Information Enterprise

- Ethnographic instrumental case study (Case)

- Employed discourse analysis (Taljia, Gee) to make visible student ICTL discourse

- Took a grounded theory (Charmaz) approach

- Conducted a year-long study of information behavior experiences of a student in his own home during his junior year in high school (*cf*. Wolf and Heath, 1992).

  - Unobtrusive observation; unstructured interviews; student as reflective researcher;

  - 24/7 access offered a rare glimpse into the lived information world of a teen in what many consider a pivotal high school year;

  - Follow-up via IM and unstructured interviews to revisit stated/expressed information behaviors

Data sources: Teen at home

- Screen shots of teen's information behaviors online
  - Online stores in his own business (inventory management; online identities; sales; feedback/identity/brand management)(eBay and BrickLink)
  - Hobby forums with own avatars/identities (Eurobrick and BrickLink)
  - Music management
  - Surfing/recreation
  - Volunteering (emails, volunteer location choice [public library], service hours performed)
  - College research, selection, and application process
  - Schoolwork
    - Collaboration with students/group work; teacher communication; courseware; resources used; search path and search terms; emails; courseware bulletin boards
    - Assignments: AP Spanish; Honors Physics; Honors English; AP History; Microeconomics
- Images
  - At home, volunteering, gaming; business photos of inventory to sell
- Video
  - Gaming; volunteer work
- Handouts: Assignments; library password sheets
- Field notes (approximately 7,300)
- Follow-up semi-structured interview transcripts

Current Context: 21ˢᵗ C. Learning

Play

21st Century Student Outcomes and Support Systems

Learning and Innovation Skills – 4Cs
Critical thinking • Communication
Collaboration • Creativity

Core Subjects – 3Rs and 21st Century Themes

Life and Career Skills

Information, Media, and Technology Skills

Standards and Assessments

Curriculum and Instruction

Professional Development

Learning Environments
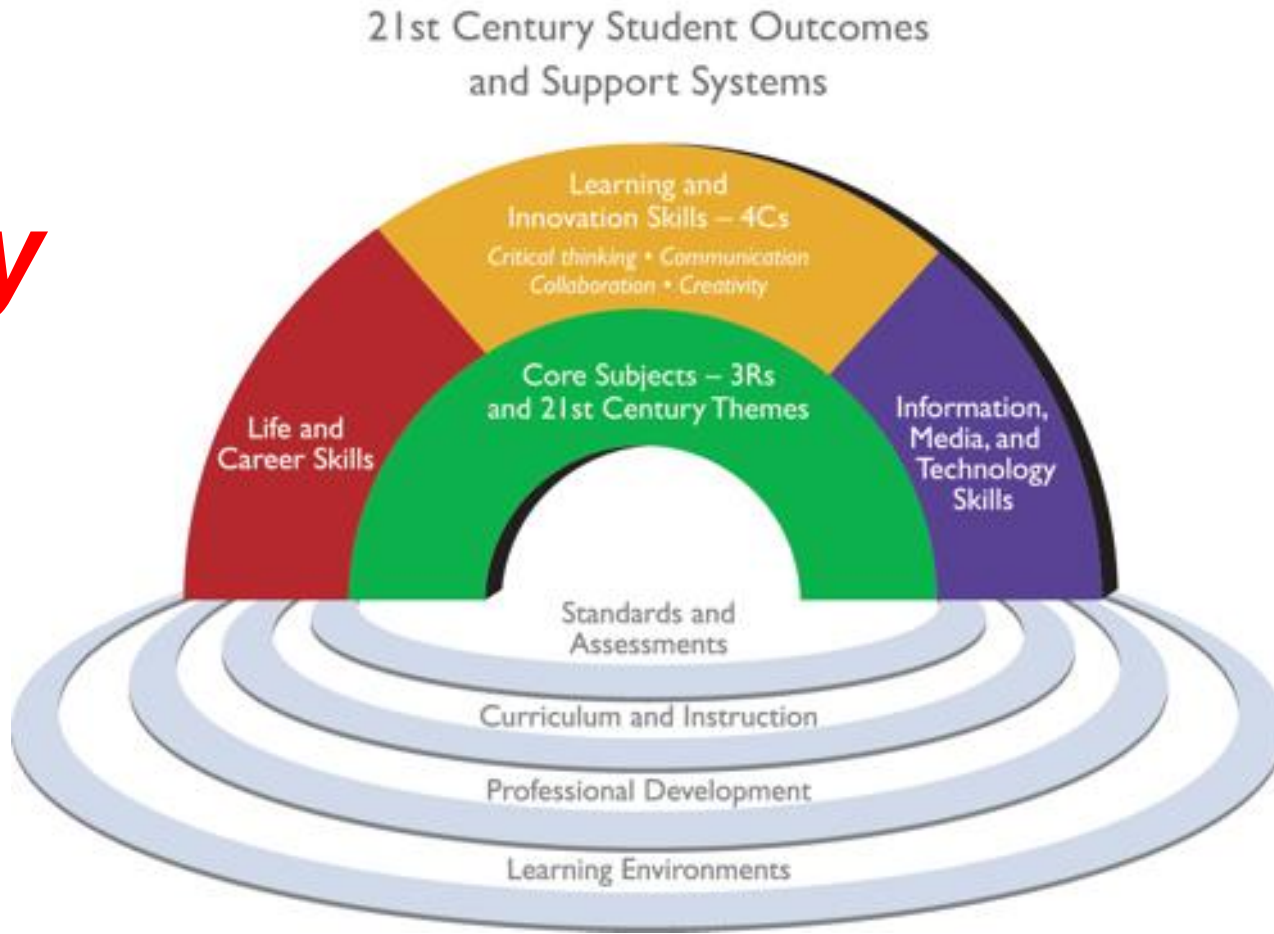
Partnership for 21ˢᵗ Century Skills p21.org

