

Information Literacy: Still in the wings or taking centre stage?

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Introduction

This year, more than any previous year, has seen the publication of various reports on in the UK which highlight the effects of the digital age on lifelong learning. Reports such as the 'Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future'¹ (The CIBER report) commissioned by the British Library and The JISC and the CURL/RIN report, 'Researchers' Use of Academic Libraries and their Services'², highlight the importance in today's digital society of Information Literacy (IL) and the requirement for librarians' specialist knowledge.

Information and communications technology (ICT) is no longer the province of work; it is now a major part of our social lives and a key communication tool. The UK government has 'committed itself to "e-enabling" every single possible government transaction'³ which has huge ramifications for society. Digital citizenship requires that people are information literate, without these skills people will be unable to make informed decisions and may become excluded from society. As IL is essential to digital citizenship and lifelong learning we also need librarians who can teach or facilitate the teaching of IL.

This paper will give an overview of Information literacy in the UK and some of the initiatives which are taking place in Higher Education and public libraries to help ensure librarians, students, researchers and the general public have the appropriate skills required in today's global knowledge society and at some of the opportunities that have arisen to help move the IL agenda forward.

The CILIP CSG Information Literacy Group

In 2003 the CILIP Community Services Information Literacy group was formed: (<http://www.cilip.org.uk/specialinterestgroups/bysubject/informationliteracy>). The groups aim is: 'to provide a forum across all sectors of the profession, which encourages debate and allows the exchange of knowledge in all aspects of IL. The group has its own JISC mailing list

¹ *Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future*. [Online] Available from http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/reppres/gg_final_keynote_11012008.pdf [Accessed 19th January, 2008].

² *Researchers' Use of Academic Libraries and their Services A report commissioned by the Research Information Network and the Consortium of Research Libraries*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.rin.ac.uk/files/libraries-report-2007.pdf>. [Accessed on 9th April 2008].

³ Cross, Michael. 'The tangled web of government'. *The Guardian*. [Online], Thursday November 2 2006. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2006/nov/02/epublic.guardianweeklytechnologysection> [Accessed 19th January, 2008].

with over a thousand members and has developed the IL Website which is hosted by Eduserv, to provide resources for practitioners: (<http://www.informationliteracy.org.uk>).

The group is keen to raise the profile of IL and to this end they have, with various group colleagues, been involved in developing the definition of IL on behalf of CILIP. IL has been defined as:

“Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner.”⁴

The group has also met with and presented to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) who have responsibility for England’s school curriculum and to the Museum Libraries and Archives Council who develop policy for Public Libraries in Britain. In 2006 they created the open source peer reviewed online Journal of Information Literacy.

<http://www.informationliteracy.org.uk/JIL.aspx>

Digital Citizenship in the UK

The Prague declaration in 2005 stated:

‘Information Literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning ...

Life long learning enables individuals, communities and nations to attain their goals and to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the evolving global environment for shared benefit. It assists them and their institutions to meet technological, economic and social challenges, to redress disadvantage and to advance the well being of all.’⁵

Digital citizenship is an area that is high on the IL group’s agenda but despite presenting to the MLA on the issues surrounding Digital Citizenship the council appears to be reluctant to address these issues. The new report ‘Framework for the Future: MLA Action Plan for Public Libraries – “towards 2013”’⁶ makes no mention of Information Literacy. This is disappointing as public libraries have a key role to play in the development of digital citizenship.

In 2006 an online programme was developed to develop the IL skills of public library enquiry desk staff and to provide them with the tools to transpire these skills into the work place. The POP-i project was a unique collaboration between Bradford Metropolitan Council and Imperial College London. The aim of the project was to develop an online learning programme that

⁴ Armstrong, C., Boden, D., Town, S., Woolley, M., Webber, S. & Abell, A. CILIP defines Information Literacy for the UK.[Online] *UPDATE*. Available from: http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00006087/01/Article_Update_25102004.pdf [Accessed 13th may 2008]

