Searching as Strategic Exploration

Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops.

The act of searching often begins with a question that directs the act of finding needed information. Encompassing inquiry, discovery, and serendipity, searching identifies possible relevant sources and the means to access those sources. Experts realize that information searching is a contextualized, complex experience that affects, and is affected by, the searcher’s cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. Novice learners may search a limited set of resources, and experts may search more broadly and deeply to determine the most appropriate information within the project scope. Likewise, novice learners tend to use few search strategies; experts select from various search strategies, depending on the sources, scope, and context of the information need.

Knowledge Practices

Learners who are developing their information literate abilities do the following:

- Determine the initial scope of the task required to meet their information needs
- Identify interested parties, such as scholars, organizations, governments, and industries, which might produce information about a topic and determine how to access that information
- Utilize divergent (e.g., brainstorming) and convergent (e.g., selecting the best source) thinking when searching
- Match information needs and search strategies to search tools
- Design and refine needs and search strategies, based on search results
- Understand how information systems (i.e., collections of recorded information) are organized to access relevant information
- Use different searching language types (e.g., controlled vocabulary, keywords, natural language)
- Manage searching processes and results

Dispositions

Learners who are developing their information literate abilities do the following:

- Exhibit mental flexibility and creativity
- Understand that first attempts at searching do not always produce adequate results
- Realize that information sources vary greatly in content and format and have varying relevance and value, depending on the needs and nature of the search
- Seek guidance from experts, such as librarians, researchers, and professionals
- Recognize the value of browsing and other serendipitous methods of information gathering
• Persist in the face of search challenges, and know when enough information completes the information task

From the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*:

http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#exploration