

“For every rally cry to embrace AI in education, there are concerns for student literacy and the demise of academic skills.”

UKieG

LibTech EdTech – transition, challenges and contradictions

THE summer 2023 issue of UKieG’s open access journal, *eLucidate* (<https://elucidate-ukeig.org.uk>), featured my reflections on the implications of a Members’ Day presentation by Ken Chad (www.kenchadconsulting.com) on the “library technology ecosystem.”

He has worked on trends in the library tech market for several years and his focus on this occasion was on the higher education sector. He recently delivered an equally thought-provoking seminar on the directions for library technology in FE, and in both cases I was struck by the complexities and contradictions that the profession faces navigating this challenging teaching and learning support landscape.

Ken notes there is “a dichotomy between the provision of library resources and learning resources.” It’s increasingly difficult to identify what constitutes a resource that is managed (and paid for) by the library and what is an educational resource paid for from a learning budget. Within this context, what future does a traditional library management system have in delivering an increasingly diverse and eclectic portfolio of learning resources when Google (and now ChatGPT or Google Gemini – previously known as Bard) dwarf conventional library systems?

Are the LMS we know and love dead in the water? Ken poses a challenging question as these learning systems and services assimilate. Who pays for the ecosystem? “LibTech” becomes “EdTech”. He argues that some current library vendors are mired in supporting legacy systems preventing the visionary transformative approach needed. “Only those that can deliver new higher value platform solutions will thrive in the longer term.”

Supporting excellence

The library and information services role in supporting teaching excellence and the student experience is integrating into a much wider learning paradigm. We can all list information innovations and disruptive

technologies; the opportunities and possibilities are endless. AI and machine learning, virtual reality, open educational textbooks and open access resources, enhanced personalisation and student engagement using mobile apps, for example.

However, we’re experiencing a proliferation of mobile educational apps and learning tools at a time when parents are calling for a “smartphone-free childhood”. We’re all acutely aware of Brianna Ghey’s mother calling for social media safeguarding. Nearly a third of UK secondary pupils avoid school due to anxiety. The Covid-19 pandemic that helped create this situation also catalysed the transition to online learning and reliance on mobile technology. How do we get that balance right?

Concerns

For every rally cry to embrace AI in education, there are concerns for student literacy and the demise of academic skills. A recent survey reported that “more than half of UK undergraduates say they use AI to help with essays... One in four are using applications such as Google Gemini or ChatGPT to suggest topics and one in eight are using them to create content. Just five per cent admitted to copying and pasting unedited AI-generated text into their assessments.” (<http://tinyurl.com/4e2cxj5>)

Another US headline screamed “College Students Basically Don’t Know How To Read Anymore. This Is Grim” (<http://tinyurl.com/bdepfv6>). This “marked decline” in “reading resilience” started before the pandemic but was significantly hot-housed by it; a reticence to read large volumes of prescribed text, partially down to the mobile tech culture and “smartphones becoming the main medium for reading.”

The e-book market still stumbles along riddled by prohibitive pricing, bundling reducing choice and unstable access. One study concluded that: “Reading print texts improves comprehension more than reading digital materials does...”,



Gary Horrocks (info.ukeig@cilip.org.uk) UK e-information Group.

so perhaps we are barking up the wrong digital tree?

Potential

The data and learning analytics that underpin most of these EdTech developments offer huge potential to map student behaviour, tracing digital footprints to determine support needs but also to evidence the value and impact of library and information services on student achievement and success. However, privacy and cyber security issues loom if a student is unaware that their data is being processed, regardless of the purpose or outcome. “Libraries will need to navigate the ethical implications of collecting and managing user data while ensuring user privacy and data security,” says Ken.

And of course, the greatest contradiction of all, articulated by outgoing CILIP Chief Executive Nick Poole in the January-February 2024 issue of *Information Professional*, is that the information and data age, the ‘fourth industrial revolution’, is an age of mis- and dis-information, where technologies like deepfake audio and voice cloning have the potential to influence millions.

On Safer Internet Day in February 2024 (<http://tinyurl.com/yk9sv5d6>) students listed “cyberbullying, mis-information and inadequate regulation of apps” as key concerns when it came to their online safety. Never have the opportunities to support teaching, learning and the student experience been greater, but the terrain is perilous. **IP**