Promoting Transformative Encounters in Libraries and Archives

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# Promoting Transformative Encounters in Libraries and Archives

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PROMOTING TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTERS IN LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

ABSTRACT

Purpose: In several existing studies of Information Encountering (IE), a recurring sub-phenomenon of serendipity arises that indicates the potential for certain unexpected encounters with information to be transformative. I will label this sub-phenomenon Transformative Information Encountering (TIE), deriving its definition from an application of Transformative Education theory to existing understandings of IE. I will discuss the potential for librarians and archivists to promote TIE through everyday practices.

Design/methodology/approach: After defining and identifying TIE in existing studies of IE, this article will put models of IE in conversation with theories of Transformative Education and propose ways in which TIE may arise in the everyday work of librarians and archivists.

Findings: In Transformative Education theory, there are three phases of the process of critical premise reflection that may be especially relevant to the work of libraries and archives. These are A disorienting dilemma (phase 1); recognition that the process of transformation is shared (phase 4); and acquiring knowledge and skills (phase 7). Each of these align with aspects of IE models.

Originality: While several IE studies have suggested the existence of TIE as a sub phenomenon, none thus far have attempted to define it or apply an understanding of it to LIS work.

Practical implications: Understanding how TIE might inform everyday LIS work may increase the positive impact cultural institutions have on the communities they serve.

Keywords: Information encountering, serendipity, education, transformative theory
INTRODUCTION

When I first read about Sanda Erdelez’s model of Information Encountering (IE) while in library school, it felt like the beginning of an answer to a question I had long been contemplating. Throughout my life I have happened upon sources of information I was not actively seeking but that have had a profound impact on the way I see myself and the world at large. I had recently begun to wonder about other’s experiences with similarly unsought information. I soon discovered that IE models speak more to the mechanisms of the encountering than they do to the impact of those encounters. In response, I began actively seeking the work of psychologists, neuroscientists, and educators who study how the human mind becomes open to learning something new. Jon Wergin is one such educator. His discussion of Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Education (TE) theory in his book *Deep Learning in a Disorienting World* (2020) included a list of Mezirow’s Phases of Critical Premise Reflection. I immediately recognized parallels between Mezirow’s phases and models of IE, and began to explore how IE and TE might inform one another.

Studies of serendipity in Library and Information Science (LIS) settings have resulted in a growing body of models informing the work of librarians, archivists, and others who work with information resources. These models and the studies in which they are rooted are well-summarized in several existing articles, most recently in Sanda Erdelez and Stephann Makri’s “Information Encountering Re-Encountered” (2020). In this article, Erdelez and Makri also propose an updated definition of the term Information Encountering (IE) to encompass the multitude of forms serendipity can take in the context of information acquisition:

“... finding interesting, useful or potentially useful information when looking for different ... information, not looking for any information in particular or not looking for
information at all . . . [T]he information that is encountered can be physical or digital, in various forms (e.g. textual, visual) and, in addition to traditional media, can also include objects and places” (2020, p. 736).

Erdelez and Makri acknowledge the evolution of research related to Information Encountering over the past twenty years and propose this unifying definition as a way to bring the full universe of studies under a cohesive theoretical umbrella.

In several existing IE studies, a recurring sub-phenomenon of serendipity arises that indicates the potential for certain unexpected encounters with information to have transformative impacts on the encounterer. In this article, I will label this sub-phenomenon Transformative Information Encountering (TIE), deriving its definition from an application of Transformative Education theory to existing understandings of IE. I will discuss the potential for librarians and archivists to promote TIE through everyday practices.

TRANSFORMATIVE INFORMATION ENCOUNTERING

Transformative Information Encountering arises when an unexpected encounter with information is more than intriguing, even more than useful. TIE is encountering information that leads to a change of strongly held beliefs, values, or world views, whether in the moment or after a process of reflection and learning.

There are existing studies of IE that indicate the existence of TIE without terming it as such. In 2003, Allen Foster and Nigel Ford identified a range of responses a scholar may have to encountering unexpected information. They classified these responses into two types:

“(1) reinforcing or strengthening the researcher’s existing problem conception or solution; or
(2) taking the researcher in a new direction, in which the problem conception or solution is reconfigured in some way” (2003, p. 330).

When an unexpected encounter with information takes the encounterer in a new direction or prompts them to reconsider a problem, they may be experiencing a transformative encounter with information.