Stephan Turnispeed, President Lego, Education North America

Lego : Play as service work….

Work *as play* = *Entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurship defined by YA:

"Critically identifying a market need within a capitalist economy. To be an 'entrepreneurial' effort, it needs to be developed outside of an existing organizational structure or standardized operations. It has to make money."

Entrepreneurship in these terms is a culture; bound by outsider rules of behavior.

Information behaviors closely mirror competitive intelligence (CI): collapsing roles of "information specialist" and "analyst" (Jin & Bauthellier, 2008)
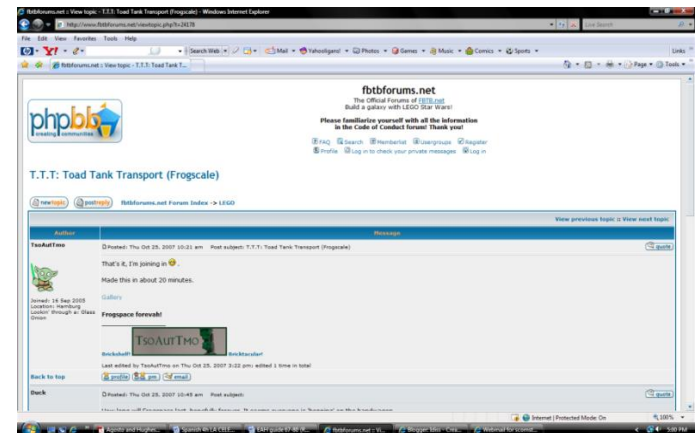
Young adults: Non-traditional work

- □ United States Department of Labor (USDOL) growing trend of teen unemployment (USDOL, 2000; 2013)

- □ Employment rate for (non-disabled) teens ages 16-19 ranged between 24.2 – 31.4% (USDOL, 2013).

- □ Teen employment patterns in social context: U.S. teens are less likely to be employed in the established economy than a mere decade ago (Morsi, 2010).

- □ Self-employment is increasingly being seen as viable among young adults ages 18-34 (Kauffman, 2011): 54%
  - □ Emerging technologies, access to local and world-wide markets (eBay, Amazon)
  - □ YouthBiz.org, Clinton Global Initiative, Microsoft's YouthSpark, Code.org, local hacker/makerspaces

Young entrepreneurs: Not just FB

- "Innovation is following your instincts."
- "Innovation is pushing beyond known limits and making it work."
- "Innovation is bringing happiness."

