LIBGUIDES, VIDEOS, AND SCREENCASTING: TECHNOLOGIES TO ENHANCE AND PROMOTE DIGITAL WISDOM IN INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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On two occasions I have been asked, “Pray, Mr. Babbage, if you put into the machine wrong figures, will the right answers come out?” . . . I am not able rightly to apprehend the kind of confusion of ideas that could provoke such a question. —Charles Babbage

The information revolution, as its name implies, has created a major upheaval in the ways that academicians produce and disseminate scholarship. For those involved in teaching today’s students how to join the scholarly community, the role of the librarian in developing digital wisdom (Prensky, 2009) is often glossed over. Before we discuss digital wisdom, however, it is helpful to remember the precursor to this term: “digital natives.” In 2001, Marc Prensky coined this term to describe the generation of people who were born after the digital revolution and spent their childhood surrounded by electronic paraphernalia. Prensky (2001) also made a distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants, the latter being those older generations who did not grow up with ubiquitous digital devices. Although many assume that digital natives are experts in manipulating digital tools, Prensky (2009) argues that many, if not most, have very little digital wisdom.

As of April 2011, a Google Scholar search for the term “digital native” shows that Prensky (2001) has been cited 2,642 times, so this concept has obviously proven to be salient across many academic disciplines. However, Prensky has recently revisited his definitions. In “H. Sapiens Digital: From Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives to Digital Wisdom,” Prensky (2009) argues that his original distinction was valid but not perhaps sophisticated enough. He now states,

Digital technology, I believe, can be used to make us not just smarter but truly wiser. Digital wisdom is a twofold concept, referring both to wisdom arising from the use of digital technology to access cognitive power beyond our innate capacity and to wisdom in the prudent use of technology to enhance our capabilities.

Furthermore, Blanchard (2011) described digital wisdom as a “less dichotomous nomenclature” and “a more modern interdisciplinary grey scale” than the digital-native–digital-immigrant divide (Blanchard, 2011, p. 357). It is thus less siloed and more nuanced.

Prensky (2009) also makes a distinction between digital wisdom and digital cleverness. Those individuals who are digitally clever “use digital technology fluently in their daily lives and work: the programmers who invent new digital tools without seeing the wider implications of their work, for example, and the hackers and spammers who use digital technology destructively”; they are not, however, digitally wise, a state that “comes only when digital tools are used to enhance thinking in a positive way” (Prensky, 2009, Being Digitally Wise section, para. 3, hyperlinked definition of “digital cleverness”). Prensky (2009) is a much-needed refinement of Prensky (2001) but as of April 2011, the former has been cited only 49 times according to Google Scholar, a disquietingly small number of citations for an article that provides so much insight.

In the past, those citing Prensky (2001) often would say something similar to, “Our students today are all native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet.” A statement such as this is analogous to saying native speakers of English do not need to take rhetoric

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or composition classes because they are fluent in the language. We assume students come in knowing how to read; they are, technically, literate, but they do not usually know how to write and analyze in a rhetorically and grammatically sophisticated way. Furthermore, comfort with a given tool, such as language or technology, does not imply that one is wise in how to use the tool. For another example, being comfortable with the nuances of using Facebook does not imply that students understand how information is created and organized online, especially scholarly or academic information. As academics we expect to teach students how to think critically, write, and analyze on a more scholarly (i.e., wise) level. We should have the same expectations for them in terms of how they use technology. They may arrive on our campuses digitally clever or competent, but that competence does not necessarily mean they are digitally wise.

Moreover, academicians (including instructional librarians) should not view technology as being in competition with traditional academic discourse; used properly, it enhances and complements academic work. Technology is no longer just a tool for producing a written text; it has become a means of exhibiting or publishing scholarship in its final form (see the whole concept of digital humanities scholarship, for example—especially the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Collaboratory or HASTAC, http://www.hastac.org/). Students can create a multimedia presentation for an online or physical class, rather than or in addition to a research paper. As McLuhan said, the medium is the message, and at the core of information literacy is the ability to critically think about content in addition to its delivery format, which strongly correlates with ACRL Information Literacy Standard Three: “The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system” (American Library Association, Association of College and Research Libraries [ALA/ACRL], 2000).

As Prensky (2009) points out, digital wisdom “can be, and must be, learned and taught. As we offer more courses in digital literacy, we should also offer students guidance in developing digital wisdom” (Being Digitally Wise section, para. 2). Current technologies such as LibGuides, video-editing software, and screencasting tools are highly salient to the concept of digital wisdom and to information literacy instruction (obviously, many other digital tools are important as well, but we are limiting our discussion to only these three). These instructional instruments can work either face to face or online, synchronously or asynchronously. They accommodate a variety of learning styles and schedules and allow librarians to model the creation of multimedia content for our students. Additionally, because our content embodies our physical presence through welcome videos as well as screencast audio and still photos, students—whether online or physically present—have the opportunity to interact with their librarian rather than “The Library” as a monolithic, impersonal entity.