Similarly, in McCay-Peet and Toms’s 2015 study of work-related serendipity among professionals and academics, they assert that the outcome of serendipitous experiences can be valuable at three levels: “personal, organizational or community, and global” (2015, p. 1473). They note that these outcomes range “from minor to life-changing” (2015, p. 1470).

Transformative Information Encountering lies at the life-changing end of this spectrum. The value may originally manifest at the personal level, but then impacts relationships between the individual and society at large.

TIE may follow a natural progression similar to the systematic unfolding of IE occurrences as identified by Erdelez in her 2000 study of IE in online environments. Erdelez proposes that IE consists of functional elements: noticing, stopping, examining, storing, using, and returning (2000, p. 368). This systematic unfolding will inform an understanding of TIE, which seems to begin with a moment of encountering and continue through a process of transformation that may involve additional information encountering along the way. A trigger is usually at the heart of these actions, prompting the encounterer to notice and stop (Erdelez, 2004, p. 1017). However, the differences between IE in general and TIE in particular will be partially rooted in the particular qualities of certain triggers that prompt transformative experiences.

Erdelez’s 2004 study of researchers’ experiences with IE presents the idea that its occurrence “is facilitated by parallel presence of various situations in people’s everyday lives
that can be defined very broadly as ‘problems’” (2004, p. 1015). While some parallel problems may be mundane, (e.g. finding the best brand of tomato sauce), others may be related to deeply held concerns about the world or a person’s identity. A transformative encounter with information occurs when a person encounters information that speaks to concerns rooted in deeply held values, beliefs, and world views.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION THEORY

The existence of transformative encounters with information indicate a connection between IE models and Transformative Education theory. First introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1978 as perspective transformation, Transformative Education theory (TE) proposes a systematic process by which an individual moves from learning something new to changing the way they see and operate in the world. Mezirow defines perspective transformation as follows:

“... the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. It is the learning process by which adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them” (1981, pp. 6–7).

The process includes not just becoming aware, but taking action in response. Mezirow outlines an eleven-phase process of critical premise reflection as follows:

“1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, sometimes turning to religion for support

3. A critical assessment of assumptions

4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

6. Planning a course of action

7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

8. Provisionally trying out new roles

9. Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships

10. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

11. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective” (1994, p. 224).

This process of “becoming critically aware” and taking action is not isolated to classrooms. In IE research, Erdelez identifies a “trigger” as the common starting place for an unexpected encounter with information (2004, p. 1017). This trigger may catch a person’s attention because it relates to any number of parallel problems present in the person’s conscious or subconscious mind (2004, p. 1015). Though not every trigger results in an encounterer “becoming critically aware”, when a trigger does prompt this critical awareness, the result can be transformative.

A transformative trigger aligns with the concept of a “disorienting dilemma,” which Mezirow situates as the first phase in the process of “critical premise reflection”: 
“Premise reflection can transform meaning perspectives, a less common and more
significant learning experience. Perspective transformation may be the result of a major
event in one’s life or the accumulative result of related transformations in meaning
schemes” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 224).

In order for perspective transformation to occur, a person must first experience a disorienting
dilemma. While discussing Mezirow, Jon Wergin describes a disorienting dilemma as a moment
when you “experience something that catches you off guard, off balance, something you can't
quite make sense of, something you can't easily make meaning of. And it is too disturbing to
ignore” (2020, p. 28). As reflected in IE models, when this occurs a person can have several
different responses to it.

IE researchers often describe serendipity as a joyful experience, however in the case of
disorienting dilemmas, the encounter can be less than comfortable at first. In discussing the work
of Dan Kahan on scientific literacy, psychologists Fernbach and Sloman acknowledge that “[t]o
discard a belief often means discarding a whole host of other beliefs, forsaking our communities,
going against those we trust and love, and in short, challenging our identities” (2017, p. 160).

