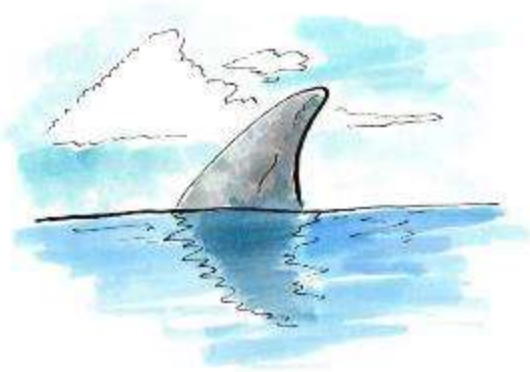


# Online conversation: information literacy as discourse between peers

Geoff Walton



# What I'm going to talk about today

- Definition of terms
- Research question
- Methodology
- Overview of module structure
- Analysis of findings
- Conclusions

# Definition of terms (1)

- Information literacy
  - The ability to find, evaluate and use information effectively
    - ‘Evaluate’ – preferred term, ‘information discernment’ which is ‘the ability to use higher order thinking skills in order to make sound and complex judgments regarding a range of text-based materials’ (Walton & Hepworth, 2013, p55)
    - Furthermore, information discernment can be disaggregated into a number of levels of increasing complexity (Hepworth & Walton, 2009)

## Definition of terms (2)

5. Expressed as the relative value of criteria for a given purpose, "Some of them initially are important like reliability... obviously if you are going to reference something in an essay etc. you need to know that the source is reliable."

5

4

3

2

1

1. Don't know or don't care how to be discerning, "When you first go on a website you don't read all the information."

3. Expressed by true/false statements, "See whether it is from a good company where it's very probably going to be factual or not." Someone's own personal website... that's less formal.

4. Expressed as making judgements, "[The e-learning training] helped [me] decide which resources were reliable and useful and why."

Levels of information discernment ladder

# Definition of terms (3)

- Online discourse: asynchronous text based postings between participants in a VLE
- The value of discourse as an educational tool (online or face-to-face) long recognised (Race, 2001; Laurillard, 2002; Mayes & De Freitas, 2004; Chan & van Alst, 2008; Osborne, 2010)



# Research question

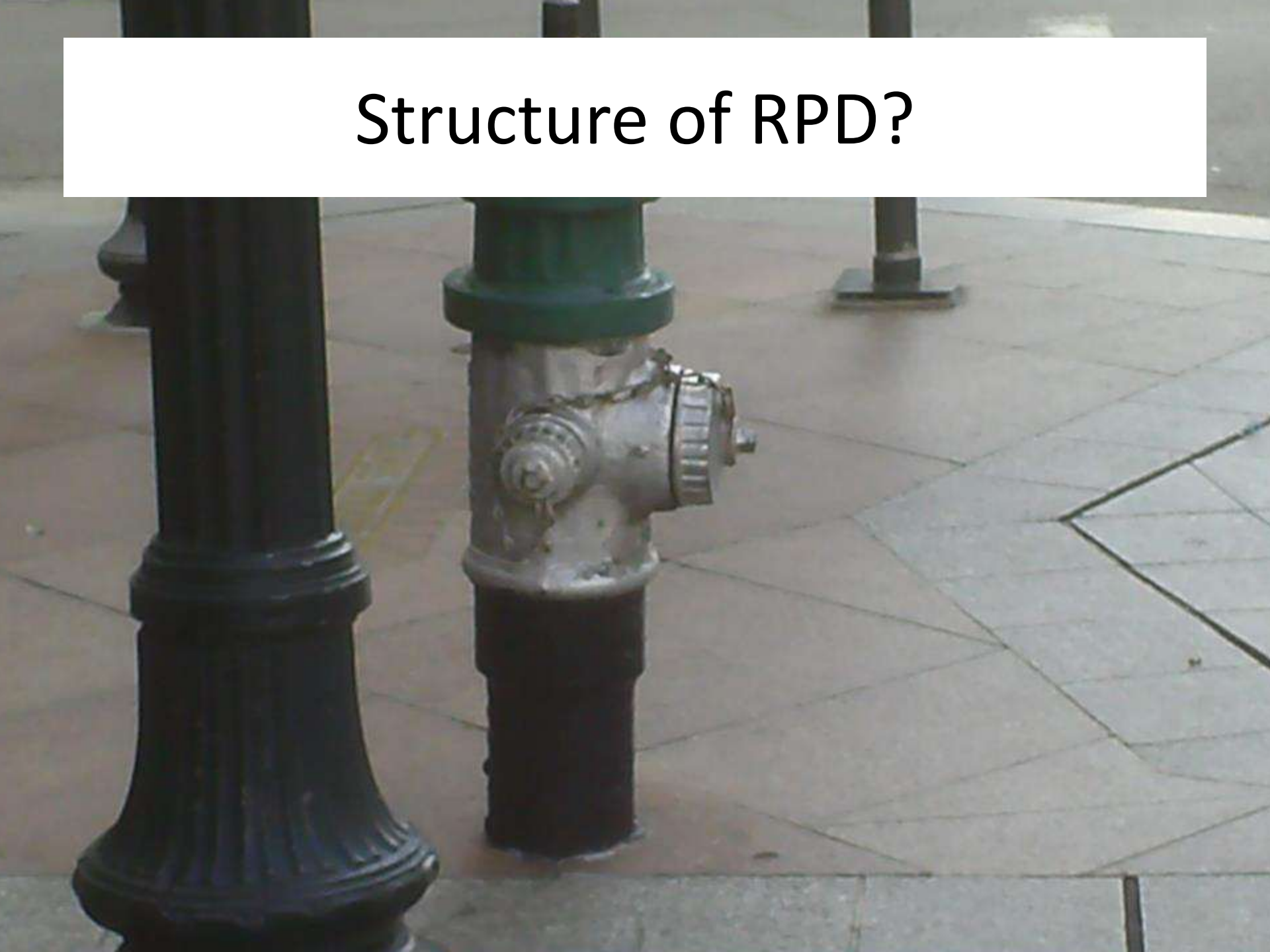
- In what ways does online discourse produced by students (with particular reference to online peer assessment) indicate evidence of information literacy?

