

# Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 10 Issue 2

December 2016

## Editorial

Coonan, E. 2016. Right answers, reflection, and CPD on a shoestring. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 10(2), pp. 1-2.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/10.2.2163>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright for the article content resides with the authors, and copyright for the publication layout resides with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Information Literacy Group. These Copyright holders have agreed that this article should be available on Open Access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike licence.

"By 'open access' to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited."

Chan, L. et al. 2002. Budapest Open Access Initiative. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Accessed: 18 November 2015].

## Right answers, reflection, and CPD on a shoestring

I'm not sure how it's suddenly December. Last time I looked it was still autumn (literally – I realised last week that my calendar was still on September) and while the rest of the country was thinking about starting an evening class, we were enmeshed in preparing for our own learners; and we haven't had a chance to stop since then. With student numbers rising and budgets frozen or falling, library teaching staff have little space between the start of the academic year and Christmas to pause and take stock. As a result, we can end up so immersed in *doing* that we get no time for *being* – and, ironically, this is the best time of year for our own reflective development, as we have so many opportunities to let incoming students show us how they perceive and experience learning.

As teachers we have to continually recalibrate our thinking so that we can shuttle between two contradictory states. We have to understand, and model, what successful academic information handling looks like in various disciplines and subject contexts; but even while we deploy this expertise we also need to be able to step right outside it and go to where our incoming students are, to meet and scaffold their perceptions of knowledge, information use and learning.

This year the best reminder to me of this need for a dual inside-and-out vision was the student who said, "I gave up using Library Search because it didn't give me the answer". There's a deeper, and much more pedagogically exciting, issue here than simply 'teaching the catalogue': this isn't about technology, or information retrieval, or search keywords. It's about helping students to realise that in the kind of learning that happens at university, which revolves around developing a critical mindset that operates in terms of degrees of validity rather than a right/wrong binary opposition, there isn't an answer out there waiting for you to find it.

So right now is a great time to focus on what our students have done or asked or told us this year that took us by surprise; to reflect on what that tells us about their perceptions of learning and what education is for; and to consider in turn how we can develop our teaching and support practices to go to meet them wherever they are. Just as we have a crucial part to play in helping our learners take a step back and reflect how they encounter and construct knowledge, so do we need to periodically step back and nurture our own ongoing reflective growth.

But how can we do this in an environment that grows ever more pressured? By December the teaching may have slackened off, but our energy levels are depleted, hordes of highly assorted germs have rampaged through our systems, and – in my case at any rate – it feels as though the brain has been replaced by a small piece of Camembert. This is the time to remember two very important professional development principles.

The first is that learning is social. Theoretically, this means that knowledge is constructed rather than pre-existing, and that it is contextually created and situated within communities of practice. In real terms, it means going for coffee with your colleagues and comparing notes about what your learners said or did this semester that you found challenging, or intriguing, or thought-provoking. In this kind of professional conversation you don't just gain an insight into the pedagogical challenges others in your team have encountered, and the ways in which they addressed them; you also gain insight into your own experiences as you recount them, a reflective gloss that helps you relate them usefully to other events and issues in your teaching practice. And if it's something that didn't work too well, you have coffee and the support of your colleagues to help ease the 'ouch' factor.

The second principle is to be kind to yourself, and let others help. Most of us feel that we should keep in touch with our field through professional reading, but few librarians, however committed, relax after a busy day by curling up with a nice peer-reviewed scholarly work. This is exactly why book reviews exist; and this issue of JIL has a lovely range of thoughtful, accessible and concise reviews that expertly filter the latest publications. Claire Sewell and Cindy Gruwell look at two very different works on critical (information) literacy and give helpful overviews of the approach and

content of each. Ann Hindson does the same for a new US work exploring tools and approaches for supporting lifelong learning in public libraries. Her review offers a useful overview of the contrasts between US and UK public libraries and considers what aspects of practice might be transferable outside the US. Marta Cassaro and Andrew Eynon review two practical guides, one on supporting HE students' learning and the other a new edition of Jane Secker's classic guide to copyright and e-learning. Each review gives not only a sound critical appraisal of the work but also pointers to its underpinning ideology, its 'take' on the field, enabling you to orient yourself critically to the work even before you read it.

If time or financial constraints prevent you from getting to a professional event, the next best thing is to read about it – particularly if it's a lively, compelling account like those by Lisa Hutchins and Kirsten McCormick. Lisa's report on the CILIP conference and Kirsten's on ECIL will be welcomed even by those who were there, since, as Lisa points out, without a time-travelling device it was impossible to get the full flavour of all that was shared and discussed. Read; enjoy; and perhaps schedule another coffee with colleagues to share the ideas further?

Finally, journal clubs are the best way I know of to fulfil the principles of social learning and being kind to yourself, since they allow us both to share knowledge and have others filter it for us. Watch out for JIL's [online journal club](#), in which you can meet and talk to the authors of some of our articles; and think about whether there's any opportunity at work, perhaps once a month, to meet up with your team and either talk about an article that all of you have read (or glanced at, depending on the state of your Camembert), or swap overviews of different papers. The papers in this issue cover a wide range of angles on information literacy, exploring a variety of subject areas and approaches: a Christmas selection box with something to everyone's taste.

Lauren Smith reports on how and to what extent school libraries supported young people's political understanding during the UK general election and the Scottish independence referendum. One of her most important, and most dismaying, discoveries, is an often tacit institutional fear that talking about politics may somehow undermine an idealised notion of library neutrality.

Boger, Dybvik, Eng and Norheim, unusually, offer a follow-up to a research study published in JIL 9.1 on the search behaviour of nursing and teacher education students. This longitudinal approach traces a deepening understanding of the information landscape as undergraduate students progress from first to third year. In addition, it offers further evidence of the need for ongoing, aligned and scaffolded information literacy support rather than the pervasive front-loaded, one-shot model. For those of us who have yet to succeed in making this case to our institutions, Cohen, Poggiali, Lehner-Quam, Wright and West explore how we can maximise the effectiveness of one-shot classes by using flipped content and pre-class assignments. This is a useful and adaptable model for all practitioners still in quest of the holy grail of embeddedness!

Joseph, Fernandes, Hyers and O'Brien look at students' health literacy across the disciplines, a fascinating application of IL among undergraduates but outside the classroom. Lastly, PiloIU's article takes a theoretical scalpel to the implications of the terminology we use to structure our understanding of IL, and the impact this may have on our thinking itself.

I hope you will enjoy this issue, wherever you choose to dip into it – and between the reading and the reflection, that you also make time to relax and recuperate during the holidays.