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## **Information Competences as Fetishized Theoretical Categories—The Example of Youth Pro-Ana Blogs**

### **Abstract**

Scientific reflections on information literacy have emphasized that young people must develop information competences related to using the Internet. Among various approaches, in the generic approach, catalogues of competences are constructed and treated as lists of desired behaviors and skills. The article aims to criticize this approach and its characteristic fetishization of theoretical categories; because of fetishization, these catalogues of competences fail to reflect social reality. The article presents the practices of female bloggers of the pro-ana movement: young girls who consider anorexia not a disease but a lifestyle. Using the method of content analysis, the author analyzed 561 blog entries on 15 blogs and compared the collected data with a model catalogue of competencies created based on the literature. Perceived from the perspective of the generic approach, female pro-ana bloggers may be considered information-literate. This implies that this approach is deficient as the pro-ana movement negatively impacts both healthy and ill girls.

**Keywords:** Information literacy, digital literacy, media education, sociology of the Internet, pro-ana movement, pro-ana blogs, anorexia nervosa, sociology of education.

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## **Introduction**

Many studies on information literacy, usually connected to new information technologies, have been performed; these studies have mainly investigated the Internet. A person is “information-literate” when they are able to productively search for, store, control, produce, and communicate information by means of the Internet (cf. Talja and Lloyd, 2010; Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005). Information literacy is also referred to as information technology (IT) literacy, digital literacy, and network literacy. Different discourses view the issue of information competences differently, each time stressing the necessity to acquire or consolidate those competences.

Information literacy is primarily discussed in reference to young people, although the category of “young people” has a broad range: the existing literature has emphasized the need to properly educate preschoolers and older students at various stages of education (elementary school, junior high school, secondary school and college; cf. Livingstone, 2009). Competences should be instilled by various means: formally, at school or university, but also in informal education, that is, in everyday functioning with peers and adults.

Mandy Lupton and Christine Bruce comprehensively discuss the various discourses on information literacy in their article “Windows on information literacy worlds” (2010). They distinguished three approaches: the generic, situated, and transformative approaches, the last of which is a critical approach that emphasizes the emancipation of individuals and groups. In this context, being literate is tantamount to the ability to question the status quo and effectively initiate social change (cf. Endres, 2001); this is outside the scope of this paper. However, the situated approach, in which competences are considered “situated” within social practices (cf. Lloyd, 2010), is extremely relevant. Competences differ depending on the context and are shaped by particular cultural and social conditions:

In this perspective, literacy is contextual, authentic, collaborative and participatory. Literacy involves individuals and groups making decisions, making

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meaning and solving personal, work, family and community problems. It is

subjective, as what constitutes literacy practices will vary with the context and be

different for each person and social group (Lupton and Bruce, 2010, 7–8).

This perspective, emphasizing the sociocultural nature of information literacy, significantly differs from the formal educational perspective (cf. Lupton and Bruce, 2010, Lipponen, 2010).

Students cannot be treated as robots to be programmed to function in accordance with educator's

beliefs regarding competence. Rather, educational processes should be tailored to individual

students, taking into consideration their everyday lives and the social and cultural context in which

they function. The proponents of the situated approach also point out that the nature of skill

acquisition lies within a community: we learn (and generate new knowledge) as members of

various groups. This is particularly evident in “communities of practice,” defined as groups of

people who share common interests and objectives (cf. Wenger, 2000). Communities of practice are

achieved when people employ similar practices—when they work by using similar tools or the

same language. Communities of practice emerge when people undertake similar activities, have the

same fears, and understand specific problems in the same way (cf. Harris, 2008; Lipponen, 2010).

The contextual nature of information literacy seems to have been overlooked by academic proponents of the generic approach; Lupton and Bruce describe this in the following way:

The generic perspective portrays literacy as “functional” or “basic.” In this

perspective, literacy is regarded as a discrete set of skills to be learned by

individuals (...). In the generic perspective, literacy is neutral, objective, text-

based, apolitical, reproductive, standardized and universal (Lupton and Bruce,

2010, 7).

