Editorial

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Innovative approaches: information, identity and the individual

I'll begin my editorial career with a confession: I'm a research methods geek. I've been one ever since my LIS course: I put it down to Alison Pickard's brilliant methods classes and 'guidebook' (Pickard 2007). So it makes me very happy indeed that my first issue of JIL is a treasure store of diverse, innovative and exciting approaches to both research and research-informed practice in information literacy (IL). Indeed, the issue might almost have been crafted as an answer to *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*'s call back in March "ditch the survey as our primary research method" (Halpern et al. 2015).

The methods and approaches featured in this issue range from phenomenography and ethnography through action research to connectivism and online content analysis. I'm especially delighted that in addition to presenting thought-provoking findings and conclusions from studies employing these methods, many of the articles also offer very accessible introductions to the various approaches in their own right, describing their principles, benefits and limitations in ways that are both rigorous and readable.

Two other important and fascinating strands run through this issue of JIL: IL in the digital (and disintermediated) environment, and the nebulous but fundamental issue of identity. Both these preoccupations bring with them a strong focus on the role and actions of the individual encountering and using information. Our constructions of IL in the past have often been focused on what we as librarians seek to do and convey about it, as though our role is to channel information to a recipient user - or indeed to a group of users, since many of the more traditional library research methods operate at group level, for example investigating the IL abilities of a cohort, or ascertaining the satisfaction levels of a population of users.

In contrast, the work on display here foregrounds the agency of the learner, the voice of the student, and the individual experience of IL. Articles in this issue showcase a number of student-led approaches, seeing the student as collaborator - helping to shape IL delivery and even the curriculum, co-designing and creating 'bite-size' IL tutorials - and also the student as researcher, investigating library spaces in the role of ethnographer. Others explore the individual's unique patterns of sense-making and knowledge construction, for example through connectivist theory in the classroom and in online discussion spaces taking place nowhere near the classroom. Finally, they explore the conceptions that LIS professionals and future professionals hold of their role and function, and the tensions they experience in occupying the often uneasy dual identity of librarian and teacher.

Peer-reviewed articles

Three articles focus in different and complementary ways on digital information use. Bebbington and Vellino's investigation of information-related behaviour in Minecraft 'affinity spaces' - online community environments, such as discussion boards, that allow gamers to create and exchange knowledge - looks at how IL is enacted outside the classroom, in a wider social context far removed from librarians, databases and assignments. Their analysis of Minecraft forum threads demonstrates that gamers evince a wide variety of classic IL behaviours, including information seeking and sharing, and critical assessment for relevance and reliability of both sources and information.

Dealing as it does with 'real world' IL in a digital environment, this article's approach is fascinating in its own right, but in addition it offers a thoughtful and informed reading of the ethical issues

involved in analysing publicly accessible online conversations - an extremely helpful account for anyone considering research into online information uses and behaviours.

Brooks's article also addresses information use and behaviour in the digital environment, beginning with a very readable introduction to connectivist learning theory. Based on the constructivist approach, which centres on the active creation of knowledge structures by learners, connectivist theory proposes that learning in the digital age is inherently social and interactive - an ongoing process of making connections between diverse and specialised fields, sources and concepts. In juxtaposing multiple information sources, device interfaces offer a useful graphic exemplar of such a connected landscape. In discussing how connectivist theory can inform IL teaching with devices, Brooks gives an insightful analysis of how this simultaneity afforded by an app-driven interface can act as a visual parallel to learners' own intersections and connections, but never confuses the two. The article thus offers a thoughtful analysis of how technology can serve pedagogy, rather than the other way round (see for instance Wheeler 2014).

Teaching and learning in the digital environment also underlie Rothera's work. This article is an excellent example of a small-scale action research project whose design, based around the principles of 'what', 'so what' and 'now what', is clearly and meticulously outlined and eminently replicable by other researchers and practitioners. Rothera's findings shed very interesting light on how students navigate VLEs, suggesting that they are motivated by strategic, short-term goals rather than any desire to explore - and therefore that IL tutorials placed in the VLE are likely to be encountered only in class and quickly forgotten. Rothera's message is clear, albeit somewhat daunting: unless we factor in ways to remind students about just-in-time online IL support, we risk wasting our time creating it in the first place. However, she also outlines a collaborative solution which empowers students as co-designers and co-creators of these 'cool tools', drawing on their expertise as students to shape the support appropriately.

Students' preference for a 'strategic' approach is also evident in Funnell's five-year analysis of attendance data and feedback on IL sessions at Queen Mary University of London. Seeing attendance figures for IL classes dropping year on year prompted her to radically revise her provision to a student-led approach. Like Rothera's, her analysis makes key points about the timeliness and reinforcement of IL support, suggesting strongly that learners and staff alike prefer a just-in-time approach where they choose the purpose, duration, and frequency of our interactions.

The research conducted by Pashia and Critten, like Funnell's and Rothera's, was sparked by a reflective practice approach that prompted the authors to query whether existing IL provision was meeting the needs of their students. This piece is of particular interest not only for its excellent overview of ethnographic method, but also in focusing on the induction or orientation process which is intended to facilitate learners' transition into higher education, and which researchers such as Bowskill (2013) have identified as critical to the development of the student identity and thus to student retention. Pashia and Critten identified that their former method of conducting library orientation fell under Freire's 'banking' concept of education, which tacitly positions students as passive recipients of information rather than participators in a learning process or creators of knowledge (Freire 2000). This realisation led them to design an active, agentive approach for library orientations, in which students create meaning rather than having it explained to or imposed upon them. As a result, students establish from the outset an identity as observers and inquirers into knowledge, an identity that will be key to their development as learners and researchers.