Youth Twitter feed

2013 World Economic Forum Annual Meeting

Everyday entrepreneur

□ Hobby: Lego collecting

□ Online identities in forums

　□ BrickLink, EuroBrick

□ Online businesses:

　□ eBay, BrickLink

　　■ PayPal, financial management

□ Community, identity

　□ Consumer to creator,

"lurker" to agent; dependency to empowerment

　□ College selection process
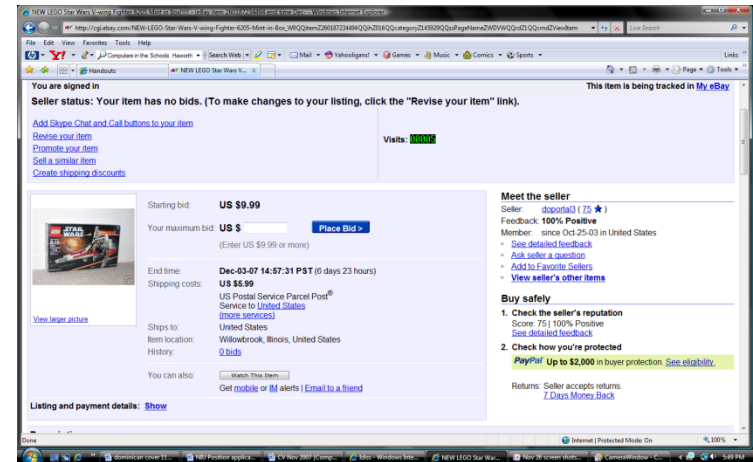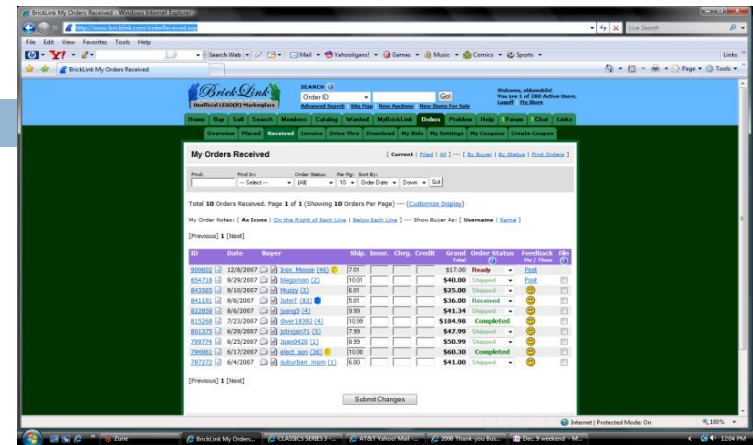
Enterprise as inquiry: Birth of a Biz

Use of what I call "instrumental databases" (eBay and BrickLink) & ah-ha moment

SLC: (Pause, noticing him grow quiet at laptop): What are you thinking about just now?

YA: *"Um, I noticed that one of the sets was very expensive compared to the others. Even though it appeared to be the same. So I clicked on it and wanted to see if the seller's other items were similarly overpriced. It was just curiosity at that point… I noticed that the seller for that had completed a large number of transactions based on their feedback rating. And it surprised me that they were able to sell so many sets for apparently inflated prices relative to the market.*

*In microceconmocis, one of my classes, we talked about how in the competitive market goods that are priced above the market price can not sell. So it suggested to me that the **Lego market is not perfectly competitive.** And I realized that that made perfect sense, actually. Since in a perfectly competitive market they have extensive information about the market and what they are buying; and what the prevailing market price is.*