Literacy is treated here as a list of desired behaviors and skills; human practices are

**Siuda, P.** (2016). Information Competences as Fetishized Theoretical Categories. The Example of Youth Pro-Ana Blogs, *Education and Society* 34(2): 87-105. completely overlooked. In this perspective, how information is obtained and used is considered independent of the context and everyday lives of various social groups.

The generic approach is manifested in the construction of catalogues of competences, which vary broadly. They are typically formulated in the context of projects in the field of media education or as parts of longer texts. They list what young people should know, what skills they should have, and what they should be aware of if they wish to be Internet-literate (cf. Rozkosz et al., 2014). There are so many catalogues that it would be difficult to mention them all. Researchers are typically directed to formulate such catalogues by scientific institutions, third-sector organizations, and government agencies. Various English-language catalogues have been released by for example the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2007), the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AASL, AECT, 1998), the Council of Australian University Librarians (ANZIIL, 2004), or the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2005, 2012).

Although the catalogues cannot be put in one category, they all suggest quite similar sets of competences. Some catalogues emphasize the contextual nature of competencies; however, this is insufficient for proponents of the situated approach, who believe that catalogues, as lists of necessary skills, inappropriately deal with information literacy. Catalogues are consistently interpreted and received in the sphere of formal education in a generic way, even when they are oriented toward a social and cultural context (cf. Edwards and Bruce, 2004; Lupton, 2004). Catalogues impose a certain way of thinking that obviates noticing or discussing context. The aim is to simply present an ideal “skillful” person who can become literate by following a series of steps that lead to the acquisition of skills (cf. Eisenberg and Berkowitz, 1990).

This article supports the situated approach. I wish to contribute to criticizing the generic approach, an approach that necessitates the formation of catalogues. Catalogues manifest the fetishization of theoretical categories; they constitute a considerable methodological oversight. With the fetishization of theoretical categories, the processes of research and education are completely

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isolated from social reality.

The aim of this article is to criticize the generic approach and the fetishization that occurs within it through the prism of the particular practices of young people. I focus on the phenomenon of pro-ana movement on the Internet—spaces that unite girls who believe that anorexia is a lifestyle. Pro-ana involves young girls, usually between 16 and 25 years of age (cf. Jablow, 2000; Ward, 2007), who either already suffer from anorexia or are predisposed to it. For them, the Internet is a space where they can disclose their anorexia in a positive way. This may be done by creating websites and blogs and by creating profiles on social media (for example, on Facebook). In this article, I focus on blogs.

In this article, fetishization is criticized on the basis that pro-ana girls, viewed through the prism of the catalogues that are characteristic of the generic approach, can be considered information-literate. The last part of the article addresses how affiliating with the pro-ana movement negatively impacts girls' health as well as mental and social development. By proving that such girls are information-literate when viewed from the perspective of catalogues of competences, the irrelevance of the generic approach can be indicated.

The example of the pro-ana movement exposes a rarely discussed weakness of the generic approach. Proponents of the generic approach take for granted that young people who have been taught to use the Internet use the skills they have acquired to their own benefit. This may not be the case; people use the competences they acquire in everyday activities that are not always positive. The catalogues typical of the generic approach are highly biased. Some have included a category pertaining to the “wise” or “reflective” use of information for the good of oneself and others. Nevertheless even if this category is present, it is not discussed any further. It is usually concluded that someone is literate if they know something or they can do specific things (cf. Lipponen, 2010, 55).

