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Communities of practice in information literacy in HE

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Origins of the research

- A belief that information literacy concerns are shared by many members of staff across an institution
- A concern that there are no mechanisms in place for allowing these concerns to be discovered and addressed or developed
- A possibility that the role of the academic librarian is not set up to address this and a shift needed

Original objectives

- To understand the terminology, and the meanings and values assigned to them, used in different academic areas in relation to information literacy
- To ascertain whether a community of practice in information literacy exists at York St John University
 - If so, what is the membership and how can it be supported and developed?

What is information literacy?

- Traditionally based upon skills models (Association of College and Research Libraries 2015; Bundy 2004; SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy 2011; Secker and Coonan 2014)
- These modules have been critiqued
- Two key critiques
 - Social construction, landscape approach (Lloyd 2010)
 - Critical information literacy approach (Elmborg 2006; Smith 2013)
- An important issue to address is whether the information literacy provisions in place adequately reflect the social, political and cultural backgrounds of those in the community

Communities of practice

- Theory emerging from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and developed by Wenger (Wenger 1998; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2015)
 - Learning is a social phenomenon and we develop our understanding through communities of practice
 - They develop, and can be recognised and supported but cannot be forced into existence
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Social learning, communities and education

- Strong evidence for use of learning communities in developing staff in educational settings (Allen 2013; Gray and Smyth 2012; Kennedy 2014; Mak and Pun 2015; Ness et al. 2010; Rae, Taylor and Roberts 2006)
- Some evidence from HE to indication that social learning approaches can cut through organisational barriers when implementing pedagogic change (Addis et al. 2013; Beach 2012; Butler and Christofili 2014; Furco and Moely 2012)
- No evidence of information literacy based pedagogic change being implemented via social learning methods; there are some linked to e-learning and blended learning (Cochrane 2010; Cochrane 2014; Dempster, Benfield and Francis 2012; Schneckenberg 2010)
- Some studies using term 'communities of practice' do not actually use the theory as put forward by Wenger (1998)

Next steps

- Action research project, based on practice at York St John University
- Triangulation of mixed method data, with a pragmatic approach
 - Analysis of terminology linked to information literacy in professional literature
 - Analysis of module handbooks to find year 1 modules with information literacy in learning outcomes
 - Pilot interviews, followed by interviews with 1 academic from each school
 - Questionnaire to find extent of information literacy concerns across university
 - These will inform the introduction of a trial platform for dialogue for the community (if found), followed by evaluation

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