

LIS Pedagogy Chat is a discussion series for library and information science instructors. Our goal is to provide an informal space to ask questions and share ideas about online pedagogy, and to build a community of practice. Each session focuses on a different topic and features a short presentation on best practices followed by a facilitated discussion and a collaborative document of ideas to share. Slides and notes from each session are available in a shared folder. For more information, see <https://www.lispedagogychat.org/>

The Feeling of Knowing and Information Literacy

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Link to [Presentation Slides](#)

Presentation Notes

Disclaimers: We are working outside of our domains in psychology and neuroscience and need to be cautious about errors. Also, we will be making generalizations about a “neuro-normative” brain, but all brains are different.

Why do people trust some things and not others? Our focus in LIS has been on credibility and authority. We may have been missing attention to brain science.

Who was the 8th President of the U.S.?

Often people are unsure of this answer-- and know that they don't know.

Federally mandated minimum wage is \$7.25-- if you could change this what would you choose as a fair minimum wage?

There is no “right” answer to this question-- the answer has to “feel” right to each person and that feeling could depend on a lot of things-- whether you've ever worked a minimum wage job, what jobs are minimum wage jobs, our biases, etc.

The things that often strike us as we encounter information is not what is new or novel but the things that feel “true” to us-- that “feel” right. There is research in psychology and social psychology that supports this idea of the “feeling of knowing.”

This “feeling of knowing” happens outside of our conscious awareness-- it generates as a feeling but it emerges from our unconscious.

In this case, we are using the word “feeling” as an unconscious response as opposed to emotions which are a cognitive response to the world.

From a neurological perspective, learning is building new neural pathways in the brain, and/or strengthening existing pathways (or sometimes letting pathways fade). Mastery comes from continual practice to keep those pathways strong. The mind’s goal is to move from conscious (resource-intensive) to unconscious (automatic) processing approach. The faster you can do it, the better, from the brain’s perspective. Important to remember our brain is not a unified whole-- the consciousness is only part of our brain, and it doesn’t have the whole picture. Many of our decisions are made through unconscious processes before they move to consciousness, and are not always rational, but rationalized afterward.

The feeling of knowing then is the memory, the stuff, content that we “know.”

Feelings are not “interruptions” of rational thought-- we are not rational computers that feelings get in the way of. Feelings are how we know things-- we don’t recognize how we know things until we feel like we know them. We need to avoid the Western trap of “pure rationality”-- our brains do not work that way.

We can’t escape our biases- we see the world through our experiences, our beliefs come from the lives we have lived, and beliefs come to us as feelings. We can try to be objective and to empathize with others but it is all filtered through our experiences.

Applying to information literacy:

We can’t evaluate sources until we evaluate ourselves-- why do we trust one thing over another? Why do we choose one topic over another-- find one thing compelling and another not? We have to recognize that we are not neutral and we might be wrong.

Caulfield tells us we should note when information stirs emotion-- both excitement and anger. Those emotions tell us something about the information we’re receiving.

Help us rethink expertise-- experts build intuitive instincts (modules, neural networks) around topics.

Critical thinking is not just about logic and rationality-- we have to recognize interactions between conscious and unconscious processing. We have to move from critical thinking to reflective thinking.

Knowing as strategy-- how we place ourselves in history, how we see the power dynamics around us and what our relationships are to them, and how that impacts how we know.

With regard to ACRL Frameworks and threshold concepts-- as you take steps toward understanding those threshold concepts, you are building those neural networks.

To what degree can our consciousness understand the sources of unconscious processing?
This is the hot debate in neuroscience right now.

Discussion Notes

Where do you recognize the feeling of knowing in your own life? Or where do you recognize the modular nature of your mind?

Mercier and Sperber argue that all decisions are intuition rather than rational. Not everyone agrees.

Kuhlthau's work on ISP is helpful-- her work on emotions in cognitive tasks can help us to encourage reflection and know when to seek help.

Mercier and Sperber argue that rationality evolved when we lived in small tribes-- those we lived with were highly trusted. Our job was to generate ideas and then judge each other's ideas-- and we are good at judging others' ideas (we don't want to get tricked) but terrible at judging our own ideas. Research shows that small groups with diverse ideas are the most successful, but we are sorting ourselves more and more into like-minded groups.-- This might be something to consider for peer review.

How can we help students become more aware of these unconscious mechanisms (the feeling of knowing)?

This makes me think of the "seven why's" technique, where you ask someone (or yourself) to keep answering "why" as you dig deeper into an idea.

Ask students to think about a time when they were wrong and what made them recognize that they were wrong.

Getting students to ground themselves in the space-- breathing exercises, etc.-- so they can focus on exploring ideas rather than getting "right" answers.

Get students to dig into topics they already have ideas/feelings about: abortion, capital punishment etc. For IL, might get students to reflect on topics they choose, which resources they select, and get them to think about their search process differently. Use the minimum wage question as an example-- how would we decide this-- what information would we weigh? What might influence us?

Resources

Swanson, Troy. (2023). [Knowledge as a Feeling: How Neuroscience and Psychology Impact Human Information Behavior](#). Rowman & Littlefield.

Troy Swanson Illinois Information Literacy Summit Keynote address:
<https://youtu.be/ExTy8WMI0iQ?si=shbmJrIErLRLSxZu>

Enigma of Reason- Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber