

Empowering Young People through Information

Maurice Devlin

NUI Maynooth

Empowerment

- Means “giving power to...” or “developing power in...”
- Power = ability to (set and) achieve goals
- May be based on different attributes (physical, material, cognitive/intellectual, emotional, positional/environmental)
- “Empowerment” implies a broad conception of power

Information

- Earliest sense: “formation of the mind or character”
- More than facts/data
- Element of judgement/discernment
- Appreciation of context
- Cannot be just *provided*, needs to be *facilitated*

Elements of information access & use

- Physical availability of (re)sources
- Skills
- Content
- Values (& motivation)
- Context (social, cultural, cognitive)

- (Lievrouw and Farb, 2003; Selwyn, 2007)

“Digital natives”?

- “Youth of all ages, from the preadolescent to the adolescent, use media in conjunction with various ICTs - for example, the Internet, instant messaging, and e-mail - to communicate with their peers and relatives, to stay current in what matters to them, to shop, to relax, to create personal Web pages, and yes, to complete homework assignments, among other things. For these youth, being a participant in the 21st century equates to being literate in media and ICTs in ways that exceed what many [adults] know or even consider worth knowing”. (Alvermann, 2004)

“Digital natives” (cont.)?

- “A recent Pew report (2005c) found that more than half of young internet users had created some kind of online content, be it a blog, personal webpage or sharing original content in the form of artwork, photographs, music or videos). Recently these creative practices have evolved into blending, remixing, chopping and ‘mashing’ original and existing content, therefore constituting new contemporary forms of ‘bricolage’. **As such there is growing reason to believe that ICTs are altering fundamentally many young people’s relationships with information.**” (Selwyn, 2007)

But – put this *information* in *context!*

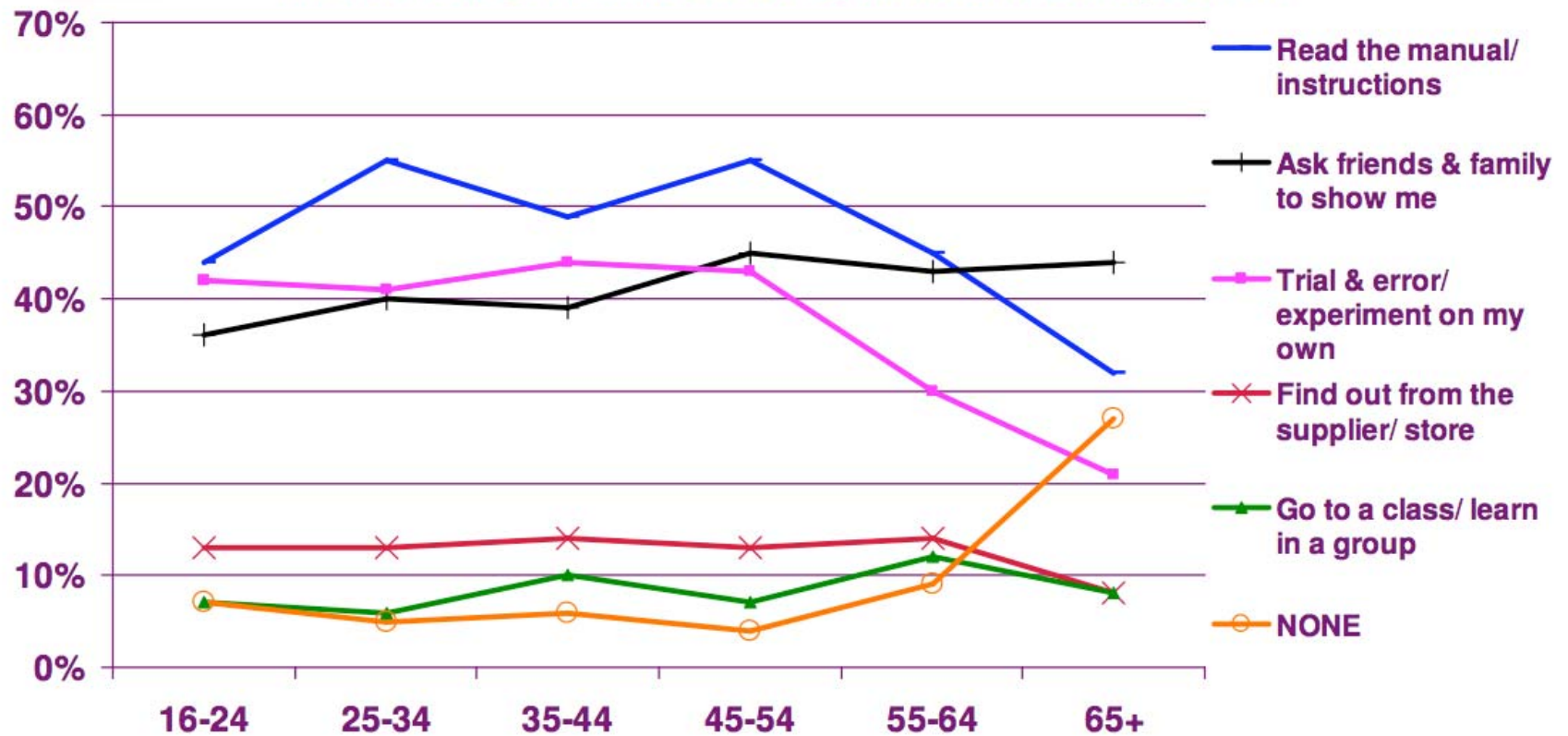
- “...the majority of young people in Europe do not necessarily use digital media in the empowering, creative and active ways that some commentators presume. Instead much technology use by young people remains relatively low-level, mundane and often banal. Moreover, ICTs continue to be used primarily by young people to engage in practices which they are already engaged in rather than supporting any prompting ‘new’ patterns of behaviour *per se*. **Thus many of the pressing issues surrounding the information needs of young people remain the same as they have throughout the past thirty years, albeit with an additional technological dimension.**” (Selwyn, 2007)

