Journal of Information Literacy

Editorial

Construction site

And what is good, Phaedrus, and what is not good – need we ask anyone to tell us these things?
(Plato, via Pirsig)

Happy birthday, JIL!

The *Journal of Information Literacy* is ten years old. In the first ever issue, the then editor Sheila Webber noted that

> Information literacy is receiving increasing attention worldwide, and through the publication of this journal we hope to support the interests of the growing number of information literacy practitioners and researchers. (2007, ii)

To mark our entry into double figures, we've invited ten of that growing number – internationally eminent scholars and researchers – to survey the last decade in information literacy and consider the next, in a series of specially commissioned reflective opinion pieces. We asked them to consider how the field has evolved, major trends emerging from recent work, and the biggest challenges facing IL in the next decade – and what we can do about them. Our aim is to create a landmark issue that will become a go-to resource providing IL practitioners, teachers and researchers all over the world with deepened insight into the state of IL at the present time and how our field will develop.

To this end, we have deliberately selected contributors with a range of research interests within IL and from a mix of international backgrounds. In a particularly neat chronological flourish, one of our invited experts is JIL's first ever editor, Sheila Webber, who with Bill Johnston provides the 'last word' to this issue by investigating IL's status as an autonomous discipline.

Sheila and Bill are joined by a host of other illustrious researchers and practitioners exploring various aspects of IL from diverse standpoints, both geographically and intellectually. From Australia, Christine Bruce and her colleagues offer a collaborative 'patchwork' of research on the relational approach. The contributors describe their individual research contributions, but the effect is one of complementarity and cross-fertilisation.

Sheila Corrall in Pittsburgh, and Sharon Markless and David Streatfield in the UK, explore key aspects of IL practice – reflection and impact evaluation – while Alison Head of Project Information Literacy presents a significant large-scale study of graduates' information use and behaviour in the workplace.

Sweden's Annemaree Lloyd presents a new model that seeks to relate and reconcile IL research and practice, which often appear to operate in unconnected arenas. In a related vein, Ross Todd explores the ways in which IL has been defined by various 'territories' in the profession and unpicks the implications of these definitional stances, exposing their theoretical foundations and conflicting perspectives in the work of theorising IL.

Barbara Fister and James Elmborg's deliberately personal narratives form a piquant contrast to this approach, but trace out a very similar developmental line in literacies thinking, from exemplar-based writing and bibliographic instruction, through 'process' and standardised models of teaching both composition and information literacy, through to the more recent emergence of critical and self-reflexive approaches to developing both academic and information literacies. Finally, Geoff Walton mixes the personal development narrative with a research approach to explore how he has endeavoured to foster information discernment in learners, and is led to reflect on issues of structure and power that underlie our desire to promote 'good' information behaviour.

The sheer extent of the variety in these expert perspectives embodies a profound lesson of information literacy: we need to look at a phenomenon from multiple angles in order to reach an informed understanding of it. The approaches taken by our authors range from autoethnography, the story of a single LIS practioner, to a large-scale study; from critically reflecting on our IL practice to evaluating its impact in meaningful ways; from presenting new models to excavating the fossil traces of old definitions; from IL as a discipline to IL as a subversive activity. They differ in many ways in their vision of IL: in their convictions and values, their choice of definitions and models, and their views on critical IL, for example. And their divergence does us, and our area of practice, a great service, in that it reflects the mindset we aim to foster!

The conscious realisation that there are many ways to view the same phenomenon, and the development of ways to evaluate, sift and balance these conflicting narratives of reality, are crucial goals of information literacy teaching and practice. Our aim in working with learners and information, as both Walton and Head explicitly point out (and many others imply), is to help people develop a constructively questioning relationship with the world.

Achieving this realisation of multiple validity, and developing this questioning relationship, forces us to frame our interactions with information, with sources, with people and with theories differently. By relinquishing the simple, consolatory belief in a single right answer or right way, and accepting (however reluctantly and painfully) that several standpoints may be both valid *and* contradictory, we enter a more complex, more informed and ultimately more truthful relationship with lived reality.

Notably, I believe we are more at ease with framing this message to our learners than we are ourselves as IL teachers, practitioners and scholars. When it comes to questions about our own community of practice and its values, our default setting (mine included) is to seek a consensus, point to a definition or set of standards, invoke a set of shared values, in order to assert our identity as practitioners. Yet integral to a community are questions such as who we are, what we profess, how we do what we do – and perhaps above all what we believe to be good: that is, what we reward in learners, what we respect and honour in our practitioners, what we strive for in our own practices and actions. And none of these questions has a simple or a final answer.

Nor should we seek one. As Wenger writes,

> there is nothing that says that communities of practice are … harmonious. Conflict can be a central part of the practice. The very existence of a community means that there is a competence for learners to lay claim to, something common to struggle over, meanings to define and thus appropriate. (2012)

Challenge, conflict and competing lines of thinking play an essential role in developing a community's concept of itself, its purpose and its 'good'; and they are crucial to ensure that the power structure does not come to dominate and close down on the creation of knowledge entirely. As a community, we are 'under construction' in the same way – and precisely to the same extent – that our theories, our models and our values are under construction: permanently, disconcertingly, rewardingly. To quote from Barbara Fister's contribution to this issue: 'This is what our work is: human, messy, incomplete'.

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Alongside our invited authors' vision of the development of information literacy, we have an outstanding selection of brief communications. There are some sparkling and eminently readable conference reports, including two from the winners of the sponsored student places at LILAC, Bethan Davies and Leanne Workman. Sarah George was inspired by a User Experience 'Learning Exchange' at University of Huddersfield, and this issue also contains a composite report on Canada's International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Conference, from five participants who were also presenters at the event.

The project reports section features a report on an innovative peer support scheme and social programme at Ireland's Institute of Technology Tallaght, together with a comparison of two methods of presenting library induction classes under the provocative title 'How little is too little?'. In our Student View section, Rebecca Scott investigates the implications of using the TRAILS information literacy testing software to assess school pupils' development in the course of a guided inquiry module.

Finally, in our book reviews Davina Omar considers a new publication looking at archival literacy and the challenges of teaching primary sources in archives, while Greta Friggens dives into a creative workbook that aims to help students improve their academic writing through a myriad of tactile and visual metaphors.

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This special issue arose from an idea originally proposed by Mark Hepworth – Professor of People's Information Behaviour at Loughborough University, eminent IL researcher, and long-standing member of the JIL Editorial Board. A founder member of the CILIP Information Literacy Group, Mark contributed to two of the papers in our first ever issue of JIL. He inspired generations of students, researchers and practitioners – among them Geoff Walton, whose invited contribution to this issue acknowledges the extent of Mark's influence in his own thinking and research.

We had hoped that Mark would be one of our ten expert contributors to this issue, but his untimely death in December 2016 meant this was not to be. Instead we dedicate this issue, with its bold constructions of knowledge, its contributions from IL scholars both newly fledged and established, and its celebration of a decade of information literacy research and scholarship, to him.

In loving memory of Mark Hepworth, 1955-2016

References

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