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### **Method**

As has been mentioned, fetishization may be criticized on the basis that, from the perspective of the catalogues of competences characteristic of the generic approach, pro-ana girls are information-literate. It is necessary to briefly summarize the content of these catalogues. They are numerous and mentioning all of them is not the aim of this study. The catalogues vary in degree of precision and by the number of example skills specified. The catalogues also vary in how skills are ordered and in the names by which skills are referred to; however, the majority of catalogues list the competences that are described below (cf. AASL, 2007; AASL, AECT, 1998; ANZIIL, 2004; IFLA, 2005, 2012; Siuda and Stunza, 2012; Siuda et al., 2013). These competences are argued to be crucial for young people growing up in a world defined by the Internet. The presented overview synthesizes various catalogues that have been released.

First, the catalogues have specified that being able to obtain information efficiently and effectively is crucial: searching for information online requires selecting a search tool appropriate to the type of content desired. Young people must be aware that, for example, Wikipedia is best used as a study aid and IMDB is best used to search for information on films. Young people must possess a range of skills—for instance, they must be capable of inputting appropriate keywords into search engines to yield optimal results. Second, young people must be able to critically assess information; not all Internet sources are trustworthy. Every person who can proficiently use the Internet should be capable of spotting common inaccuracies in Wikipedia articles or should at least understand the need to verify and check information against other sources. Third, young people must be able to create and present content and must be aware of the legality of this. Young people who, for creative ends, are able to upload their own photos and films and remix and convert materials found online in different ways without infringing copyright are in good stead. Fourth, young people must be aware of how to safely use the Internet—they must know to be careful not to reveal passwords, to avoid “cyber-bullies” and replying to messages from suspicious people, and to refrain from posting compromising photos, films, and other materials on social media. Fifth, young people should be

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sociable on the Internet and should participate in various communities. For example, young people with profiles on Facebook should be active in such a way that they can gain support from acquaintances, such as advice.

To determine whether pro-ana girls can be considered competent when the above-described model of catalogues is applied, I investigated the pro-ana phenomenon based on a content analysis of various pro-ana blogs on the Internet.

Because of the unusual secretiveness of the pro-ana community, it is very difficult to conduct netnographic research in pro-ana's virtual communities as recommended by Robert V. Kozinets (2010). Kozinets recommends observing what members of a certain community do online by interacting with them. Consequently, this research is confined to pure content analysis which is used to understand the meanings, narratives, and patterns manifested in the movement. I analyzed 15 blogs; the names and addresses of these blogs are not mentioned here for ethical reasons. Pro-ana girls are extremely careful not to disclose information that could help identify them. Although pro-ana blogs function in the openly accessible "public space" of the Internet, the girls treat these blogs as private spaces. As has been pointed out by many methodologists of online research, the Internet is a space in which the public and private spheres are entangled (cf. Berry, 2004). Cyberspace often cannot be distinguished as public or private. The open nature of certain virtual communities would suggest that they are part of the public sphere; however, people reveal private, shameful, and intimate information within such communities, which would suggest that such communities belong to the private sphere. Despite the fact that what is published online is openly accessible, people may perceive that only people who respect and understand their situation and problems read what they write.

I assessed this issue following Storm A. King (1996), who proposed that the degree to which a study has infringed on research subjects privacy online can be assessed by considering their emotional state and their sense of privacy, as well as the study itself. Indeed, people ruminating on sports, music, and film and people in the midst of a life crisis (for example suffering from anorexia)

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are significantly different.

I used the content analysis method; I did not interact with the subjects of this research. However, I have decided not to reveal the studied blogs or to quote the entries because of the extremely sensitive nature of what female pro-ana users post on their blogs and because of their own concern for anonymity and privacy. At the same time, the accessibility of the investigated blogs and the lack of interaction with their authors enabled the analysis to be conducted without obtaining informed consent.

The blogs sampled were not representative; in research into various Internet webpages, creating a representative sample is practically impossible. The procedure used in this study was not substantially different from procedures that have been used in other studies. Internet research is universally hampered by the disadvantage that representative samples are impossible to create; this has been indicated as its biggest flaw (cf. Blasius and Brandt, 2010). Pro-ana blogs are numerous, written in many languages, and are active for different periods: some of them are maintained over long periods of time (i.e., years) and some “die” quite quickly. Most importantly, there is no central listing of pro-ana blogs.