Tingting Jiang, Fang Liu, and Yu Chi’s study of IE online highlights the importance of
understanding not just how the encountering occurs, but also what an individual does with
encountered information (2015, p. 1148). They propose a model that, when read with TIE in
mind, implies that consideration of “Mid-activities”—noticing, examining, and acquiring
information—as well as the encounterer’s intentionality, curiosity, emotions, and attitudes (2015,
p. 1147), are critical to whether an encounter with information will lead to perspective
transformation. An encounter with a disorienting dilemma is not in and of itself enough to
catalyze a transformation.
The emotional repercussions of a disorienting dilemma, or transformative trigger, relate to Heinström’s assertion of the psychological factors involved in IE (2006). Reporting on her research with three different populations of students, she ultimately concludes that a positive emotional state, in addition to certain personality traits and a high level of motivation, are highly correlative to experiencing what she terms Incidental Information Acquisition. Heinström claims that “. . . in emotionally stressed moods thought processes may be blocked against divergent thinking” (2006, p. 580), limiting the encounter’s ability to recognize the potential in unsought information. An environment conducive to TIE must account for these affective factors that will impact whether a person engages with or rejects a transformative encounter with information.

Wergin highlights the precarity of this moment following the initial disorientation:

“A disorienting dilemma should make us curious, but not so curious that we put ourselves in a place that feels isolated and unsafe. We want to make meaning of and interact with the dilemma, but only within socially sanctioned limits. We need to feel that changing our belief system will make us more competent in dealing with our environment, as long as doing so will not threaten our important social networks (and our cherished self-images)” (2020, p. 35).

If a person feels threatened by the new information, they are likely to retreat. As Sloman and Fernbach put it, “The first step to correcting false beliefs is opening people’s minds to the idea that they and their community might have the science wrong. No one wants to be wrong” (2017, p. 170). Heinström identifies a correlation between a positive emotional state and receptivity to unexpected information (2006, p. 580), however Transformative Education theory suggests that it is possible to move from an uncomfortably disorienting IE through a process of perspective transformation, as long as the discomfort remains at a tolerable level.
Much of the work of an individual’s critical premise reflection may take place beyond the reach of libraries and archives, however it is worth examining the roles that information professionals can play in both prompting disorienting dilemmas and facilitating the phases leading to perspective transformation. In what follows, I propose ways in which libraries and archives might engage with this process, especially in the following phases:

Phase One: The disorienting dilemma

Phase Four: Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change

Phase Seven: Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

By incorporating an understanding of Transformative Education theory into our work with information resources, librarians and archivists may be able to increase the frequency with which our communities experience Transformative Information Encountering.
PROMOTING TRANSFORMATIVE INFORMATION ENCOUNTERING

Phase One: Disorienting Dilemmas

As the first phase of critical premise reflection, a disorienting dilemma prompts a series of subsequent phases, some of which may include information seeking activities. Given the nature of libraries and archives, librarians and archivists may more often encounter people seeking information as a result of a disorienting dilemma, rather than having the opportunity to initiate such a dilemma. However, disorienting dilemmas can arise even in the midst of other information seeking activities (Foster and Ford, 2003, p. 330). In order to promote Transformative Information Encountering (TIE), librarians and archivists can choose to design spaces, curate exhibits, and plan events informed by an understanding of the situations in which a disorienting dilemma is most likely to occur.

Diversity is a key component in prompting disorienting dilemmas. The word diversity is being used so often at the time of this writing that it can begin to take on more “buzz” than meaning in everyday consciousness. But the frequency with which diversity is discussed is due to its ongoing and critical importance to human activity and interaction. It is, therefore, worth revisiting the definition. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines diversity as follows:

1: the condition of having or being composed of differing elements : VARIETY especially : the inclusion of people of different races . . . cultures, etc. in a group or organization . . .

To expand on this definition in the context of libraries and archives, a diverse space or collection is one in which multiple identities, ideas, norms, etc. are represented.

The more diversity represented in a space or collection, the more likely it is that people interacting with the resources will experience a disorienting dilemma. Paraphrasing Terenzini (2014) on the qualities of “[e]xperiences that promote student learning,” Wergin asserts that these “[a]lmost uniformly involve encounters with difference, both with people different from themselves and with ideas different from those currently held. Because they challenge existing beliefs these encounters create cognitive dissonance” (2020, p. 32). IE research supports this claim. Jiang et al. found that the number of resources available to information seekers is related to the probability of having an encounter (2015, p. 1150).

