

Interview with Dr. Elizabeth LaRue, Information Usage Specialist

With the usage of information from the Web as a necessity in education, educators need a tool for their students to utilize for guidance in making informed judgments as to the validity and motives of the content in a web page. Dr. Elizabeth LaRue, Academic Coordinator of Nursing Informatics in the School of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh has come up with such a tool: SPAT.

SPAT stands for (S)ite, (P)ublisher, (A)udience, (T)imeliness, and the fast application and ease of manipulation of this tool enables students (and any user of the Web), to become better equipped for selecting and using information from the Internet. Dr. LaRue was kind enough to give us some details about the genesis of this new and useful concept.

BB: How did you initially conceive of your research idea?

Dr. LaRue: I was teaching nurses concepts in the discipline Evidence Based Practice and noticed that there was no easy to use tool for validating the accuracy of the health information they were finding. There were and are methods for validating websites but all of them are too laborious. Knowing this, I began looking at the key elements of the existing methods for determining validity of web pages, and derived from them SPAT, an easy to remember acronym to evaluate content.

BB: I heard that you are going to Dublin, Ireland to present your findings at a conference. Tell us a little about this.

Dr. LaRue: I will be speaking at Trinity College at the 7th Annual Interdisciplinary Research Conference "Transforming Healthcare through Research, Education and Technology." I will be presenting an active

learning educational tool that I created along with a couple colleagues. The tool is called, 'Accessing and Assessing the Evidence.' Its primary purpose is to give the user opportunities in structuring a question correctly so it can be answered. A component of the tool provides a librarian's search strategies explaining the methodology used to find relevant literature to answer an 'experts' question. I expect the audience to be researchers, educators, and probably practicing nurses. The delegates selected for presenting papers and posters come from the US, UK, IR, and other EU countries.

BB: Who was your favorite author and what was your favorite book as a child?

Dr. LaRue: I wasn't a very good reader when I was young so this is a difficult question. I loved the 'Amelia Bedelia' series while in elementary school. As an adult I can say my favorite children's book is currently Dog Breath by Dav Pilkey.

BB: How many librarians are there in your immediate family and do you think your family (from a medical librarian's perspective) is genetically predisposed?

Dr. LaRue: Ah, funny. You must have some inside information. My Mother is a librarian, but hasn't practiced in quite a while. She was a kindergarten teacher and told me the other day that she ran the column on 'children's lit.' on Jeopardy. I can't remember book titles or authors so working as a public librarian or school librarian wasn't going to be my forte.

My sister Catherine Black, is a library media specialist for the Lamont School District in California. When I ask her what she is reading for fun

her response is usually a Newbery Award winner book.

I'm a medical librarian transforming into an Informatician. Genetically, yes, I think there is a trait. The trait may not be specifically for 'librarianship' but I think it is present for 'educator.' While the LaRue girls have held various forms of librarian positions, in the end we are all teachers – as are all librarians.

BB: What are future plans for development and utilization of your SPAT tool?

Dr. LaRue: Future plans include obtaining a grant to introduce the tool to the general population for consumer health information. I also intend to collaborate on a book about SPAT with my sister Catherine.

An Example of how to use
SPAT in the Classroom