I selected the blogs based on popularity and how active they were. Popularity was considered in terms of Google ranking when searching for terms such as “pro-ana,” “pro-ana butterflies,” “pro-ana movement,” and “pro-ana blog.” After entering the search terms, the search engine also displayed websites that were not blogs; I ignored these results in favor of blogs. Blogs were considered active when their authors had posted at least three entries monthly for at least half a year. Investigating only active blogs ensured that an authentic, “living” phenomenon was examined. The active blogs differed in terms of when they were active: the oldest was active from May to October 2008, the newest from January to July 2014. Some blogs were active for longer than they were studied. Even when this was the case, I investigated blog posts over half a year, starting with the month that the blog first exceeded three entries in a month.

As has been mentioned, whether blogs were up-to-date was assessed by examining posting



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frequency. Although blogs contain numerous elements (cf. Rettberg, 2013), entries are their essence. In posts, bloggers publish their texts and graphics and share links to interesting websites, films, and graphics found online. Posts were the unit of analysis. Half-year periods of activity were determined for all fifteen blogs. Posts within those periods were analyzed; the blog with the least posts in this period had 22 posts, whereas the blog with the most posts had 58. The number of posts analyzed totaled 561.

The posts were manually coded; no software was used. The coding categories were distinguished based on the synthesized catalogue of competences presented previously and are presented in the next section of this article. I also investigated a total of 1,011 post comments.

## **Results**

I analyzed pro-ana blog posts to confirm that pro-ana bloggers have acquired the skills presented as necessary in the model catalogue. I distinguished coding categories and determined how many of the posts they could be applied to. The data are presented in Table 1. In the analysis and interpretation of the collected material in the following section, all references to frequencies of the occurrence of particular categories can be checked against Table 1.

As evidenced by the precise information on anorexia in the blog posts, the girls have mastered the skill of being able to efficiently and effectively obtain information; their posts include references to both press articles and scientific studies on this subject (the former are more numerous). However, in addition to this content, the posts also reference various miracle diets, methods of fighting overweight, and ways to artificially induce vomiting or diarrhea and how to withstand starving. Many of the blogs featured “tips and tricks,” or guidelines on how to deceive close family members and specialists in order to avoid treatment (cf. Burczak, 2009). The advice is usually supplemented with references to various sources, confirming that the girls are skilled in Internet search.

Obviously, whether these bloggers critically assess the information they obtain must be

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considered. Anorexia has drastic health consequences; seen through this prism, the “tips and tricks” these blogs present does not stand for critical assessment of the information. Seen through the prism of the aims of pro-ana anorexics, however, the information presented has been critically assessed: the “tips and tricks” presented have been deemed perfectly effective.

That the authors of these blogs engage in critical assessment is evident when blogs that vary in the radicalism of their approach are compared. These approaches have already been identified in the literature and have been well documented (cf. Startek, 2011). Girls of the more extreme approach want to “popularize” anorexia; they do not consider anorexia a disease. Girls of the more moderate approach want eating disorders to be accepted; they believe that it is possible for those with eating disorders to function normally and that immediate treatment is unnecessary. They question whether people with eating disorders must eschew anorexic rituals and adopt “normal” eating habits. Identifying which approach a blog author supports is straightforward. The variance in opinions between the extreme and moderate approaches evidences that pro-ana blog authors are knowledgeable and, furthermore, confident in their knowledge: they consciously and polemically read materials from journalistic, scientific, and other sources and stake a particular standpoint.

The model catalogue distinguishes another skill: being able to create, process, and present information, or in other words, being able to coherently post original or remixed texts, photos, films, and other materials found on the Internet. In the pro-ana blogs analyzed, this kind of creativity was omnipresent, evidenced by the girls’ posting of letters and poems written to and received from anorexia as a personified entity, affectionately referred to by such names as “Ana,” “goddess,” and “best friend.”