This establishes yet another in a long list of important reasons for libraries and archives to engage in practices that promote multiple forms of diversity. When cultural institutions have diverse collections, with materials that represent a multiplicity of identities, experiences, ideas, norms, etc., and especially with materials that represent identities, experiences, ideas, norms, etc., that are rarely encountered in our users’ everyday lives, they create opportunities for the constructive cognitive dissonance that can instigate the process of learning and critical premise reflection. When cultural institutions prioritize exhibits and events that center marginalized communities’ voices, ideas, histories, and experiences, they are creating the “encounters with difference” that promote deep learning. When spaces are welcoming and inclusive, it is more likely that people with different identities, experiences, ideas, and values will be able to interact with one another. Even if libraries and archives already engage in practices that promote diversity, engaging with TIE in mind may shift plans and priorities, or even how we assess the gaps in a collection or the success of an event.
For example, as University Archivist at [removed for blind review]San José State, I had become aware of several well-known stories that are often at the forefront of people’s minds when they think about university history. While preparing a digital exhibit that included a display of items related to the university’s response to World War II, several of these familiar stories presented themselves: The football players who were in Honolulu to play a game when Pearl Harbor was attacked, the numerous students who left their studies to enlist as soldiers, and the use of the men’s gymnasium as a processing center for Japanese Americans on their way to government incarceration camps. The documentation on these stories was numerous due to widespread and ongoing interest in them. It would have been easy to include only these in the exhibit and nothing more. Less well-documented were the names and stories of the individual students who found themselves in the [removed for blind review]San José State Japanese Club one semester and forced into incarceration camps the next, via the processing center on their own college campus no less. The final exhibit included both the well-known and lesser-known stories, but with an emphasis on the lesser-known stories. Doing so entailed taking the time to quantify how much of the exhibit was being dedicated to each story in the hopes of providing new perspectives and perhaps prompting some in our community to question what they thought they knew about university history.

It may not always be possible for librarians and archivists to know when an attempt to prompt a disorienting dilemma has been successful, but emphasizing the perspectives and needs of marginalized communities as well as multiple manifestations of diversity, may increase the frequency with which user communities find themselves in this first phase of transformation while interacting with these institutions and their resources.
Phase Four—Recognition That the Process of Transformation is Shared

Community and community spaces are critical to transformative experiences, providing a way for people to feel connected with others who are investigating similar questions. In *The Knowledge Illusion*, Sloman and Fernbach discuss the importance of community to our sense of what we think we know (Sloman and Fernbach, 2017, p. 12). Evolutionarily, humans have relied on one another for survival. A single human does not need to be an expert on hunting and gardening and raising children and building boats and treating illness as long as they are part of a community of humans who among them share all of this knowledge. This has led our brains to perceive safety in having shared knowledge and beliefs with a community. As a result, our brains also perceive information that challenges a shared belief as a threat, because it may separate us from our community (2017, pp. 112, 160). As reflected in Mezirow’s phase four, being in community with others within the process of a transformation can mitigate the sense of vulnerability, guilt, and shame experienced, and inform the critical reflection that follows a disorienting dilemma.

IE researchers also recognize the role community plays in the discovery of information. Pálsdóttir, in her 2011 study of opportunistic discovery of information among elderly people living in Iceland, found that organizations such as associations and sewing clubs became crucial information grounds. Study participants shared that a sense of solidarity and an understanding of one another’s needs inspired them to disseminate encountered information to others (Pálsdóttir, 2011).

Constructing literal and metaphorical spaces for dialogue and connection—whether a tangible meeting room or event, or a less tangible silence that can be filled by new voices or a reputation for being a safe and affirming environment—may increase the probability that users will find the community they need to be able to continue along a transformative path. These
necessary connections may include the ability to make internal connections while exploring an
idea—i.e. an understanding of how the idea connects to the individual—as well as external
connections allowing the individual to discover that they are not the only one asking questions.
McCay-Peet and Toms discuss the “social aspect of serendipity” and “the notion that serendipity
springs from interaction with other people or relationships” (McCay-Peet and Toms, 2015, p. 1468). Though this discussion centers around triggers, which align more closely with Phase One
of critical premise reflection, their findings amplify the important role of community in how
people discover and respond to unexpected information. Many libraries and archives already
provide spaces for communities to connect. We host events to bring communities into our
buildings. Communities reserve our spaces for meetings. In some reading rooms, there is no
demand for silence and discussion among researchers and staff flows freely. As with disorienting
dilemmas, perhaps looking at this work through the lens of TIE will shift how we plan and
prioritize.