# Methodology



- Mixed methods
  - Qualitative
    - Online postings
    - Questionnaire responses
  - Quantitative
    - One year snapshot of assessed work
- Participants
  - Level 4 undergraduates in Sport & Exercise Sciences over 6 Years on the Research & Professional Development ('skills') core module
  - Three tutor groups sampled from each year

# Structure of RPD?







Students given assignment in induction week



Tutor marks assignment (formatively) and gives it back



Students redraft their assignment



Online Peer Assessment - Students discuss each others drafts on VLE discussion board - supported with Assignment Survival Kit - ASK



Students hand in their final assignment for marking



Induction Week  
1<sup>st</sup> draft  
Week 1  
Essay process  
Week 2  
Learning styles  
Week 3  
E-resources  
Week 4  
Referencing  
Week 5  
Plagiarism  
  
Week 6-8  
OPA  
  
Week 9 -12  
Research methods



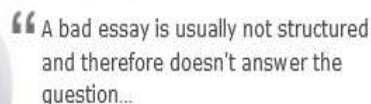
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### Lecturers' Top Tip



More assignment tips...

**Mani** — Social Science Lecturer

## My ASK account

Use your own personal version of ASK to store a number of assignments simultaneously and be sent email reminders. [For more information...](#)

Username:

Password:

Log in

Being faced with your first assignment at University can be a daunting prospect. This piece of software might help you to cope! It will help you to plan your time and the steps you might need to follow to survive and produce your first piece of assessed work. [About ASK...](#)


## Start date

30 / 05 / 2013 (dd/mm/yyyy)

Due date

/ / 2013 (dd/mm/yyyy)

### Type of assignment

Essay 

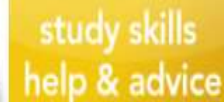
### Calculate Assignment Schedule!



Watch  
& learn



Library &amp; enquiries



**Please note** that any information provided under the ASK web support pages is advisory only. No liability will be attached to the University, its

# Analysis of findings

- Initial attempt to find themes around information sources e.g., 'books', 'journals', 'e-books', 'articles' and 'web-pages'
- Found to be unproductive
- Second sweep showed that students tended to comment on others work via the term 'references' (often typed as 'referances') and how effectively, or otherwise, they felt their fellow students had used them
- A search using 'refer' located most mentions of this term in the discourse

# Number of mentions of 'refer'\* per group each year

	JB	JF	JS
2008	38	9	52
2009	21	39	22
2010	37	46	15

NB – pertaining to the specific comments about the use of information sources only, rather than comments about creating a reference list .