In the blogs, “thinspirations” are posted. These are materials—often edited graphics—created by amateurs to inspire and motivate weight loss that feature girls who are both non-famous and famous—some are actresses, models, and singers. Most frequently, they combine several separate photographs with captions such as “skinny bitch,” “hot as hell,” and “I only feel beautiful when I’m hungry” (see Figure 1). The girls featured as thinspirations are noticeably skinny;

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thinspirational collages show photos of women with hip bones, ribs, knees, and collarbones that stick out; models with flat stomachs and small buttocks of models; and celebrities that are often edited to look even slimmer than they are in reality. Thinspirations are presented to prove that achieving a very low body weight is possible. There are also thinspirations that feature overweight people and people overeating high-calorie food that evoke the fear of excess weight, discourage eating, and show how those who are unable to withstand hunger and eat too much are to be punished.

**Figure 1.** Thinspiration photo (from a blog which was not analyzed)

Though thinspirations in the form of photos are prevalent, there are also “vids,” or amateur-made films comprising photo sequences that are supplemented with appropriate background music. Pro-ana vids feature photographs similar to those previously mentioned. Thinspirational films are also made from scenes from Hollywood movies that are selected because they feature slim actresses. The music accompanying these short video sequences is either that of professional performers or created by the bloggers themselves; it is intended to encourage the work of “self-improvement” (cf. Startek, 2011).

It has to be noted that the girls who write pro-ana blogs, promoting the content which is shocking for the average Internet user, are careful not to reveal personal data or post anything which would help identify them (cf. Fleming-May and Miller, 2010): they anonymize their written experiences and omit details from their lives as well as information about other people. Those who post photos of themselves only show those parts of the body that originally induced them to start losing weight. It may be said that the bloggers are competent in regard to protecting their own privacy and avoiding the publication of compromising materials on the Internet.

Regarding participation in Internet communities, the literature has strongly emphasized that communities form around pro-ana webpages serve as support groups for members (cf. Dyke, 2013;

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Yeshua-Katz and Martins, 2013). The communities cohere around particular rules and values and a specific group language or ethos; thus, they may be considered coherent.

Pro-ana culture is characterized by the legitimation of anorexic rituals and behaviors and a collective recognition of the pain, emotional disquiet, suffering, and struggle leading to a final victory. In breaking away from the dominant view of what a healthy human body should look like, it embodies a subjectively felt otherness. The girls call themselves butterflies, connoting lightness, grace, ephemerality, and, thus, freedom. As a symbol of the movement, the butterfly also refers to the transformation the girls seek—from a hideous (fat) caterpillar to a beautiful (slim), ethereal, and weightless insect. This transformation is to be achieved by obeying the pro-ana Decalogue, a set of rules that often appeared on the blogs (see Figure 2). The pro-ana Alphabet, which connects every letter of the alphabet to losing weight, is also important (see Figure 3). Publishing daily, weekly, and monthly calorie limits is also considered essential.

**Figure 2.** Pro-ana Decalogue (from a blog which was not analyzed)

**Figure 3.** Pro-ana Alphabet (from a blog which was not analyzed)

As has been shown by some cultural studies researchers (cf. Dias, 2003; Ward, 2007), communities form around pro-ana webpages that are celebratory of eating disorders are based on the anorexic body. In encouraging members to explicitly articulate their opinions, such communities aim to question the laws imposed by the so-called economy of difference. The anorexic body is always stigmatized as different, that is, different from the “normal” body. Based on a classification culturally established, anorexics are excluded as “outsiders.” That is why anorexic communities that emerge always show the social nature of the pro-ana movement: pro-ana webpages unite people of similar views who provide each other with various types of support.