In February 2020, the California Historical Society held an intimate gathering titled
Hidden Histories of African Americans in the Bay Area (“Black History Month,” 2020). Curator
Susan Anderson had worked with reference archivist Frances Kaplan to identify documents and
photographs throughout the collection that provided a picture of the influence of Black
Americans in the earliest days of California history. These were items discovered scattered
throughout various collections that told a commonly overlooked aspect of history. The items
were laid out across two tables, and attendees were invited to move with the curator as she talked
about each item and the story it told. This format meant attendees were in close proximity to one
another and to the curator throughout the evening. This proximity promoted a more natural
dialogue than may have occurred in a traditional presentation with a speaker on a stage and a
question and answer period following the talk. Attendees asked questions of the curator, but also of one another. They called each other’s attention to details they noticed in the materials. As a participant in this event, I experienced a sense of community around shared enthusiasm for and interest in the history of Black Californians. Similar events have taken place at the San Francisco Public Library, which they call “Hands On History” (“Presentation: Hands on History | San Francisco Public Library,” n.d.). This approach brings people with a shared curiosity together with one another and with the collections. It is an opportunity to make connections internally as a person explores an idea, as well as externally as a person discovers they are not the only one with a particular question. In the midst of the phases of critical premise reflection, an event such as this may allow a person to discover others who are negotiating a similar transformation in their knowledge and beliefs. This sense of camaraderie or even solidarity can mitigate feelings of fear or discomfort, and facilitate continued transformation.

Phase Seven—Acquiring Knowledge and Skills

It is possible that the majority of people who enter a cultural institution are neither primed for a disorienting dilemma, nor hoping to connect with community, but are rather seeking new knowledge and skills, engaging in the activities LIS researchers are usually addressing when they discuss information seeking behavior. This information seeking can be rooted in everyday questions or profound needs, and depending on the need, finding the sought for information can have a range of impacts on the seeker. Librarians and archivists often interact with information seekers in some type of reference exchange, whether this occurs at a reference desk, over email, through a live chat, or on a video conferencing platform. Critical to the reference interview is asking the right questions to understand what is at the heart of a person’s information need.
As a liaison librarian and archivist in an academic library, the majority of the reference questions I receive from students involve their course assignments. They need ten scholarly sources on U.S. immigration policy in the 1990s, or a primary source on the history of women’s sports programs, not necessarily to answer a question that is close to their hearts, but to satisfy the professor’s requirements for their assignment. Despite best efforts to teach students database search strategies rather than simply delivering the articles they require, these types of reference interactions tend to be largely transactional. These are legitimate information needs, but they produce a particular type of interaction compared to a reference interaction with someone in the midst of critical premise reflection.

Brook, et al, in the article “In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library,” discuss the idea that the dialogue that takes place in the context of a reference interaction has the potential to be liberatory. This potential is enhanced with the recognition that the individuals on both sides of the desk (whether physical or virtual) have knowledge to share. They advocate for training “…reference staff to employ problem-posing methods of critical pedagogy in reference interactions in order to draw out patrons’ struggles against oppression and to help build strong and lasting solidarities with patrons” (Brook et al., 2015, p. 276). This could be the foundation for a transformative reference interaction: a reference interaction that fulfills the needs of the knowledge and skill seeking phase of critical premise reflection, and makes it possible to take the next steps.

A person who finds themselves in the knowledge seeking phase of critical premise reflection may have already had an encounter that has created cognitive dissonance, spent time in self-reflection, and survived feelings of guilt or shame. They may have reconsidered the assumptions on which their old beliefs were based, and sought community with others who have
similar questions. They may have explored new ideas and created a plan of action, so that by the
time they are sitting on the other side of the reference desk they are likely to have a lot to say
about the topic they are researching. There is an opportunity for the librarian or archivist to learn
through careful listening and thoughtful questions, not just what the person’s information need
is, but how to be an ally (or a co-conspirator) in that moment, becoming invested, even in the
short term, in this next step of the person’s journey towards transformation. This reframing of the
reference interaction may change the dynamic of the entire exchange, and those on both sides of
the desk may walk away not quite the same people they were when the exchange began. As
Brook, et al, put it, “In a reciprocal, dialogic process, librarians and patrons would share and be
affected by each other’s knowledge, care, and actions” (Brook et al., 2015, p. 275).