*But **if someone did not know how to use BrickLink or eBay they might not know much about how much Legos are worth.** That is what I was thinking about."*
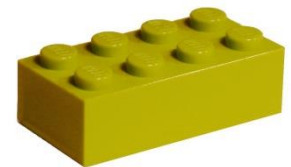
Lego secondary markets: Global
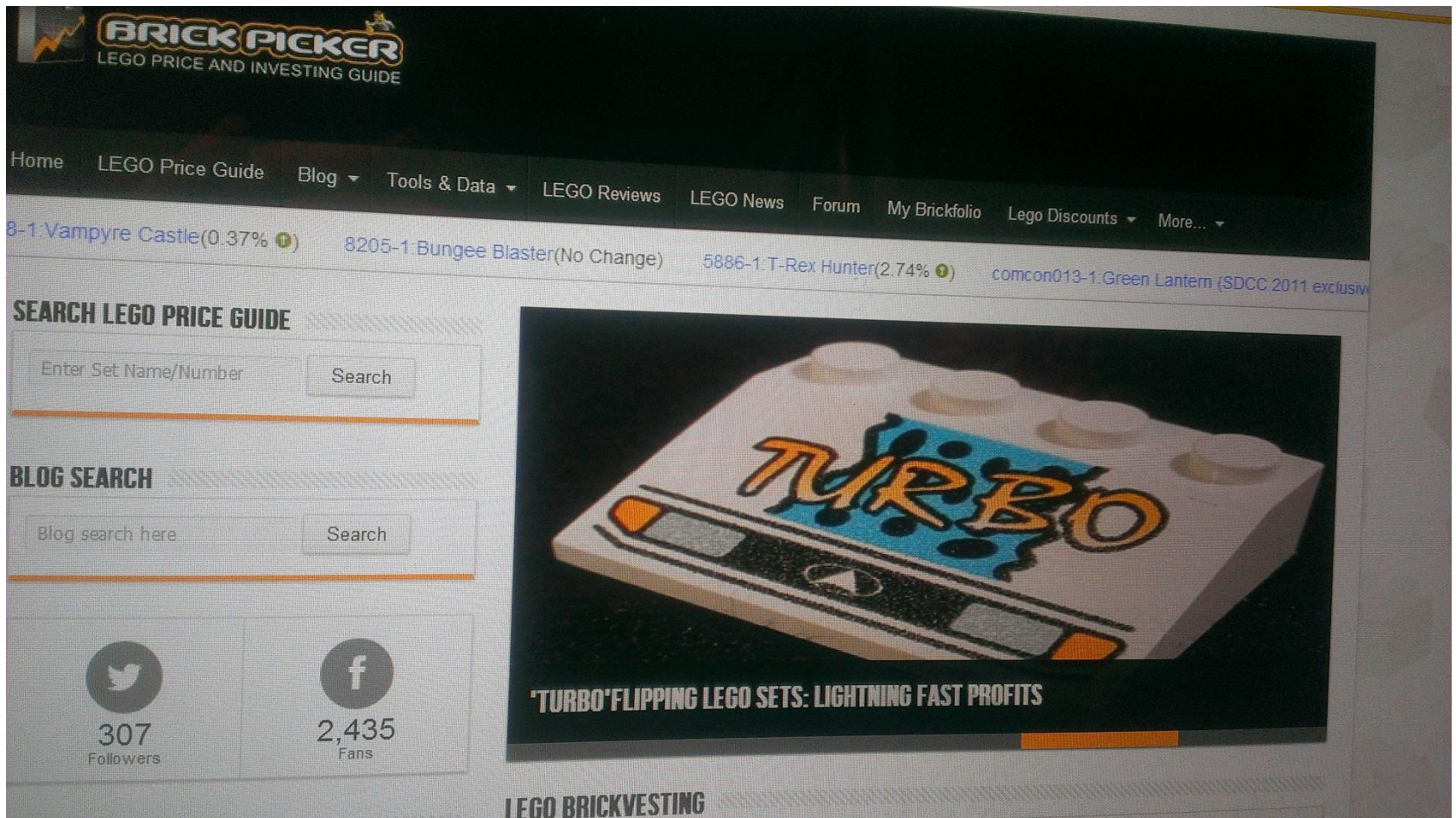
Entrepreneurial behaviors

(1) Reflection: perceived increased confidence in goal setting, decision-making, and risk-taking

- Wharton School of Business, Univ. of Pennsylvania

(2) Critical thinking:

- Market analysis [Porters 5 Forces, c.f. Porter, 1988]

- Information management (inventory tracking, transaction management)

- Mathematics (e.g.,accounting, statistical forecasting)

- Technological fluencies (website, spreadsheet, and database creation and management; online identity/branding control; online marketplaces' individual tools (e.g., Bricklink, eBay, Amazon)
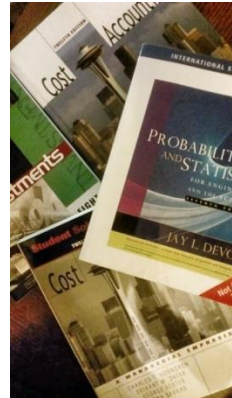
Entrepreneurial behaviors