From this perspective, pro-ana communities are sanctuaries from a threatening outside world

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that wants to label girls who follow the pro-ana guidelines as ill or predisposed to becoming ill (cf. Brotsky and Giles, 2007). In these communities, position is gained not based on commonly accepted norms but by being in opposition to them and by the establishment of an alternative, “underground” perspective. The communities offer a different understanding of the notion of health, where bodies that are generally considered affected by illness are not at all pathologized.

The girls who are active on the blogs gain substantial knowledge on anorexia; the communities they form may be called expert-like. How being a member of these communities fulfills many needs for young people must also be considered: membership satisfies the needs for acceptance, belonging, independence, defiance, and identity (cf. Giles, 2006). Pro-ana communality may fulfill these needs primarily because of the egosyntonic nature of anorexia, which means that anorexia does not contradict a person’s ego but is considered an indispensable element of it (cf. Starzomska, 2008).

The blogs frequently feature accurate, guidebook-like descriptions of how to “nurture” one’s illness; this evidences how these blogs serve as communities that guarantee support and fulfill various types of need. On the blogs, the girls share their progress, writing about such topics as their daily caloric intake, their successful attempts to avoid eating, and the frequency with which they have vomited. Post comments also serve a community-building function. I analyzed 1,011 comments on posts regarding progress in starving oneself; examples of such comments are not presented here to avoid infringing on the privacy of those who were studied. I distinguished three categories that were not mutually exclusive (see Table 2):

- Support comments (encouraging persevering with starving, commending the consumption of a small number of calories, and reporting the successful application of various measures promoting starving);
- Advice comments (on how to persevere in starving, what methods to use, and what and how often to eat);
- Confessional comments (sharing personal experiences connected with starving, including

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boasting about personal achievements in this sphere).

**Table 1.**

**Table 2.**

### **Discussion and conclusions**

Anorexia nervosa is a disease that is relatively recent in origin and it primarily affects young girls. It is manifested in the desire to restrictively reduce food intake or even to starve. The aim of every person affected by anorexia is to achieve an extremely slim figure. Anorexics obsessed with losing weight often experience overwhelming feelings of anger, fear, and isolation when they try to gain control over a perceived dissonance between the mind and the body: the former orders them to refrain from eating, the latter advises quite the opposite (cf. Ward, 2007).

However, anorexia is much more than a fixation on appearance. For many ill people, it is a means for coping with a lost sense of safety (cf. Ward, 2007). For anorexics, focusing on the aim of losing weight facilitates a sense that worries and fears connected with everyday life have been eliminated. Furthermore, for anorexics, anorexia is predictable, safe, and very difficult to give up (cf. Jablo, 2000). Rigorous weight loss measures ensure the achievement of the “perfect” figure but also control over one's life—the girls think that if they achieve their aim, they will become happier, more beautiful, and more admired. Perhaps this is the reason why they personalize their conditions with the affectionate names “Ana,” “goddess,” and “best friend.” Nevertheless, from the clinical standpoint, the pro-ana movement threatens the health and lives of both anorexics and healthy people interested in anorexia.

For anorexics, the pro-ana movement can facilitate the strengthening of the key psychopathological factors and symptoms of anorexia (Abbate, Gramaglia, Pierò and Fassino, 2006; Rodgers, Skowron and Chabrol, 2012): asceticism, an obsession with self-control, and behaviors

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connected with rejecting food (for example, inducing vomiting and diarrhea by pharmacological means). Browsing pro-ana webpages may lengthen the illness period and increase the number of hospitalizations (Wilson, Peebles, Hardy and Litt, 2006); it may also increase bodily dissatisfaction and further lower self-esteem (Harper, Sperry and Thompson, 2008). These webpages provide ill girls with advice and inspiration to “persevere” with their disorder.

