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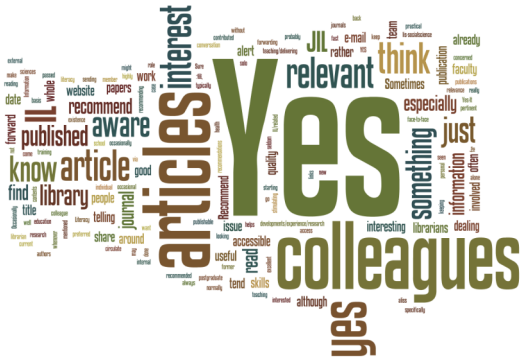
The Journal of Information Literacy: taking stock and looking ahead

Welcome to the second issue of JIL 2011 (Vol.5). Previous editorials were organised around clearly defined information literacy (IL) themes, but the collection of papers and reviews in this issue cover such an array of perspectives that cannot be conveyed through a homogenous theme. Instead, I have taken the opportunity to discuss the current collection in relation to the feedback generated by the JIL's readership survey, launched by the editorial board in October 2011. In the concluding part of this editorial, this issue's papers and reviews are presented in response to IL-related events I was involved with recently presented here as potential sources for future issues.

As the journal turns five this year it seems appropriate to take stock of its achievements by reflecting on what our readers think of the papers we publish, and assess the impact that these publications have made. The survey we used to elicit the views of our readers had the following objectives: establish the profile of the journal's readership; ascertain the level of satisfaction with the journal's different types of publications; assess the impact that the papers have made on its readership's view or practice of information literacy; and finally identify suggestions for improvements and further development of the journal. The full analysis of the survey's responses goes beyond the scope of this editorial and will be published in January 2012. Here, I would like to offer a preliminary examination of some of the points raised by the survey as they inspired the editorial's title.

Out of 125 responses, a significant majority gave a positive answer when asked whether they would be using JIL in the future. It is gratifying to see that among the reasons given for continuing to read JIL are the fact that the journal provides a "good balance between theory and practice" and functions as awareness-raising that enables its readership to "keep up to date with IL developments" because it is "current and relevant and based on case studies, not academic theories". But there is always room for improvement, and when asked for views on this, by far the respondents' most common suggestion was for JIL to focus on a broader interpretation of IL and on practice that is relevant to sectors beyond academia. Suggested alternative topics that the respondents would like JIL to explore include: employability; digital literacy and e-learning; as well as a wider worldwide coverage of the IL debate. The need to reach a wider IL community has always been at the heart of JIL's raison d'être and and is fully reflected by the journal's aim of investigating information literacy in all its forms.



19 of the survey: 'Will you continue to use JIL in the future?'

However, these comments show that more work needs to be done to fully implement such an aim. The current issue of the journal is already acting on these comments as the paper 'Information literacy in United Kingdom schools: evolution, current state and prospects' by Streatfield, Shaper, Markless and Rae-Scott focuses on IL practices operating within the school sector. In my view, this is a 'must read' paper, especially for those who are not familiar with IL initiatives by school libraries in the UK, as it provides a comprehensive overview of this debate, drawing from a detailed chronological account of the literature and from the authors' empirical research on school librarians' IL practices. The first review by Carbery on MacMillan and Kirker's *Kindergarten magic: theme-based lessons for building literacy and library skills*, continues on this theme by presenting innovative and pedagogically sound IL strategies for early years teaching.

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One respondent suggested that JIL should offer special publications to "spotlight a particular area, e.g. overlap between information behaviour research and IL". This is a timely comment, as the editorial board has been planning to publish special issues to do just that (watch out for announcements about these special issues on the LIS-INFOLIT list and the JIL website). Purely by coincidence, Carlin's review of *Interactive Information Seeking, Behaviour and Retrieval*, edited by Ruthven and Kelly, addresses this very topic by identifying specific approaches to information behaviour that would make useful additions to IL tutorials.

Mindful of the need to expand the remit of JIL, I am always attending events in the hope of recruiting authors who can offer a broader perspective of IL. Hall's paper 'A DREaM come true' is a case in point because, through its account of the project Developing Research Excellence and Methods (DREaM), it establishes the link between information literacy and research within the Library and Information Science (LIS) discipline. It does this by exploring shared issues of concern, such as the ethical implications of information use.