(3) Financial literacy (pragmatic understanding of financial goal-setting, saving, investment for a stated goal: college expenses, entertainment, purchasing a car); and

(4) Empowerment and autonomy outside of established networks/roles as student or family member; identity beyond limiting high school peer grouping

    a. Important for this teen Latino male, pushing against stereotypes of lack/under-achievement

(c.f., Harper, S. (2014) "Succeeding in the City: A Report from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study. Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education at the University of Pennsylvania)

"This gives me independence: from you and Dad and from having to be at a job when I'm buried with homework."

- "Entrepreneur" a powerful YA identity
- Legitimizes: line between "amateur" and "professional"
- Status at a time when teens are often viewed as betwixt and between the protection childhood afforded and not the respect established adulthood confers
- Concrete push-back on Latino male stereotypes in the U.S.

"Instrumentalism": Employee info behavior
Information literacy in traditional work: *teen as clinician*

JB: Um, I'm a patient care technician. So I take back patients before the real doctor sees them, and like, get their vital signs, do some lab work sometimes.

Um, usually I need to know a few things or two, about diabetes-related; the area I work in is endocrinology, so a lot of diabetics go there and they'll ask me, like, things. Like, once I give them their lab work, like, if they're A1C, which is their average blood sugar, so I, like, have to know, like, what the range is and, like, stuff like that.
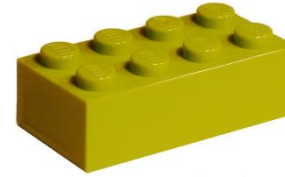
SLC: And how did you learn about those?

JB: WebMD. And asking the doctors.
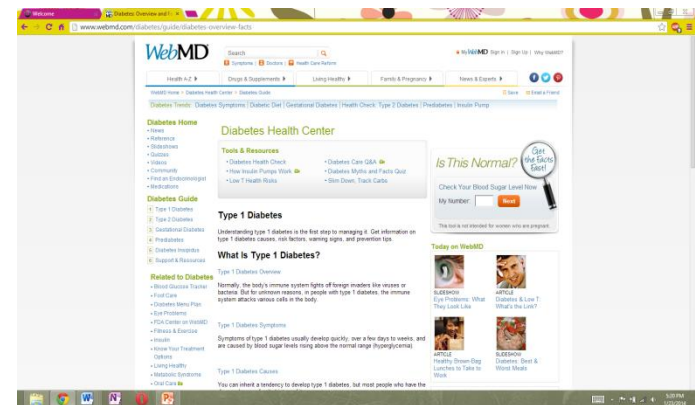
Information tool legitimized by its utility in specific workplace setting by professional: functional and authority-based

21ˢᵗ century skills?

- Global Awareness • Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- Learning and Innovation Skills:

   Prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments

   Creativity and Innovation • Critical Thinking and Problem Solving • Communication and Collaboration

- Information, Media and Technology Skills

   Effective citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills • Information Literacy • Media Literacy • ICT (Information, Communications and Technology) Literacy

- Life and Career Skills

   Ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information • Flexibility and Adaptability • Initiative and Self-Direction • Social and Cross-Cultural Skills • Productivity and Accountability • Leadership and Responsibility

Pragmatic implications for LIS

- Reflection and inquiry, critical theory eye on our own practices to allow space for these emergent information behaviors

- Hold in curious tension both the construction and deconstruction of information literacy curriculum.

- De-emphasis on how information problems are solved is the lesser of the two needs

- Key questions of *why* and *what-if* inspire entrepreneurial thinking

Epilogue:

"It's a form of investing with little risk of loss; what started as a hobby, it's now an investment. Losses are less than 10% in a worst-case scenario. World-wide at this point, with Australia, Russia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Singapore sales. I run low, preferring to sell fewer units at higher margins: 700 transactions with 100% feedback; and competition is often a full-time brick and mortar shop. But, you know, and that has never been a goal: this isn't a career.

Why entrepreneurship, why do this? *For the satisfaction of making a profit on my own terms and on my own schedule.*"

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