Healthy people interested in anorexia who are exposed to the influence of the pro-ana movement are more prone to becoming ill. Research has indicated that healthy girls who often visited pro-ana webpages exhibited decreased self-esteem, as well as increased perceived obesity and perfectionism (Bardone-Cone and Cass, 2006; Custers and Van den Bulck, 2009). Even minimal exposition to the pro-ana movement may influence daily caloric intake and the formation of habits promoting the development of the disease (Jett, LaPorte and Wanchisn, 2010). Healthy people who visit pro-ana webpages are primarily those who already have an interest in losing weight and those who already manifest many individual risk factors for becoming ill (cf. Startek, 2011): bodily dissatisfaction, having experimented with various diets, involvement in sports, and being in adolescence (cf. Józefik, 1999). Motivational thinspirations can induce people to compare themselves with others, contributing to the risk of becoming ill (cf. Maksymium and Jasielska, 2009). Furthermore, in pro-ana communities firm interpersonal bonds are formed and the girls support each other strongly. This makes recovery from the disease, which is already hard to cure, even harder. By sharing information about effective ways to conceal symptoms of anorexia, sufferers can keep their health condition secret.

Thus, it is clear that pro-ana blogs fail to promote the social or cultural development of young girls—on the contrary, such blogs have a profoundly negative impact. However, from the standpoint of the model catalogue of competences, pro-ana bloggers may be considered highly competent web users. Although certain catalogues include the premise that being competent means engaging in behaviors that are personally and socially beneficial, this is not common practice; most catalogues only list necessary skills. By their example, pro-ana blogs prove that researchers creating

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catalogues simply fetishize theoretical categories; this is a considerable methodological oversight.

This type of oversight was aptly described by Mirosław Filiciak (2013) in the context of media research; he showed that researchers in film and cultural studies, in investigating media transformations, incessantly move within a circle of “zombie notions”—terms that mean nothing and function only on the pages of books or periodicals. One zombie notion he considered was Web 2.0, which refers to webpages that are based on voluntary and bottom-up work by amateurs. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find what zombie notions refer to in social reality.

Information literacy has a similar situation. As proponents of the situated approach described earlier have argued, contextualizing how information literacy is considered is particularly essential. The point is not that catalogues should be eliminated wholesale, but rather, that they should be supplemented with an analysis of the everyday life of young people. “Leaving the desk” and outlining the various uses of the Internet by young people, including those seemingly in accordance with catalogues, is warranted.

Obviously, it is not my aim to prove that children and young people should not be educated as regards information literacy connected with using the Internet. Neither it is my intention to show that catalogues are impossible to construct: on the contrary, in educating young people, competences should be ordered. However, appraising catalogues at a distance and determining whether they contain theoretical concepts that do not fully reflect the social reality is crucial.

In creating catalogues, proponents of the generic approach must distinguish competent negative uses—that is, competent uses of the net that are not beneficial for the development of children or young people. Competent negative uses, shown from the perspective of a particular catalogue, must be delineated. Identifying such uses through field research is essential in the present, that is in times characterized by the increasing flexibility and personalization of Internet and computer usage.

Distinguishing competent negative uses can shed light on how young people may use acquired knowledge in ways other than those imagined by researchers and educators. Consistently



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instilling skills included in the catalogues is not enough: at both the planning and implementation stages in the educational process, attention must be paid to sensitizing young people to the “bad” use of such skills. This sensitizing is necessary to avoid negative consequences.

Researchers who write on the ways of shaping young people may enclose themselves in a bubble of self-satisfaction and confirm their own convictions that the application of the proposed solutions always leads to good effects, that is, to the positive development of children and young people. Unfortunately, when their theoretical assumptions are translated into real life, positive development does not necessarily result. Catalogues created according to the generic approach to guide the education of young people may in fact blind researchers and educators to competent negative uses. To eliminate such negative uses, they must be taken into account at the stage of theoretical formulations.

By their example, pro-ana blogs show that skills indicated as necessary by catalogues may be wrongly used by young people, leading to tragic consequences. The planning and implementation of the educational process cannot be separate from the everyday life of young people: the various shades of their culture, problems, and social practices must be learned and taken into account. This must be born in mind in constructing catalogues of information competences connected with Internet use.

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