Two other events I attended recently are worth mentioning here as they offer a glimpse of topics that may appear in future issues of JIL. The first one is a meeting that took place at the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) headquarters between Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, from political think tank Demos and the authors of '*Truth, lies and the internet: a report into you people's digital fluency*' (2011)[1], and representatives of various groups with an invested interest in promoting digital fluency (e.g. the Reading Agency, the School Library Group and the Information Literacy Group to name a few). Issues of concern raised by this report include the fact that young people lack the critical skills to evaluate digital information appropriately, and the corresponding lack of teachers' confidence in teaching digital fluency (Bartlett and Miller, 2011, p. 32).

I find the report's definition of digital fluency "the ability to find and critically evaluate online information" (ibid.,p. 4) consonant with my experience of information literacy, especially as Bartlett and Miller argue that digital fluency consists of three main characteristics. I summarise the three characteristics here, discussing them where relevant in relation to papers or reviews from this issue. The first characteristic is net savvyness, or a basic knowledge of internet tools (e.g. knowing about coding, how search engines operate etc.). The second one, critical skills, is required to discern the quality of digital resources and minimise the problem of misinformation generated by 'online propaganda' (ibid., p.26). The paper by Weiner 'Is There a Difference Between Critical Thinking and Information Literacy?' is of relevance here because it makes a case for merging the two concepts of critical thinking and information literacy to develop the learning tools required to expand one's own knowledge-base, while critically engaging with subject specific content. It follows that this paper has implications for curricular development at any educational level, be it primary, secondary or tertiary, that could inform the strategy of embedding critical thinking in the curriculum advocated by Bartlett and Miller. The paper by McClure, Cooke and Carlin's 'Information Literacy and the Skunk Ape: Assessing the Impact of Online Library Learning Modules on Student Writing in English Composition Courses', also offers an innovative way of teaching learners how to deal with inaccurate web-based information. It does so by asking first year undergraduate students to research the credibility of this urban legend, something that they find difficult. In my view, this approach could be employed with the "digital natives (12-18 year olds)" examined by Bartlett and Miller (ibid., p. 5) to address similar challenges of knowing how to discern reliable from unreliable information. The third and final characteristic of digital fluency is the ability to acknowledge and respect the diversity of views, or the need to seek out information that does not reflect our perspective, a problem that is compounded by social networks which encourage us to socialise with communities sharing our view of the world. Eynon's review of *Information Literacy: infiltrating the agenda, challenging minds,* edited by Walton and Pope, is relevant here as it discusses some of this books chapters

[1] Available to download at: www.demos.co.uk/publications/truth-lies-and-the-internet

that deal with the cultural and ethical implications of information use, particularly in a social media environment.

At the meeting, Bartlett and Miller proposed that digital fluency should be at the heart of learning and fully embedded in the curriculum. Moreover, its crucial role in schools should be raised with relevant agencies such as the Department of Education and the National Curriculum Review Advisory Committee. In response to this point, some of the CILIP's representatives pointed out that the campaign 'Shout About School Libraries'[2], which aims to make school library services statutory, could be seen as an important step to promote digital fluency amongst teachers and pupils alike. Another issue discussed at the meeting was the need to create resources that foster the development of digital fluency, in a format that appeals to younger generations, such as games. The paper by Markey and Leeder on 'Students' Behaviour Playing an Online Information Literacy Game' presents an example of a game called BiblioBouts that encourages students to develop basic IL skills required to evaluate the accuracy and authority of sources. This could be used as a blueprint for similar games designed to foster the evaluative competences of younger learners.

Bartlett and Miller are already planning the next study which aims to audit existing resources that foster digital fluency not only in schools but in other educational situations as well, such as in public libraries. The book by Herring *Improving Students' Web Use and Information Literacy. A Guide for Teachers and Teacher Librarians,* reviewed by Ellis-Barrett, could be a useful starting point for this audit as it offers a range of digital resources designed to help school pupils become effective web users. The findings from the Demos report are of particular relevance to IL educators and promoters in the school settings, although they will be of interest to the JIL readership at large. Those survey respondents who have asked for a broader coverage will be pleased to know that Bartlett and Miller have agreed to publish a paper about their study in JIL next year.