OPA session two

Average of 15 students per group and 50 postings per session



# The use of the term tended to indicate a level of information discernment (1)

- There appeared to be 5 levels of discernment
  - Level 1: expressed as quantity
    - *You have only used some references* (critical)
    - *You use lots of references* (uncritical)
  - Level 2: expressed as a range
    - *Nice and varied amount of references*
    - *A wide range of different references used*
  - Level 3: expressed by type (quality implied)
    - *You have used websites as references, try to use more books and journals*
    - *The referneces (sic) are good but maybe throw in a couple of journals in there to widen the scope of research*



# The use of the term tended to indicate a level of information discernment (2)

- Level 4: expressed as use of specific evaluation criteria
  - *References are relevant and support the information presented* (NB: relevance - most common evaluation criterion mentioned)
  - *References back up argument all through essay and very up to date*
- Level 5: expressed as linking of references to specific content or concepts to support an argument
  - *You have looked at both sides by including refernces (sic) that oppose each other such as the reference that stated there was no change and then another reference that stated there was a change*
  - *You have used references to support your points, although I think you could have included a few more just to show off your understanding! It would have been nice for you to include 2 other themes also, such as the social benefits and psychological benefits to show your knowledge, and add in the negatives to give an argument!*

# Student reflections

- *It's a really good idea, hearing everyone's different comments to improve. Effective feedback will help me know where I went wrong. It is good as we're all communicating with each other giving positive feedback and effective criticism to help improve (student 15)*
- *It will be good as it is not only helping ourselves via feedback but it also helps others. I am looking to gain more knowledge and understanding of how to write in higher education. If the feedback is logical and fair I will take it on board, if not I'll discard it (student 54)*
- *I'm looking for a much wider range of constructive criticism to help improve my writing style and learning process (research, referencing etc.) for future modules (student 91)*
- [More here:](http://journals.staffs.ac.uk/index.php/ipihe/article/view/6)  
<http://journals.staffs.ac.uk/index.php/ipihe/article/view/6>

# Other evidence


- Statistical test indicated a significant difference between students' performance ( $n=38$ ) on the two assignments ( $t(1, 74) = 11.380, p < .001$ ). For assignment one, the mean across both groups was 40.22 with a standard deviation of 6.50; for assignment two, the mean across both groups was 57.92 with a standard deviation of 7.05. (Cleland & Walton, 2012)
- An increase of **two** grade points

$$\Sigma_K \equiv B_c = K_1 + K_2 + K_3 + K_4$$

# Conclusions


- Online discourse can evidence information literacy
- This online discourse appears to engender learning as highlighted by many e.g., Mayes & De Freitas (2004) and Chan & van Alst (2008)
- A number of levels identified and these match, to some extent, the levels of information discernment identified by Hepworth & Walton (2009)
- A possible means of assessing knowledge and avoiding plagiarism
- So... plenty of evidence of critical thinking demonstrated via online discourse... and that was about it...

## OR SO I THOUGHT....

- ...then I met Michael Olsson at the Information: interactions and impact (i<sup>3</sup>) conference
  - He introduced me to Foucault and the inseparable nature of knowledge and power
  - Discourse is the means by which power relations are reproduced and maintained
  - Discourse as the embodiment of practice
  - Now, I've gone back to the discourse and re-appraised
- 



# MY NEW THOUGHTS ARE...

- This learning and teaching intervention does produce critical thinking but in a way which reproduces existing discourse
  - Why?
  - Perhaps unsurprisingly students can be seen to adopt their tutors (and in turn) accepted academic view of the production of knowledge
  - Is this really information literacy?
- 

# CRITICAL THINKING UP TO A POINT...

- Students, through this discourse, recognise and accept what is good quality information but they do not question why
- Student' critical thinking exists in a very narrow range
- They become aware of the texts they need to use but...
- The dominant discourse ensures that they are not fully critical of knowledge production



## HOW CAN THIS BE DISRUPTED?

- Is it time for both academics and librarians – who are complicit in this knowledge hegemony – to be critical of their own discourse?
- Only when this happens will we enable truly information literate and engaged citizens ready for the challenges of the future



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# ONLINE CONVERSATION: INFORMATION LITERACY AS DISCOURSE BETWEEN PEERS

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