A student who had been born in a country in Africa began to question the stories she had
been taught about the impact (or lack thereof) of the Transatlantic Slave Trade on the history of
her country. Finding herself in a program at the university to support students in pursuing
graduate level research, she turned her curiosity into a research project, reaching out to me, as
the liaison librarian, for assistance in finding resources. The energy and enthusiasm that this
student brought to the research consultation resulted in an entirely different interaction than the
typical student looking for sources for a class paper. More than a question of research expertise
or experience, the difference was the student’s sense of urgency in working not to meet a list of
requirements, but to discover the answer to questions that were close to her heart and impacted
the way she saw the world and her role in it.

Aspects of transactional and transformative reference interactions may look the same on
the surface. A student has a question or information need. The person on the other side of the
reference desk (or the web conferencing platform or chat program), asks questions to understand
what is at the heart of the information need, asks what resources the student has already found, and seeks to establish the context of the request, proceeding to guide the student in navigating relevant resources, using databases and research guides, and applying Boolean strategies and facets to narrow and expand searches. The mechanics of both types of interactions are quite similar. However, the underlying dynamics and the intentionality of how each actor engages in this conversation may shift if the information professional approaches it with an understanding of the potential for Transformative Information Encountering.

CONCLUSION

Understanding when the qualities of information itself, as well as the context within which it is accessed, promote transformation, will enhance the impact cultural institutions such as libraries and archives can have on individuals and communities. Within this is an opportunity for libraries and archives to become or continue to be generative spaces where new ideas take root and grow beyond their walls. That is not to say that everything libraries and archives do can or should promote transformations, nor that transformations will not occur without intentional design.

The idea of Transformative Information Encountering hovers perilously close to the realm of vocational awe. As Ettarh cautions:

“Because the sacred duties of freedom, information, and service are so momentous, the library worker is easily paralyzed. In the face of grand missions of literacy and freedom, advocating for your full lunch break feels petty. And tasked with the responsibility of sustaining democracy and intellectual freedom, taking a mental health day feels shameful. Awe is easily weaponized against the worker, allowing anyone to deploy a
vocational purity test in which the worker can be accused of not being devout or passionate enough to serve without complaint” (Ettarh, 2018).

Promoting Transformative Information Encountering will look different in different contexts, and may not be the right choice for every institution or professional. I offer TIE as another way for librarians and archivists to understand the potential impact of the everyday work we do, and choose to, as Meredith Farkas recently said in an interview, do “the most meaningful work rather than focusing on doing the most work” (Thomas and Farkas, 2021).

It is worth investigating whether intentional design can provide more opportunities for Transformative Information Encountering in libraries and archives. McCay-Peet and Toms, in discussing Björneborn, highlight “serendipity dimensions of the physical environment of the library” which appear related to the phases of critical premise reflection, including: “diversity, pointers, imperfections, cross contacts, and explorability” (McCay-Peet and Toms, 2015, p. 1466). They also identify “[f]actors that may facilitate the process of serendipity,” including creating a trigger-rich environment and enabling connections (2015, p. 1471). De Rond likewise promotes the importance of being in an environment where dissent and risk-taking are encouraged, and heterogeneity is avoided, if serendipity is to occur (de Rond, 2014). If it is possible to facilitate more Information Encountering through design, it may be possible to work towards an environment in which more of those encounters have the potential to be transformative. Studying personal accounts of well-known as well as everyday people who have experienced such perspective transformations, with the intention of understanding the role IE played in their development of new world views, may enable the development of models that could then be put to the test in libraries and archives.
It is possible that TIE is too elusive to fully understand and codify. If understanding the factors that make TIE possible relies solely on deriving evidence from people’s personal experiences, any models that result will be unreliable. Studies in neuroscience have revealed that people are consistently untrustworthy when it comes to reporting on why they say, think, or act in a particular way (Mlodinow, 2012, pp. 176–218). Human memory is also unreliable (2012, pp. 52–78), while at the same time, identifying an experience as serendipitous is often only possible in hindsight (McCay-Peet and Toms, 2015, p. 1464 discussing Makri & Blandford). Therefore, interviewing individuals about their transformative encounters with information may provide limited insight, however it is a place to start, and grounded in a long tradition of IE research.

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