GUEST EDITORIAL

Information Literacy: A Subject for the 21st Century

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I write this Editorial just after the first truly international Information Literacy (IL) conference: although its title is "European" Conference on Information Literacy (http://www.arber.com.tr/ecil2013.org/index.php/home), speakers from 59 countries travelled to Istanbul to speak, listen and learn. Meanwhile in the United States of America, October is IL Awareness month (an annual initiative supported by President Barack Obama). At the same time, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has been working with UNESCO to develop international recommendations for Media and Information Literacy. And for ordinary citizens in many parts of the world, googling for information is just part of everyday life.

In other words, IL has moved firmly into the world arena. Bill Johnston and I (Johnston and Webber, 2006) have argued that IL is a, or one could say the, discipline for our information age. There are professional associations, networks of researchers, classes, doctoral theses and journals which have information literacy as their focus. In my view the lively debate about what information literacy means, and the differing schools of thought about IL, are further signs that IL is maturing as a substantial field of study.

The origins of information literacy are in the library tradition. The catalyst to further development was provided by the advent of the online information industry, with the term "information literates" coined by the then President of the Information Industry Association, Paul Zurkowski, in 1974. At the aforementioned European Conference on Information Literacy in October 2013, Zurkowski himself recalled the pioneer excitement of the early days of online. That excitement was shared by a relatively small band of providers and users, since early online services were expensive, slow and difficult to use. However, they enabled librarians to start on the path of teaching people to make effective use of online information and opened the way to the broader information sea of the internet.

It is my view that the basics of IL have not changed fundamentally, as Maryam Nazari and I discussed in Nazari and Webber (2012). Whether the solution to your information need is provided by your family, the radio, a book, a website, a journal article or a tweet, you still have to recognise that your situation requires an information solution, be able to identify the places from which you might get information, select appropriate information, and

apply the information effectively. Whether you are sharing information with a friend over coffee, or uploading a video to Youtube, you have to think about the ethics and human implications of sharing that information. The difference is that thoughtless sharing or publishing online can more quickly run out of your control, and reach a larger number of people.

The increase in the options for acquiring, remixing, creating and sharing information, in all formats, has increased the complexity of IL, and made it more challenging to help people become truly information literate. However, on the positive side, search engines and social media have made citizens more aware of information issues. I was part of the early online industry in the United Kingdom, marketing the British Library's online services in the early 1980s. I remember how difficult it was explaining to my friends what "online searching" was and when they did understand, most of them did not find it very interesting. Now, issues of information ownership, information use and information misuse have become headline news, politicians use phrases such as "information society", and I overhear people in buses or cafes talking about search engines.

What are the implications for librarians, educators and researchers? Firstly, there is the need to keep up with what is published and discussed. I will concentrate on English language material. Many journals, such as this one, are including articles on IL, and there are also specialist journals, notably the Journal of Information Literacy (JIL: http://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/JIL) and Communications in Information Literacy (CIL: http://www.comminfolit.org/). Although some important journals (such as Journal of Academic Librarianship) are priced, JIL, CIL and other relevant journals such as Information Research (http://InformationR.net/ir/) are open access. You can monitor blogs, for example my own Information Literacy Weblog (http://information-literacy.blogspot.com), and also discussion lists such as the British lis-infoliteracy (http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/lis-infoliteracy.html(and the North American ili-l (http://lists.ala.org/sympa/info/ili-l). There are some regular synchronous online discussions, for example the Information Literacy blog-post journal club (http://infolitjournalclub.blogspot.com/). I would also mention the substantial number of conference presentations on information literacy, either on conference websites (e.g. LOEX: http://www.emich.edu/public/loex/conferences.php) or on

sites such as Slideshare (http://slideshare.net) where I upload my own presentations.

Secondly, for those teaching information literacy, this is a good time to reflect on how one can be an information literate teacher, and how one can support ones students to become information literate citizens. It is particularly important that library and information science students and trainee teachers are taught about information literacy, and understand effective ways to teach it, since they in turn will need to help others develop information literacy.

Thirdly, there are rich possibilities for new research in information literacy, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. One of the key trends in information literacy research has been the focus on investigating information literacy in different contexts (Limberg, 2010; Lloyd, 2005; Webber and Johnston, 2013): different workplaces, different countries and cultures, different subjects and levels of education. Although the literature is still dominated by contributions from North America, Australia, the United Kingdom, and other parts of Europe, there are now exciting contributions from other countries (e.g. Baro and Keboh, 2012; Batool and Mahmood, 2012; Dokphrom, 2013). I look forward to more such studies appearing in this journal.

In conclusion, it is an exciting time to be concerned with information literacy. In his keynote talk at the European Conference on Information Literacy, Paul Zurkowski urged us to take up the pioneering spirit of the early days of the online industry, and to assert the value of value and importance of information literacy. As the Prague Declaration on information literacy (http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/PragueDeclaration.pdf) says: IL "is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and is part of the basic human right of lifelong learning."

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