

AALT 2004 - Saturday, May 15, 2004 - #4a

From Zookeepers to Safari Guides: the Evolution of Library Instruction

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HOMES IN THE AIR

GIANT PANDA

PRESENTED
FROM
THE PEKING MUNICIPAL
REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE.
THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

大熊猫

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FRESHWATER CROCODILES



KEEP HANDS CLEAR OF FENCE!

























From Zookeepers to Safari Guides: the Evolution of Library Instruction

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Click on each image to get to the next 'slide'.

In the 'good old days'... Libraries were like ZOOS



- ◆ Information was tame.
- ◆ It was easy to show people where information was, and it always was where you said it would be.
- ◆ Information was discrete - books stayed with books, periodicals with periodicals.
- ◆ The library contained representative samples of information, not the entire information environment.

- ◆ Everything in the library was carefully selected.



We were like zookeepers

◀ We stressed (bibliographic) **control** of information, **controlled** vocabulary

◀ Information was carefully looked after.



Instruction was pretty easy



◆ Orientation to where things were in the room.

◆ Demonstration of the catalogue or indexes.

◆ In academic libraries, students visited the same zoo the faculty did and both were used to using the same kinds of information in the same ways.

Evaluation was much easier

◆ We had metadata!!!!



Users were like tourists

- ◆ Most were content to follow the same, safe paths.
- ◆ Gathering information was as passive as looking at animals in the zoo.



But the process wasn't always that exciting...



NOW... things are a little different

◆ Information roams free, breeds, dies, moves around.

◆ Information types mix and match - books, articles, videos, etc can all be web sites; some periodicals are more like books; just about anything can call itself an encyclopedia.



We're more like safari guides



- ◆ We've given up on control and are happy if there's metadata.
- ◆ We have no control over what our users will access.

- ◆ Sometimes information is obvious and easy to find.



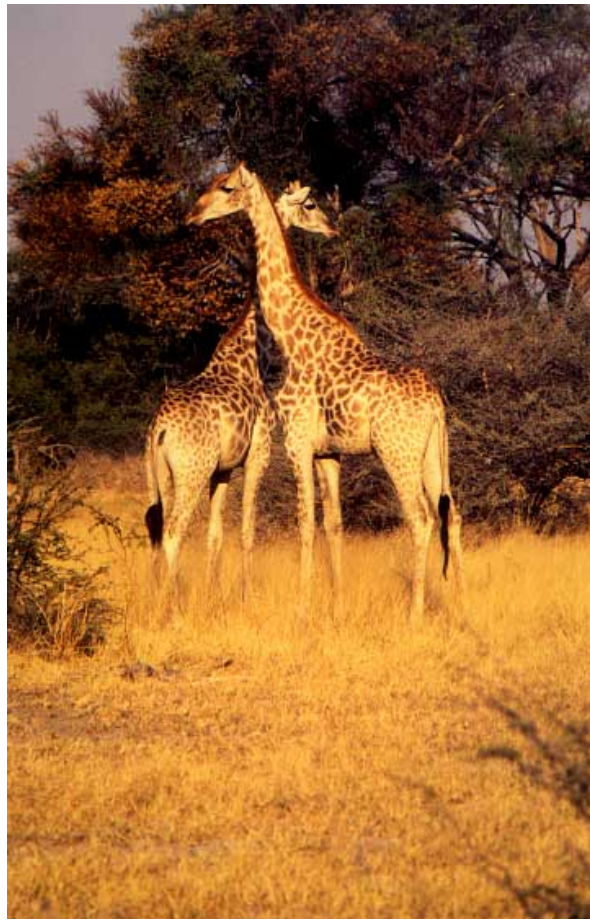
◀ Sometimes it's hidden.





◆ Sometimes all that's available is a sign the information was there.

◆ Sometimes it's X-rated!



Users are still like tourists but more demanding

- ◆ Most want to explore for information by themselves.
- ◆ Gathering information requires knowing more about the new information environment, interacting with systems, and evaluating the results for quality.



Instruction is a lot more complex

- ◆ Users often don't know where to start.
- ◆ Most of the information is not geographically present.
- ◆ Resource types and the ways of tracking them are all intertwined.
- ◆ Users don't always know they could use a safari guide.
- ◆ In academic libraries, some faculty don't realize they're not at the zoo anymore, and neither are their students.



What this means for teaching library users



- ◆ We need to teach people how to track information.
- ◆ We need to teach people more about the information environment.
- ◆ We need to teach more about evaluation.
- ◆ We need to convince them to come back to the zoo sometimes.



For more information

- Visit the library site and check out worksheets - <http://library.mtroyal.ca>
- Visit my site - <http://www2.mtroyal.ca/~mmacmillan>
- Email me - mmacmillan@mtroyal.ca

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AALT 2004 - From Zookeepers to Safari Guides

Page Address: <http://www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/~mmacmillan/conf/aalt.htm>

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Photo credits: Don MacMillan

With input from AALT Conference attendees

Brainstorming Worksheet

Zookeepers and Zoos

- ◆ It was easy to show people where information was, and it always was where you said it would be.
- ◆ Information was discrete - books stayed with books, periodicals with periodicals.
- ◆ The library contained representative samples of information, not the entire information environment.
- ◆ Everything in the library was carefully selected.
- ◆ We stressed (bibliographic) **control** of information, **controlled** vocabulary
- ◆ Information was carefully looked after.
- ◆ Instruction usually consisted of orientation to where things were in the room, and a demonstration of the catalogue or indexes, which all worked on simple principles.
- ◆ In academic libraries, students visited the same zoo the faculty did and both were used to using the same kinds of information in the same ways.
- ◆ We had metadata!!!! There was information physically attached to the resources that told you what they were.
- ◆ Sources are in isolation, not in rich environments.
- ◆ Most users were content to follow the same, safe paths.
- ◆ Gathering information was as passive as looking at animals in the zoo.
- ◆ Users didn't really have to interact with information to find it.
- ◆ The process wasn't all that exciting.