Because most students have come of age after the digital revolution, when they want to learn about something, they turn to the Internet, usually a search engine, especially Google (Rowlands et al., 2008). They gather news and learn about current events from Twitter and Facebook. For almost everything else, they often turn to Wikipedia, whether their professors approve of it or not (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). Keeping the above in mind, we need to focus on being available in their information-gathering spaces. Thus, the first concrete example we discuss here of how students use technology to enhance their “cognitive power” (Prensky, 2009) is LibGuides: interactive, welcoming, personal, and helpful online tools that librarians can use to encourage digital wisdom in students (see Figure 1). LibGuides work well for imparting digital wisdom because we can integrate social media and Web 2.0 interactivity in them, but we can also use them to introduce academic tools such as journals databases and online reference works. Additionally, on almost all our LibGuides pages, we have embedded Meebo chat widgets so that students are able to chat in real time with their librarian—to ask questions and get help with the use of digital tools at their point of need. We also embed links to short instructional videos where students are most likely to have difficulties or questions. LibGuides embody the modern concept of “always beta” since they are easy to customize and change. Finally, we bridge the chasm between students and experts (i.e., faculty members and librarians) by linking to our social media presence and other collaborative spaces that encourage two-way dialog. Students are more likely to give credence to librarians’ expertise on digital media if they can see evidence of us possessing digital wisdom online (as in our LibGuides).

Figure 1: Sample LibGuide

Our second example is video-editing instruction. The point of multimedia creation is not merely to teach the mechanics of video editing, but to make students aware of the processes and choices that go into making a video, to make them active participants in the creation of digital knowledge rather than passive consumers of digital content. In short, the end result of the instruction is to impart or encourage digital...
literacy, which fulfills ACRL Information Literacy Standard Four: “The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose” (in this case, to convey their argument using digital tools; ALA/ACRL, 2000).

In making videos, students must conceptualize how content creators (such as mainstream filmmakers or creators of political messages or commercial advertisements) choose what to emphasize. In video creation, students participate in an active-learning process, choosing music to convey mood and selecting still images or video shots that argue their point. In this way, they (hopefully) learn that multimedia presentations are always filtered through a visual and aural/oral rhetorical lens. Furthermore, when doing multimedia instruction, we discuss and emphasize many broader issues of content acquisition, such as copyright, open access, and remix culture since students often have a facile view of how multimedia are produced and how copyright works (see Figure 2). These concepts correlate to ACRL Information Literacy Standard Five: “The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally” (ALA/ACRL, 2000).

Figure 2: Copyright & Fair Use LibGuide

In our multimedia instruction, we use video that is shot on a Flip camera, in addition to public-domain stock footage or Creative Commons–licensed content. Flip cameras are simple to use, will record up to two hours of high-definition content (for newer models), and cost only around $70 to $120 (used to new). We also edit the video while students follow along in a computer lab (for operating system and version control). In the past, we have used Windows Movie Maker on Windows XP. We have now switched to Windows 7, and Windows Movie Maker Live. This participatory environment helps students realize that teaching and learning basic video-editing skills can be relatively quick and painless.

Another demonstration of a way to foster digital wisdom in students is through screencasting to answer reference questions. This method of recording a reference transaction can be used either face to face or online. Using Google Documents, we developed a personalized, automated, online form so that students can submit their questions wherever and whenever they may have them. Google notifies us via email when a question has been submitted, and the appropriate subject librarian can then create a screencast to answer it. We used a free service (Screenjelly, now defunct) to answer individual questions as they came in; we now use Jing (http://www.techsmith.com/jing; see Figure 3). Many other free screencasting options exist on the Internet (see “Comparison of Screencasting Software,” 2011, for more information).

Figure 3: Jing’s Home Page

Screencasts are extremely useful in helping students navigate online digital content, whether the source is a subscription database or Google Scholar/Books. Rather than writing out step-by-step instructions for an online search, we show them the search process that they need to learn, modeling the search behavior and catering to multiple learning styles since the product is both visual and auditory.

These are just some examples of the digital tools we have used with students and faculty and received positive feedback on. Many alternatives exist, depending on patrons’ needs.

Often, people attribute more to new technologies than they should. In the epigraph to this article, we gave a quote from the 18th century by Charles Babbage. We can paraphrase his
statement for today’s users: “Pray, Ms. Librarian, if you put into
the search engine the wrong search terms, will useful articles
be brought up?” As librarians, we cannot blame our students
for thinking this way if we do not teach them digital literacy,
which is a stepping stone to digital wisdom. We understand
the confusion of ideas that students have with analyzing
information, and we must provide them with the tools to help
them be digitally wise, so they can overcome this confusion.

For students, part of the process of gaining digital
wisdom is understanding that there is no magic wand that will
answer all their questions and/or do their work for them. Digital
wisdom is a new phrase, but it encompasses many aspects of
information literacy that have been around for some time. We
must make it clear, however, that students should not treat
databases, search engines, or any kind of technology tool like an
oracle that will intuit and answer all of their questions; these are
simply tools that they must learn how to understand, evaluate,
and manipulate.

To close, we emphasize that there is no magic bullet
for librarians either. As we mentioned above, the digital world
is always beta, and we must embrace the most current tools
that are best suited for our purpose, not the tools we have
always used. Our aim is to provide a framework for librarians
to understand the importance of digital wisdom in information
literacy instruction and to become more comfortable with a few
of the technologies and/or techniques inherent to the process.
By doing so, we model the behavior we would like to see in
our students and communicate more effectively with all our
constituents campus-wide. We encourage our readers to take
our examples and run with them, to develop them in new and
exciting ways that will encourage the growth of digital wisdom
in their academic communities.

**Note**

The original idea for this online form came from the one created
by Jeremy Donald at Trinity University (TX); Jody Bailey and
Eric Frierson jointly developed the form currently used by UT
Arlington.