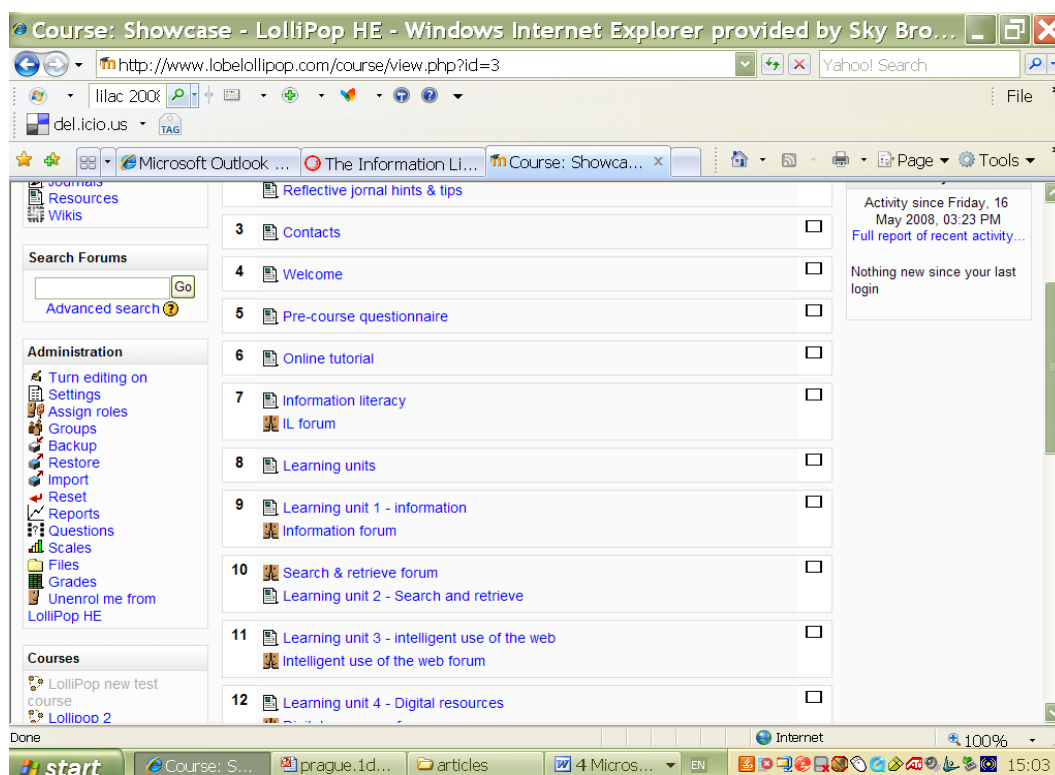
⁵ “TOWARDS AN INFORMATION LITERATE SOCIETY” [Online] Available from: <http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/post-infolitconf&meet/PragueDeclaration.pdf> [Accessed 13th May 2008]

⁶ MLA. *Framework for the Future: MLA Action Plan for Public Libraries – “towards 2013”*. May 2008 [Online] Available from: http://www.mla.gov.uk/news/press_releases/Five_year_plan_to_make_every Accessed 13th may 2008]

would raise awareness and increase the knowledge and skills of a group of public library staff in the principles and practical applications of information literacy. A successful pilot took place between August and December in 2006 with staff from Bradford public libraries. In 2007 the project was developed further and adapted for HE enquiry desk staff, renamed LolliPop and is being piloted in a joint initiative with the Universities of Loughborough and Bedfordshire.

Recognising the urgent need for staff development within public libraries and the lack of interest from the MLA, LolliPop is now being supported and developed further with support from the IL group, the Universities of Worcester, Bedfordshire & Loughborough and Bradford College. The programme is being rerun at Bradford and the files have been taken to be adapted for Newcastle public libraries.

Screen grab of LolliPOP



Information Literacy Initiatives in the UK – Higher Education

A recent article in the Guardian about the CIBER report and the author Wendy Wallace states “there is a clear message that young people have not been taught to construct a proper search and evaluate the results. Libraries are spending a fortune on premium content, but fundamental skills are lacking”. Wallace goes on to suggest that the report is a ‘wake up call’ for librarians.⁷ Wallace unfortunately has not done her homework and the CIBER is far from a

⁷ Wallace, W. Information alert. *The Guardian*. [Online] Available from: <http://education.guardian.co.uk/librariesunleashed/story/0,,2274796,00.html> [Accessed on: 13th may 2008]

wake up call for librarians as IL is an area which has been high on the agenda of librarians in HE for many years.

As Boden & Stubbings point out:

'a considerable amount of resources in the UK HE sector is put towards enhancing students IL skills. Librarians now deliver IL teaching to students and academic staff both on a one-to-one basis, at the enquiry desk, in an academics office and in the classroom. Classes can be small or large ranging from ten students in a lab or lectures of 350 students. Librarians are also taking an active role in developing online learning materials that can be used as stand alone resource or within a blended learning environment. In the HE sector, teaching has become a core part of a librarian's role.'⁸

There are many and varied IL initiatives within England, too many for this paper, therefore only a few key ones can be mentioned. A useful resource is the IL website mentioned earlier in this paper. The IL website is cross sectional and provides resources, links and key information for anyone interested in IL. The website can be accessed at: <http://www.informationliteracy.org.uk>. Sheila Webbers blog also gives a useful overview of what is happening in the world of IL and links to other useful blogs: <http://information-literacy.blogspot.com/>

Imperial College London (www.imperial.ac.uk/library) has an impressive history in IL development in particular with its development of its IL online programme OLIVIA⁹. The aim of the course was to create an independent learner with the confidence and ability to retrieve, evaluate, exploit and manage information with an understanding of the legal, economic and social issues that surround its use. The course was based on a set of competencies which incorporated key skills 3 & 4 methodology and salient themes from various IL models such as Sconul 7 Pillars, The Council of Australian University Libraries (CAUL) and the American Library Association (ALA) IL frameworks.¹⁰ The programme has 9 learning units which include areas such as Information, search and retrieve, plagiarism, referencing etc. Imperial have recognised the importance of sharing resources and therefore freely give the files to any institution for them to adapt.

