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## Article

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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

# A multilingual information literacy resources tool

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On 15 February 2013, UNESCO announced a new multilingual information literacy resources tool, *Overview of information literacy resources worldwide*, which I had the honour of being invited to author with the wide editorial advisory collaboration of, and individual language list contributions from, dozens of LIS professionals around the world.

I have been professionally active in advocating the information literacy (IL) concept for a very long time, stemming from the 1970s when I had the privilege of working closely with Paul Zurkowski, then Chief Executive of the Information Industry Association in the USA, who is generally credited as being the author of the IL concept. At the time, I was Director of Studies for the US Federal Paperwork Reduction Commission, a congressionally established government study body charged with recommending ways to reduce the paperwork and red tape burdens which our government was placing on citizens, businesses and lower levels of government. We undertook a key study to determine whether excessive government demands for data and information were responsible for the tremendous public paperwork burdens (especially statistical data and regulatory reporting collections). To try to help combat that trend, our Commission came up with the Information Resources Management (IRM) idea. We asserted that data information demanded by and collected by government is indeed very valuable and beneficial, but at the same time a costly and burdensome resource, the costs of which need to be more carefully balanced with the values. In other words, information requirements imposed on the public could not and should not be assumed to be a 'free good'.

Coincidentally, at about the same time as my Commission was operating, the aforementioned new fledgling Information Industry Association was also trying to establish itself, in part by also

asserting that information is not a free good, and that its value is (perhaps counter-intuitively) decreased rather than increased if it is always shared (especially by citizens to their governments) at no charge.

The coincidence and convergence of these two lines of thought brought about both the IRM and the IL concept. The IL idea in particular was soon linked very closely with user education in the library world, as librarians argued persuasively that much of what they try to do in their libraries is to teach and educate patrons to be more skilled when it comes to knowing how libraries and their holdings can help them search for and retrieve information. I have not rigorously investigated whether any librarians used the IL term before 1970, but I am guessing they probably did. And so user education and IL came to be closely allied with each other.

Because the IL concept formally originated in the West (but certainly not necessarily in all historical contexts), it was not surprising that most of the early research advancing the theory and the practice of IL were also in the English-speaking world. Because I worked for the State Department, I found that when I talked to LIS professionals in other countries, they often complained of the dearth of research in their own native languages. I never forgot those complaints.

Therefore, because I also had worked as a consultant to UNESCO, at one time serving on their Programme for General Information Council, and was also a Vice President of the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID), I proposed to UNESCO in 2011 that we develop a simple database that would contain listings of key IL research and other kinds of resources available to both the general public and to LIS professionals. UNESCO enthusiastically agreed, pointing out that this kind of project would also fit squarely with one of their key goals: linguistic diversity.

And so, beginning in late 2011, I began to contact LIS colleagues in many different countries and asking them to develop a list of select but important IL resources in their own native languages. Nearly all agreed enthusiastically, and the result is this UNESCO ePublication. The lists prepared were not peer-reviewed, and therefore inevitably there were omission and commission challenges that need to be dealt with.

My hope is that the publication will be used primarily by teams of teachers and librarians to put on workshops for ordinary citizens who are not fluent in the English language, but who would greatly profit by learning about such resources in their own native languages as well as how to use them. Also, my hope is that researchers will be motivated to produce better and more advanced IL resources in languages other than English.

Finally, I hope the initial database can be updated and kept current. Already we have many 'adds, deletes and changes' that could be considered.

The UNESCO publication is available in PDF and ePub formats. The ePub format is designed to be read on mobile devices and can be emailed to, for instance, iBook on iPads. To open the ePub on a PC, you would need to download additional software such as Calibri or Adobe Digital Editions. Alternatively, browsers such as Firefox make it possible to download plug-ins or add-ons to view them also.

In the months ahead, UNESCO will decide on an updating mechanism so that the beginning language list entries can be maintained. Some new entries will need to be added, and some existing ones deleted or amended. Hopefully new languages can be added so that the database can come to be regarded as a 'living tool', especially for ordinary citizens who are not fluent in English and must fall back on their native language for learning and education. The author would appreciate hearing from any volunteers who might be willing to add a new language to the database.

The resource and information about it can be accessed via the following links:

- The PDF file version of the publication:  
[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/news/overview\\_info\\_lit\\_re\\_sources.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/news/overview_info_lit_re_sources.pdf)
- The ePub version of the publication: [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/news-and-in-focus-articles/all-news/news/e\\_pub\\_brings\\_together\\_worldwide\\_information\\_literacy\\_resources\\_available\\_in\\_42\\_languages/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/news-and-in-focus-articles/all-news/news/e_pub_brings_together_worldwide_information_literacy_resources_available_in_42_languages/)
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