Safari Guides and the Jungle

- ◆ Information roams free, breeds, dies, moves around.
- ◆ Information types mix and match - books, articles, videos, etc can all be web sites; some periodicals are more like books; just about anything can call itself an encyclopedia.
- ◆ We've given up on control and are happy if there's metadata.
- ◆ We have no control over what our users will access.
- ◆ Sometimes information is obvious and easy to find, sometimes not.
- ◆ It can be really difficult to tell what kind of information you're looking at.
- ◆ Sometimes all that's available is a sign the information was there.
- ◆ Most users want to explore for information by themselves and don't know they might need a guide. How often do we seek a guide for hiking in the Rockies?
- ◆ Gathering information requires knowing more about the new information environment, interacting with systems, and evaluating the results for quality.
- ◆ Users often don't know where to start.
- ◆ Most of the information is not geographically present.
- ◆ Resource types and the ways of tracking them are all intertwined.
- ◆ In academic libraries, some faculty don't realize they're not at the zoo anymore, and neither are their students.

Captions



Captions from the assembled AALT folks:

There are all kinds of information, all mixed up

There's lots of information out there.

There are different perspectives.

It's a dynamic environment.

There are many choices.

There may be different needs.

Unlike the zoo which tends to isolate species and concentrate on the big ones, there are lots of little bits of info - grey literature, etc in the new information environment.



Captions from the assembled AALT folks:

They're lost.

Don't know where to go, where to start.

Need a leader.

Information gathering is now a social practice - students are seeking help from friends.

What it all means for instruction at the desk, in the class, online....

What skills do users need?

Communication:

- Need to know what to ask.
- Need to know how to ask.
- Need to know how to define their topic.
- (- Users ask questions they hope will get answered in the affirmative - e.g. "Do you have a book?")
- Need to know more words - synonyms are imperative in searching the savannah of uncontrolled vocabulary.
- Need to listen.

Knowledge:

Need to know how to identify what they've found.

Need to know how to evaluate what they've found (Users tend to either believe or disbelieve the internet too readily often correlated with age). (*At this point I talked about the three evaluation questions - who, when and why, the pie chart method of evaluating information/persuasion/advertising content of sites, the rule of shared fridges, and I think... the difficulty that websites aren't just websites - a website can be Encyclopedia Britannica, Joe's house o' vitamins, Nature etc. and that Nature in print is mostly identical to Nature if it's online, or through a database. This sidled into a rant about how it's important to teach that different kinds of information - articles/books/reference works have different strengths and purposes, regardless of whether they're print or electronic.*)

Need to know that sometimes it's faster to go to the zoo for some information.

Need to know that research takes time.

Need to be comfortable with uncertainty.

Need to learn how to track information including:

- Where it's likely to be/Who's likely to have what they need (e.g. City of Calgary and skateboarding)
- What it's likely to look like

What skills do we need?

Communication:

We need to communicate better - less jargon.

We need to compensate for language difficulties, of those whose first language is not English, and for vocabulary deficits in all groups.

Knowledge:

We need to know more about what's out there - need to explore.

We need to appreciate cultural differences (closed stacks).

We need to spend our time wisely - focus on those who will benefit most.

We need to coordinate our efforts more - within courses, and programs, between grades in the same school and between schools - e.g. arrange tours for high schools students at academic libraries. Incremental growth of skills is good, and only possible with planning.

(There was a question at this time about how MRU teaches - last year 560 classes + many ESL courses, all course integrated, with some program integration as well. Teaching usually in a lab with hands-on practice. Classes at MRU generally less than 35 students, good relations with civilian faculty. The main goal of every class is to make students feel comfortable enough in the environment to come back and to ask for help when they need it.)

We need to be more comfortable with uncertainty - to be able to say "I don't know, but let's find out together." comfortably.

How do we teach these skills?

Teach the skills in context - and pay attention to timing with real assignments.

Use games to engage students - such as exercises that lead students to compare and evaluate sites, determine which site provides the info they need.

Translate and interpret library/information jargon - help them learn the lingo, but make sure the lingo isn't unnecessarily complex.

Hands-on teaching - in the classroom or at the reference desk reinforces concepts with kinesthetic learning.

Develop tools - handouts with the steps they need - give them a path to follow.

Empower them to a certain point - determine needs and teach to those needs.

Don't send them into the jungle without backup.

It's not their fault they don't know how to do this - check all assumptions about what they should or shouldn't know.

We pay attention to the information environment and the changes that take place there, they don't.

Don't scare the user with a flood of information too soon in the process for them to handle - start them off slow and check back with them frequently.

It would be really great to be able to teach them about the information environment. We spend a lot of time helping them find elephants and giraffes without really giving them a picture of the environment as a whole.

The responsibilities of a safari guide are many - but they centre around:

- Knowing the environment.
- Knowing how to track information.
- Knowing how to communicate specialized knowledge to novice users.
- Keeping the user safe - from bad information, from wasted effort.

I really enjoyed preparing this presentation - and resolve to introduce a little more exploration time in my library sessions - let the students explore our website a little rather than just telling them exactly where to go. I'm also going to try and make time for teaching about the information environment - wish me luck!

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Brainstorming Worksheet

Page Address: <http://www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/~mmacmillan/conf/aalthanodout.htm>
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