A New Curriculum for Information Literacy

transitional▪ transferable ▪ transformational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ARCADIA

Front cover image: *'Tulip staircase at the Queens House, Greenwich' by* **mcginnly**
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We selected the image on the front cover to reflect several key themes and ideas that arose from our research. Most notable among these is the concept of learning as an iterative and spiral process which progresses by building upon previously achieved insights. The image also suggests aspiration, development and upwards movement.

Finally, the coincidental resemblance to an eye recalls the metaphor of vision often used as an analogy for the researcher's mission: "*If I have seen further, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants*" (Newton).

Acknowledgements

Introduction

This short project, based at Cambridge University Library and funded by the Arcadia Programme, sought to develop a practical curriculum for information literacy that meets the needs of the undergraduate student entering higher education over the next five years.

The research is grounded in relevant theoretical models and reviews of recent professional literature and existing best practices. In addition, the authors consulted with experts in the information literacy field, and also those working in curriculum design and educational technologies.

Project aims and objectives

This project sought to develop a practical curriculum for information literacy that meets the needs of the undergraduate student entering higher education over the next five years. Specifically the project aimed:

- To understand the information needs of future undergraduate students on entering higher education
- To develop a revolutionary curriculum for information literacy that can be used with undergraduate students entering UK higher education
- To provide practical guidance about how best to equip students with the knowledge, skills and behaviour around information use to support their learning in the digital age
- To develop a flexible curriculum that can be used and adapted in the higher education community and used in face to face, blended and online learning provision.

Background and context

Information literacy is widely recognised as a key part of lifelong independent learning. It is viewed by some as a set of skills, attributes and behaviour that underpin student learning in the digital age. Information literacy has been linked to graduate employability and increasingly UK universities are developing information literacy strategies to ensure students acquire and develop these competencies during their undergraduate studies. Information literacy programmes or sessions are often run by academic libraries; however, in order to be most effective, experts recognise that information literacy should be embedded within a subject curriculum and ideally taught in partnership with academic and academic support colleagues.

Shortly before the start of this project, SCONUL's Seven Pillars of Information Literacy model, widely accepted in higher education, was modified and re-issued (SCONUL, 2011). The model sets out the skills and attributes that an information literate person should have. Recent research suggests that the information-seeking behaviour and needs of students are changing (CIBER, 2008), largely driven by the changing experiences and expectations of 'the Google Generation' who have grown up with access to the internet being the norm. While the Google Generation and 'Digital Native' terms have been debated and widely criticised (Jones, et al, 2010), it is clear that information literacy programmes over the next five years will need to adapt and respond to the needs of current students.

Methodology

The project involved an extensive review of the literature, which forms the theoretical background to this project. In addition a modified Delphi study was undertaken which involved consulting widely with experts in the information and education communities. The curriculum was developed and presented to the expert group taking into account findings from the literature and from the expert consultation. It was subsequently refined and a final curriculum, with a number of supporting documents, was produced.

Definition and terminology

Information literacy has been defined as "knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner." (CILIP, 2004)

UNESCO's definition takes a broader view that goes beyond learning, stating that:

> Information literacy empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion in all nations.
> UNESCO (2005) Alexandria Proclamation

Our approach was to view information literacy in the broadest possible sense, which is more in line with UNESCO's than with CILIP's definition. We also recognized that information literacy has three key attributes, which are embodied in our curriculum, making it:

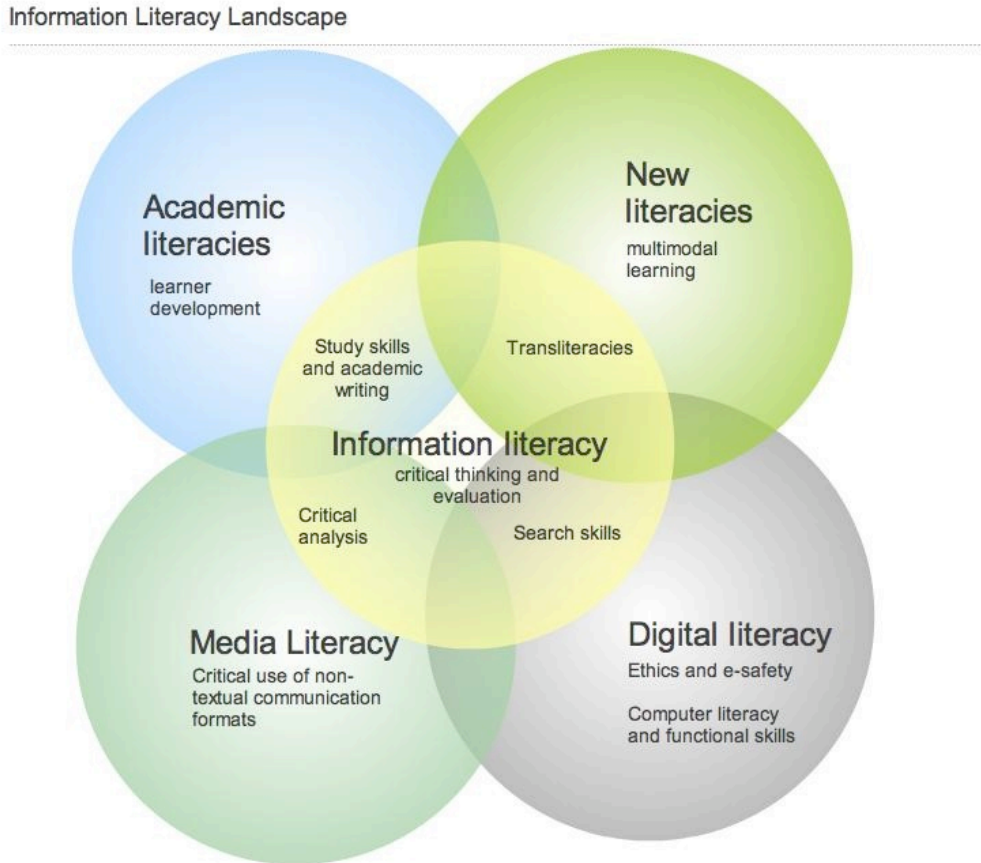- Transitional
- Transferable
- Transformational

