# Article

# Information literacy: a term whose time has passed?

Welcome to the first issue of JIL 2011 (Vol.5), which in line with the previous two issues published at this time of the year reflects on the LILAC Conference. Everyone would agree, I am sure, that conferences offer great opportunities for networking, but they can also be utterly exhausting for delegates and speakers (and most of all for the organisers). As I attended LILAC this year, I fully appreciate the first two aspects, but I can also sympathise with the LILAC team about the third one. It's hard enough to organise a conference in one venue. This year LILAC was in London, with the first two days held at the Conference Centre of the British Library, while the final day was held at the LSE. One can only imagine the complex logistics required to host a two-venues event, but as Matt Harvey comments in his account of LILAC *"This was information literacy in action"*.



**Figure 1 The British Library[1]**



**Figure 2 The New Academic Building at LSE[2]**

I came away from LILAC with a number of questions, which is always a good sign as it suggests that the debate was engaging and thought provoking. Allow me to reflect on one particular issue that was raised at LILAC, as I think it has serious implications for the IL community as a whole.  Some of the delegates I spoke to, and indeed two of the keynote speakers, David Nicholas and Jesus Lau, expressed reservations about the term 'literacy', which they argue, does not appeal to communities outside the HE context. At this point, I am reminded of a conversation that I had with Christine Bruce a few years ago about her reluctance to use information literacy in the title of the book she was writing at the time. Instead she opted for *Informed Learning* (Bruce, 2008), because this term provides a more appropriate contextualisation of people's engagement with information within the process of formal or informal learning (Bruce, 2008: 2).

The question of whether the term information literacy has 'gone out of fashion' inspired the title of this editorial. Should we follow Bruce's example and look for alternative ways of describing what we do? The authors represented in this issue do not seem to think so, as they are all using information literacy to describe their practices and the IL programmes they deliver to their own institutions, although, like Bruce they associate information literacy with learning. In fact, the main theme promoted in this issue is about seeing information literacy as a way of fostering a learner-centred pedagogy.

[1] http://www.e-architect.co.uk/london/british_library.htm (Accessed: 29 May 2011).
[2] http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/estatesDivision/lseEstate/campusBuildings/newAcademicBuilding/ (Accessed: 29 May 2011).

As the papers in this issue demonstrate, 'learner-centred' means employing diverse strategies that foster the learners' engagement with information and with the process of learning. By eliciting the views of the learners through the use of pre and post surveys Allison Kavanagh, Rachel Johnson and Brian Galvin ensure that their IL programmes address the students' concerns, albeit in different contexts. Kavanagh, for example, triangulates the data generated by first year students in a BSc Marketing course with the feedback from teaching and library staff, although as the author acknowledges, the positive impact of IL generated by this study is based on the students' perception of increased competence and confidence after the IL programme, and further research is needed to gather evidence of the students' changes in academic practice. Johnson uses Knowles's theory of andragogy (1984) to ensure that IL provision addresses the research needs of adult learners by explaining why they need to be information literate (i.e. to enhance their research practices), whereas Galvin uses focus groups to follow up issues raised by the pre and post surveys of students on an Evidence-Based Practice course on Substance Use and Prevention. By contrast, Anthony Holderied combines active learning with the use of interactive technologies (such as clickers, electronic whiteboards, wireless slates and document cameras) to foster greater student-engagement and move away from a didactic "*one-way communication from teacher to student*" approach.

The second learner-centred strategy is collaboration based on Sophie Bury's study on the perceptions, assumptions and practices of IL by faculty staff which suggests that greater partnership between faculty and library staff leads to greater student engagement. In addition, Johnson argues that collaboration between library and research training staff helps the students realise that IL practice is an essential part of the research process. Amongst the recommendations generated by Bury's article the following are relevant to foster a learner-centred approach: 'one size does not fit all' points to the need to take into account the different disciplinary requirements and shape IL education accordingly; there is a need to implement a culture of collaboration between faculty and library staff (surprisingly Bury's study found that in theory faculty staff support this, but in practice co-teaching is not widespread); and finally there is also a need for effective university-wide advocacy of IL based on its "*pedagogical value*".

Finally, Galvin's paper positions information literacy within a problem-based learning (PBL) approach where the competences of finding and evaluating information required to solve a problem complement the stages of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) and the scientific approach employed within medical practice. I find the table comparing the IL competences with the EBP steps very useful in that the five competences described by the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries' Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (ACRL, 2000) are translated into activities that make sense to the learner. For example, EBP describes the abstract first IL competence to 'determine what information is needed' in terms of 'converting the need for information into a question'.

For the past two years, the June issue of JIL has published accounts of LILAC by the students who received ILG sponsorship to attend this event. This year is no exception, and the first article in the conference corner section is the one written by the 2011 winner, Matt Harvey, who is currently studying for an MSc in Information and Library Studies at Aberystwyth University. His account of the three keynote addresses reveals that despite the different backgrounds, they all conveyed similar messages about the changing information landscape (from physical to virtual) and promoting information literacy as "*more than just books"* or using it to define international indicators of social and cultural developments. LILAC, Harvey argues, illustrates how the IL community has harnessed the benefits of social media technology, such as Twitter and spruz, to take the IL debate beyond the confines of the face-to-face presentations and extending the discussion before, during and after the conference.