⁸ Boden, D. & Stubbings, R. *Do librarians learn online?* Paper for the IFLA Conference. Ontario. August 2008.

⁹ Boden, D. & Holloway, S. Learning about plagiarism through information literacy: A fusion of subject and information management teaching at Imperial College London. JISC Plagiarism: Prevention, Practice and Policies 2004 Conference.

¹⁰ *Information Literacy Standards*. 2001 Canberra: Council of Australian University Libraries [Online]

Available from: <http://www.caul.edu.au/caul-doc/InfoLitStandards2001.doc> [Accessed: 13/06/03]

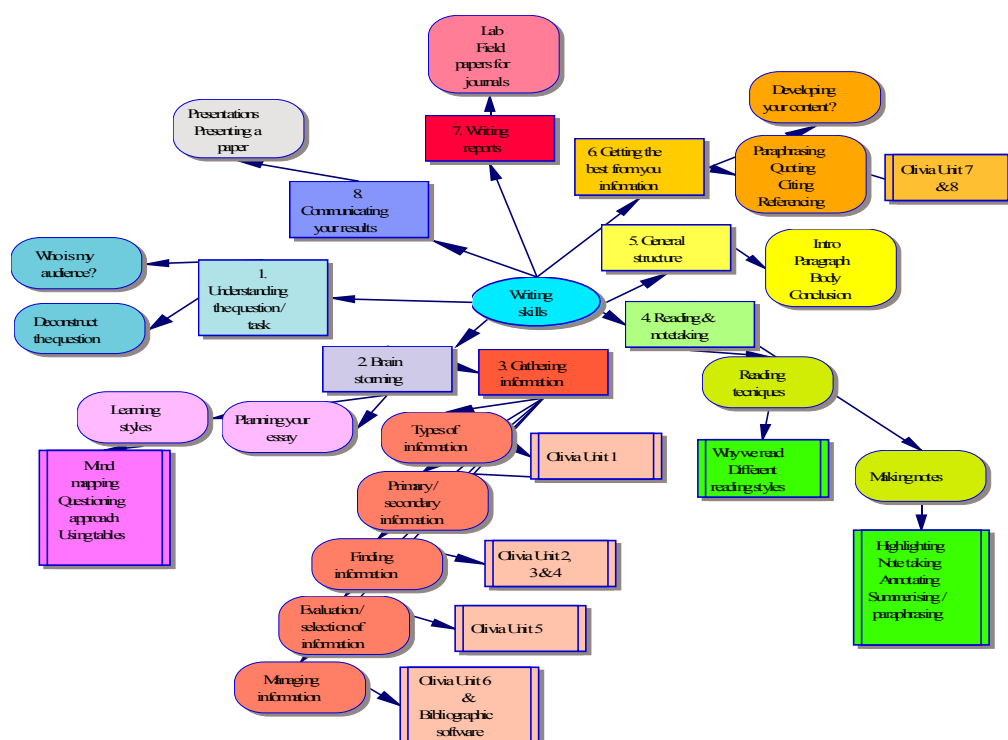
American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. Final Report. 1989. Quoted in *A Progress Report on Information Literacy: an update on the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report*. March 1998 [Online] Available from: www.ala.org/acr/nili/nili.html [Accessed 13/06/03]

Information Skills in Higher Education: A SCONUL Position Paper. Sconul 2003 [Online] Available from:

http://www.sconul.ac.uk/activities/inf_lit/papers/Seven_pillars.html [Accessed: 13/06/03]

Librarians within HE are also recognising that students require a skills package that not only covers IL but also writing skills. Aware of this the Universities of Worcester, Loughborough and Imperial College London have come together to create a combined writing skills and IL package. (see Table 1) The programme will reuse resources from each of the universities (OLIVIA for example) and create new content as required. The programme is called SMILE and is funded by the JISC. SMILE will be open source and will eventually be deposited into the repository JORUM. Further details on the project can be found at: <http://www.lilaconference.com/sirlearnlot/> username: student password: student.