Transition occurs in learners, who enter university from a wide variety of backgrounds, but often need to make the transition from school to higher education. They also have to make the transition from dependent to autonomous learning.

The curriculum content needs to be transferable, forming a part of education, not simply 'library training.' Information literacy fosters and develops appropriate behaviour, approaches, cognitive functions and skills surrounding the use of information. In essence information literacy equips students with the capacity to generate their own strategies for dealing with new information contexts, for example when they leave higher education and enter the workplace.

Finally, information literacy should be transformational for the learner, changing their attitude, behaviour, outlook and even their world-view. Therefore this curriculum has the potential to change lives and make a real difference to society.

It is clear from our research, that information literacy is a term that is much favoured in the library community. However, it overlaps with numerous other terms including academic literacies, new literacies, media literacy and digital literacy. At the heart of many of these other literacies is a desire to develop critical thinking, evaluation and high level cognitive skills in students. This is the essence of what information literacy seeks to achieve. Therefore, we hope that this study rehabilitates the term information literacy and can be a way of bringing those working in other related fields together. Figure 1 below illustrates what we have described as the information literacy landscape.

Figure 1: the information literacy landscape

Information Literacy Landscape

Project outputs

This project had three major outputs which should be consulted for more detail:
- Theoretical background
- Expert consultation report
- The curriculum and supporting documentation, comprising
  - Curriculum overview and implementation guidelines
  - Mapping to existing IL frameworks andstandards
  - Evidence toolkit for implementing the curriculum
  - Six tips for transforming your teaching
  - Good practice in information literacy

Summary conclusions

The key finding during this project is that the way in which information literacy is taught, structured and implemented is as important as the topics that are covered in any new curriculum. In addition, information literacy needs to be embedded into the academic curriculum as far as possible; it also needs to be ongoing throughout a student's academic career and adapted according to the specific requirements of the discipline. The curriculum needs to include opportunities for students to work collaboratively and to reflect on their learning. It should be based on real needs, ideally following an audit. Meaningful assessment forms an important part of this curriculum, while recognising that information literacy can be difficult to assess summatively. Therefore approaches such as peer assessment are key.

The curriculum will need to be taught by a range of different people within an institution including librarians, learning developers, IT and e-learning staff, but most importantly by academic staff. A programme of staff development is therefore required to equip staff within an institution with the understanding and skills they need to deliver the curriculum. In order to be most effective, the curriculum needs buy-in from senior management. Therefore it must be clear how information literacy relates to the strategic aims of the institution, such as graduate capabilities, employability, enhancing the student experience and improved achievement.

In terms of the content, the curriculum is divided into ten strands:
1. Transition from school to higher education
2. Becoming an independent learner
3. Developing academic literacies
4. Mapping and evaluating the information landscape
5. Resource discovery in your discipline
6. Managing information
7. Ethical dimension of information
8. Presenting and communicating knowledge
9. Synthesising information and creating new knowledge
10. Social dimension of information literacy

These strands are not discrete modules, but should be incorporated into the academic curriculum as appropriate to the needs of the discipline. They can also be combined in a variety of ways, and specific learning outcomes and activities are presented to guide those tasked with implementation. A variety of other resources, including examples of good practice, an evidence toolkit and a mapping of the new curriculum to existing models of information literacy, are presented to assist in implementation.

Recommendations for further work

Opportunities for further work in this area include:

1. A follow-on pilot study to implement the curriculum with several different academic departments in different types of institutions.

2. Further work on collating examples of good practice that illustrate the teaching activities and strands described in the New Curriculum of Information Literacy. This work should draw on the large numbers of existing good practice examples and highlight those that support our approach.

3. The creation of a web-based tool to enable practitioners to audit their existing practice against the curriculum and to identify any gaps in their current provision.

4. Further dissemination events, including a workshop to bring together those in the education and library field to discuss common issues, such as how best the curriculum could be implemented and how best to better embed information literacy into the school curriculum.

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