Digital exclusion

- “Indeed, the groups of young people most likely to be characterised as being ‘digitally excluded’ are most commonly distinguished in terms of gender, age, income, race, educational background, geography and disability. For instance, recent studies in Europe show that levels of ICT use are lower amongst rural youth, female youth, those from families with low levels of parental education and younger children.”
(Vandewater *et al.* 2007, Looker and Thiessen 2003).”

Learning about digital services – age differences?

Preferred ways to learn about digital services and products⁶



The “Google generation”?

- The information literacy of young people, has not improved with the widening access to technology: in fact, their apparent facility with computers disguises some worrying problems.
- Digital literacies and information literacies do not go hand in hand. A careful look at the literature over the past 25 years finds no improvement (or deterioration) in young people’s information skills.

The “Google generation”?

- These points relate both to the current use of the internet by young people and, a technology generation earlier, to their use of early online systems and CD-ROMs. There is little direct evidence that young people’s information literacy is any better or worse than before.
- Internet research shows that the speed of young people’s web searching means that little time is spent in evaluating information, either for relevance, accuracy or authority.

The “Google generation”?

- Wikipedia and YouTube both exhibit a marked age separation between viewers of content (mainly 18-24s) and content generators (mainly 45-54s and 35-44s respectively) (Horrigan,2007).

The “Google generation”?

- The article’s main findings are that much professional commentary, popular writing and PowerPoint presentations overestimates the impact of ICTs on the young, and that **the ubiquitous presence of technology in their lives has not resulted in improve information retrieval, information seeking or evaluation skills. Really the main message to take away from the research described here is that all of us have changed the way they seek information.**

The “Google generation”?

- **We are all the Google generation**, the young and old, the professor and the student and the teacher and the child. Furthermore, we should worry more about what has happened and not will happen, as we are only just waking up to the fact that a fundamental shift in the way people seek and read information has already occurred and that the impact of the shift has yet to be understood by information providers and educators (Naughton, 2008). But you can bet that Google has.

Pew Research Centre

Headline June 18th

Adults and cell phone distractions:

Adults are just as likely as teens to have texted while driving and are substantially more likely to have talked on the phone while driving

Study:

Teens not the worst text-driving culprits

<http://www.pewinternet.org/>

Surviving & thriving

- “Whilst the use of new digital media is certainly not a pre-requisite to a young person *surviving* in twenty-first century society, it is almost certainly an integral element of *thriving* in twenty-first century society”

(Selwyn, 2007)

“Critical interpretation & expression”

- “No longer is it enough to be able to read the printed word; children, youth, and adults, too, need the ability to both critically interpret the powerful images of a multimedia culture and express themselves in multiple media forms”.
- (Thoman & Jolls, 2005)

Role of youth work & education

- “In a world that is increasingly a vast marketplace, consumerism in itself is probably irreversible, but “critical consumption” can be encouraged and enhanced by effective educational programmes; and youth work, if it can reach out to young people in a way that is as meaningful and attractive to them as the commercial alternatives, has a particularly important role to play in this regard.”
- (National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007)