This theme of identity is picked up in Inskip's work, which investigates whether LIS students believe that IL principles are sufficiently embedded in LIS courses or whether they should be addressed explicitly in a focused IL module. Again, this approach underlines the need for us to learn from and listen to our students as active participants in the collaborative endeavour of teaching and learning. The piece is studded with quotations from the research participants which yield a compelling insight into how the next generation of the profession perceives not only the

status and importance of IL, but also the role and function of the librarian; and it points up a fracture in our professional identity that is explored in depth in Wheeler and McKinney's phenomenographic study.

Inskip's research is also noteworthy for its unusual approach which required the researcher to address an interesting ethical issue: how to conduct a secondary analysis of data that were not elicited for research purposes, and which were not therefore accompanied by participant consent. Inskip's approach is sensitive not only to the issues around retrospective consent but also to the power differential between lecturer and student in the research context. Once again, the article offers valuable insights into research design in its discussion of how these issues can be addressed while protecting the interests of research participants.

In our final peer-reviewed article, Wheeler and McKinney present a phenomenographic investigation of how teaching librarians describe their professional selves, how far they are influenced by teaching theories, and whether they see what they do as 'teaching', 'training', or something else. As Inskip writes of his students, we are all 'consumers' of IL, but librarians are also, by profession, 'producers' of it in others. Does this make us teachers or trainers, as well as librarians? And if we call ourselves teachers, how many of us actually feel confident about maintaining this identity, perhaps without training or formal teaching qualifications (as in my case), in the deeply hierarchical world of academia? This research was also presented at LILAC, where it was very well received, and offers a thought-provoking and instantly recognisable analysis of familiar tensions in how we perceive our purpose and professional identity.

Reports and reviews

In our other submissions, Jackman and Weiner report on the demise of the US National Forum for IL and give an overview of what it achieved in its lifetime - including persuading President Obama to endorse the importance of IL at federal level.

On a happier note, we have a report on Canada's WILU conference by first-time attender Alan Carbury, who outlines how the keynotes and presentations lived up to the conference theme of a 'sea change' with much debate revolving around the ACRL's radical shift from competency standards for IL to its new, threshold concept-based framework. Alan also writes of Char Booth's inspiring keynote on social injustice and 'information privilege', topics that reflect the emergence over the past decade of critical librarianship, surely one of the most important developments in our profession and one which is profoundly connected with IL practices and values. (See Tewell 2015, for a comprehensive bibliography on and introduction to critical IL.)

We have a second lively conference report by Stéphane Goldstein, Jane Secker, Chris Morrison and Geoff Walton from ECIL in Tallinn. The authors note with approval that the presentations show a move away from previous preoccupations with IL's terminology and meaning and instead towards more applied aspects including IL in professional environments, sustainability, and – as at WILU – democracy and activism.

In our reviews section Stephanie Farley looks at a new book that promises to transform the 'one-shot' session through the Lesson Study approach, which involves librarian-academic collaboration in the planning stages. The book also offers practical suggestions for addressing the challenges of the one-shot experience, as well as interviews with faculty members who were involved in the collaborative lesson design model.

Pam McKinney reviews a work that traces Paul Zurkowski's eminent 40-year involvement with IL. Generally credited with coining the term, Zurkowski's vision has always situated IL in the context of wider social issues and a means of individual empowerment. McKinney's review thoughtfully picks out the highlights of this eclectic compilation which brings together many of his writings and

conference papers, including his presentation at the first ECIL conference in which he places IL at the forefront of citizenship.

Issues of social justice are once again picked up in Lauren Smith's insightful review of a new *Handbook on Teaching and Learning in Political Science and International Relations*. This work looks at how university teaching staff can engage students - and indeed fellow professionals - in recognising the inherent, yet often covert, connection between information uses, power and inequality. This is an unusual, and exceedingly welcome, instance of IL appearing (by name!) in a subject-specific textbook, together with a message about its importance in HE teaching and learning. Although political science has the status of an autonomous knowledge discipline in its own right, it has the capacity to 'overflow' the formal boundaries of its discipline and spread out into all our knowledge structures. In this way it spans and inflects all the disciplines – just as IL does, and with a similar and interconnected potential for both individual empowerment and wider societal change.

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Being an editor is exciting, inspiring, and humbling all at once. I can't describe what a privilege it is to be able to read and respond to work of this calibre, nor how much I've learned from the expertise, scholarly understanding, and unique insights of the authors whose work features in this issue. I've also learned, over and over again, how the support of JIL's outstanding peer reviewers can help authors to craft the best possible presentation of their work. I'm deeply impressed by how graciously and constructively JIL authors respond to the suggestions of their referees; but I'm also amazed - and proud of - how hard our reviewers work to support authors with thoughtful, constructive and workable feedback.

Several authors have commented on how positive the JIL review process was, telling us that reviewers' comments were "invaluable" and that they helped "make a potentially very scary process a lot more manageable". Indeed, one author's feedback is such a testament to our referees' work that I give it here in full:

> I would like to thank you again for all the constructive and benevolent effort that you and your reviewers put into this review and for the graciousness with which you did it. I have been through several submission processes that have been quite impersonal and where the critical feedback has been either on the verge of cruelty or entirely neglectful. You and your reviewers stand apart and it speaks volumes for the value that small, community led open-access journals have to offer as an alternative to corporate publishing machines.

Usually only special issues of journals carry dedications - but I'm going to take advantage of being a newbie editor to dedicate this issue of JIL to our peer reviewers, in recognition of their invaluable contribution as 'critical friends' to authors and research integrity alike, and for making the journal what it is.

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