Table 1 – Mind map of SMILE content



Information Literacy Initiatives in the UK – Staff development

One of the key roles of a ‘front of house’ librarian within HE is teaching and this has required a culture change for both senior management and practitioners. Support of management is essential to ensure the development of Information literacy teaching programmes and for funding and time to ensure that staff develop the skills required for their role as teachers.¹¹ Those who are entering the world of HE librarianship need to recognise that if they do not want to teach, they may want to consider if they have chosen the most appropriate profession. Those who have recently qualified and enter HE lack the required pedagogic or

¹¹ Secker, J., Boden, D. & Price, G. *The information literacy cookbook*. (2007) London, Chandos.

practical skills and are totally unprepared for the realities of teaching students.¹² Comments from a recent survey demonstrate this:

'My formal training at library school did not really reflect the need for pedagogic skill my job now demands. It would be really good to see more formal teaching of pedagogic skills and assessment in library school.'

'I really so think that teaching skills should be taught in LIS courses. It's possible that you'll get your first professional post and be expected to teach hundreds of students ... how on earth can you do that with no training?'¹³

Although formal IL teaching tends to be the province of the education sectors, teaching skills are today required on a more informal basis for all sectors and particularly in public libraries with the lifelong learning and digital citizenship agendas. Information literacy is now on a few library schools curriculum but pedagogy is not, therefore acquiring knowledge and developing teaching skills has to be gained elsewhere.

With support from the HEA and CILIP ILG a project was initiated to create an online programme, which would help librarians develop their teaching skills and pedagogic knowledge. The programme is called SirLearnaLot and builds on the work of EduLib (Hunter 1997). EduLib was a JISC funded project under the eLib programme (Hunter 2006). It aimed to enhance librarians teaching skills and produced both a print guide and a series of workshops that were disseminated throughout HE institutions. SirLearnaLot will be available through the Creative Commons Licence and the CILIP ILG is investigating the possibility of running the course for librarians who work in small institutions. The ILG are also investigating the possibility of the module being accredited by the HEA.¹⁴

At the time of writing this paper SirLearnaLot has not been completed but the programme should be available at the end of 2008.

LILAC is the IL group's annual conference. The first conference was in 2005 in London organised with a committee from various HE institutions. The conference has gone from strength to strength and in 2008 had over 240 delegates demonstrating the interest in IL and also the new developments that are constantly taking place in this area. The conference runs for three days and has delegates from Singapore, USA, Canada, Malaysia, Finland, Norway, South Africa and many other countries. Speakers have included, Diana Laurillard, Lynne Brindley, Christine Bruce the Australian IL guru, Ross Todd, Tara Brabazon and from the USA Patricia Breivieck..

¹² Powis, Chris. Developing the academic librarian as learning facilitator. P.85.

¹³ Swindlehurst, Sarah. *Librarians as Teachers: An investigation into support and training for librarians teaching information literacy in UK Higher Education*. Unpublished MA dissertation. School of Informatics, Northumbria University. (2006) p.37.

¹⁴ Boden, D. & Stubbings, R. *Do librarians learn online?* Paper for the IFLA Conference. Ontario. August 2008.

The conference has attracted sponsors from the first year but this has also grown over the last four years and in 2008 we raised a considerable amount in sponsorship. Many of our sponsors return each year and their sponsorship allows the IL group to fund training and sponsored places at LILAC including a LIS student and this year the President of the Serbian Library Association.


Screen grab of SirLearnaLot


Topic outline

SirLearnaLot


Welcome to SirLearnaLot. This tutorial aims to encourage development and exchange of good practice in:


- design of teaching
- creation of an effective learning environment
- evaluation of teaching methods
- raising the profile of information literacy.


 Your learning journal




1 Unit 1: Understanding learning





 Understanding the nature of learning: content of unit


 Introduction


2 Unit 2: Teaching - planning a learning event

 The nature of teaching: Content of unit

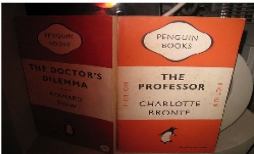
 Introduction

 Professional skills

 Planning a teaching session

 Teaching forum

Picture called "The Professor" by Kai Chan Yong on www.flickr.com



Conclusion

We are in an age where there is rapid growth of information which is available electronically, however, in this period of growth we have seen the creation of the information minefield. We now have the digital divide and for people to succeed in today's digital society they must be information literate. If we go back to the title of this paper, 'Information Literacy: Still in the wings or taking centre stage?' I would say that IL is definitely taking centre stage but some are slow to recognise this, it is therefore essential that librarians take advantage of every opportunity market themselves, their skills and the importance of IL. Librarians are needed today more than ever before.

'Information Literacy is more than a library or education issue. It is crucial to issues of economic development, health, citizenship and quality of life.'¹⁵

¹⁵ Douglas, J. *French Military victories*. Keynote presentation. LILAC 2006. Available from: <http://www.cilip.org.uk/specialinterestgroups/bysubject/informationliteracy/lilac/lilac2006> {Accessed 13th May 2008}