Figure 2: The Crown Tavern in London where LIKE holds its meetings every last Thursday of the month.

The final event discussed in this editorial 'Information literacy: fit for the workplace?' was organised by the London Information and Knowledge Exchange group (or LIKE). In a previous publication, I discussed the importance of this group in relation to its Transliteracy practices (Andretta, 2009, p. 10), but this time LIKE turned its attention to information literacy and its relevance to the world of work. For those readers who are not familiar with this group, LIKE was created in February 2009 to provide an informal discussion forum for Library, Information, Knowledge and Communication professionals. Face-to-face monthly meetings are advertised through the LIKE network on LinkedIn and held in a cosy room above The Crown Tavern. This particular event consisted of a panel-led forum consisting of Caroline De Brun, Rachel Adams and Adjoa Boateng from the fields of health, legal and higher education information services respectively.

A brief summary of the discussion that took place at this meeting is given here because all three speakers have been invited to publish an account of their IL professional practice in future publications of JIL. In her talk, Adams argued that the term information literacy is not popular with

[2]This campaign is supported by: Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), the Association of Senior Children's and Educational Librarians (ASCEL) and the School Library Association. Details of this campaign can be found at http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/shout-about/Pages/default.aspx (Accessed 7 December 2011).

professionals in the legal sector. Instead she uses 'information skills' to market IL-based training activities, such as searching legal resources, and stresses that, to be effective in the legal context, IL training needs to be made relevant and timely (i.e. embedded in profession's CPD programmes), although the catchy slogan that advocates IL training because it "saves time, money and stress" also helps. In other words, how one sells IL training is crucial in ensuring success, even if it means calling it something other than information literacy. De Brun presented her take on IL training within the context of health care and evidence-based medical practice with the ultimate aim of enhancing the patients' experience. Like Adams before her, De Brun stressed that in the health sector, lack of time and access to expensive online resources make the ability to find accurate information quickly crucial, particularly if a patient's life is at risk. IL provision in such a pressured environment is primarily through outreach practice, i.e. delivered as one-to-one sessions and at the medical staff's place of work. Coming from an HE environment, the third speaker, Boateng highlighted the challenges associated with information literacy education that will sound familiar to those readers operating in the similar academic contexts. These are the need to keep up with fast-changing technology where information is increasingly accessed through diverse types of media, while at the same time ensuring that students develop information literacy practices that are transferable to their current and future careers. In van Helvoort's project report: 'How adult students in Information Studies use a scoring rubric for the development of their information literacy skills' he proposes a way of addressing the problem of transferring IL practices from an academic environment to the world of work by employing a rubric that encourages the development of self-evaluation competences which the students subsequently employ to assess the quality of work-related reports.

In her talk, Boateng raised an interesting question about the nature of IL training within the academic context, i.e. whether IL should be embedded in the subject (and presumably cover the search and retrieval of information that is content specific) or whether it should adopt a more holistic approach by fostering "critical thinking and knowing how to use knowledge" (i.e. one that sees information literacy as fully embedded in the learning experience). The paper by Lange, Canuel and Fitzgibbons 'Tailoring Information Literacy Instruction and Library Services for Continuing Education' subscribes to the holistic approach because it promotes the relationship between adult learning theory and information literacy in order to customise the training to suit the students' diverse learning needs. Similarly, the book *A guide to teaching information literacy: 101 practical tips,* by Blanchett, Powis, and Webb, reviewed by Bickley, offers an example of holistic information literacy education that is supported by a sound pedagogical rationale and evidenced by a range of innovative learning and teaching strategies, such as "Stop, Start, Continue".

In conclusion, this editorial has presented some reflections on the journal's current position and future plans within the context of the JIL's readership survey and recent IL events I attended in search of new ideas. As I alluded to earlier, a full analysis of the survey's findings will be disseminated in January. Here, I would like to take this opportunity to express the editorial board's gratitude to all JIL readers who have shared their views with us, conveying their current experience of the journal and giving detailed suggestions for future issues. It is clear that, thanks to the survey, we have established a constructive dialogue with our readership which we aim to continue in future by eliciting our readers' views on a regular basis.

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