The second account of LILAC is by Eleni Zazani, a Learning Support Adviser at Birkbeck College. She makes a number of fruitful observations about issues she had discussed with other delegates and speakers. Like Harvey, Zazani stresses the central role that Web 2.0 and mobile technology played at LILAC both as a focus of several presentations, concerned primarily with the pedagogical benefits of using interactive social media and mobile technologies in IL provision, and also in terms of expanding the discussion by delegates in the 'Twitter-sphere'. In her account, Zazani mentions the panel-led debate on the overall usefulness of IL standards, although as I recall, the discussion focused primarily on the updated version of SCONUL's Seven Pillars, 2011. The debate explored the two opposing views of whether the Seven Pillars can provide a satisfactory framework for IL provision, or whether in practice using these standards reduces IL education to a de-contextualised 'tick box' approach. Whilst I would concur with the need for context to make the IL standards more relevant to the learner, I wonder about defining information literacy solely through these standards as this raises two important questions. First whose definition of information literacy do these standards promote (i.e. that of the tutor or that of the learner)? And if the former, how do these standards account for the learners' perspectives of information literacy? In other words how do they foster the students' engagement and active learning as advocated by the papers in this issue?

The Project section presents two different but equally important IL initiatives. The paper by Lisa Anderson entitled 'Embedding Digital and Information Literacy OERs into the PG Cert' gives an overview of the DELILA project. For those who are not familiar with this acronym, it stands for Developing Educators Learning and Information Literacies for Education. This project, part of the JISC Open Educational Resource (OER) initiative, is run collaboratively by the LSE and the University of Birmingham. Its main aim is "*to provide a model of embedding digital and information literacy support into teacher training courses that are accredited by the HEA such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (commonly called the PG Cert)".* Two issues are raised by Anderson's account of DELILA. On the plus side, this project has enabled library staff at Birmingham to establish a working relationship with the PG Cert coordinator to ensure that IL and digital skills are covered in this course. But the team has also had to deal with some of the challenges of OER, such as the complexity of making screenshots of subscription databases available in an open access environment. In the end, they settled for a place holder where the screenshot would be, thus avoiding time consuming copyright negotiations with various database providers, although I suspect that this problem is going to be a recurring one as OER initiatives become more common within academia and other educational environments.

The second paper in the Project section, by Joy Head and Cathie Jackson, is entitled 'The Welsh Information Literacy Project: First steps in a developing information literate nation'. This paper presents the first stage of this initiative whose ultimate aim is to promote *"[..] the understanding and development of information literacy in education, the workplace, and the wider community in Wales'*. Amongst the outcomes from this initial stage is the creation of case studies illustrating IL in various educational sectors and lifelong learning scenarios. There are ten case studies for lifelong learning alone spanning familiar social concerns, such as health literacy and employability, and also not so familiar challenges, such as fostering information literacy practices of inmates. Complementing the case studies is a current-practice report, which draws evidence from these case studies to illustrate the socio-economic benefits of IL and map these onto the main political and educational policies in Wales.

The last section of this issue contains two book reviews. Nigel Morgan in his review of *Active learning techniques for librarians* by Walsh and Inala (2010), describes this book as a "*treasure trove*" of active learning tips that can be adapted to deliver IL to diverse groups of learners, from school to postgraduate levels, and which suggests a range of innovative techniques, from buzz

groups to mobile and Web 2.0 technologies. The second review by Philip Russell is equally positive as he claims that the book by Mackey and Jacobson *Teaching Information Literacy Online* (2010) offers a good range of case studies illustrating how partnerships between faculty and library staff can produce innovative ways of delivering IL in online mode thanks to the effective use of Web 2.0 technology. Both of these books target practitioners who are responsible for IL provision and advocate the use of a sound pedagogical rationale to enhance the interaction between learner and information. But while Walsh and Inala address the needs of IL educators within different educational scenarios, Mackey and Jacobson's book targets practitioners within the HE setting. However, Russell argues that this does not diminish the value of the book in presenting evidence of how collaboration can be used successfully to deliver online IL provision.

In conclusion, the collection of papers in this issue promotes information literacy as the foundation for a learner-centred framework that harnesses the use of innovative pedagogy and interactive technologies. The papers identify a set of strategies to ensure that this learner-centred approach underpins their IL programmes. These can be summarised as:

1) Pre and post testing to ascertain the students' competences before and after the IL sessions, although further research is needed here to establish impact in terms of changes in the students' academic practices as well as in their confidence.
2) Reflective practice on the part of the IL educators, informed by regular feedback from the students and faculty staff.
3) Collaboration between faculty and library staff to integrate IL in the core curriculum and also to change the students' perceptions about the importance of being information literate learners.

Whilst the majority of these authors focus on IL education in HE, thus giving credence to those who criticise the lack of IL influence in other sectors, the Welsh project promotes IL in its wider social remit, suggesting that far from lowering expectations to basic or remedial levels the term 'literacy' is seen in a prominent lifelong learning role as the starting point for social and community developments. What is important to bear in mind is that the evidence of good practice promoted by the articles and books in this issue could inspire IL provision in other educational sectors and beyond. It is only by making IL learner-centred, technology-enabled and most importantly, underpinned by the reflective practice of educators and learners alike, that we will be able to reclaim information literacy by associating this term with a 'scholar-like' attitude, rather than with basic reading and writing skills.

# References

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