Editorial

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Be kind: Teaching for information literacy in a pandemic era

I'm pleased to say that JIL is back in business after our slim publication in June 2020 – so much so that we have decided to split the December issue from the LILAC Special Issue, which will be published in January 2021. Thank you to all authors who have worked with us over the last six months to get their articles and report into print. A large proportion of the credit for this achievement, however, must go to our band of voluntary reviewers, who have quietly guided these authors in so many ways. They have done an amazing job reviewing and re-reviewing work amidst the risks and uncertainties of a pandemic landscape and their astute but constructive advice is much appreciated. Huge thanks, also, to copy-editors, Helen, Kirsten and Rebecca, new recruits, Ellen, Tom and Harriet, and our Interim Managing Editor, Ruth Stubbings, for their immense work to get these JIL issues published – I am beyond grateful for their tireless good humour and dedication.

While keyboards may be clattering, it is clear that the pandemic is still having a huge impact on educators and information workers and I'd like to acknowledge, again, the voices that are missing from this issue, particularly those of people who have been dealing with short-staffed libraries, rapacious e-book vendors, and overwrought learners, amongst other challenges. While the pandemic and political events of recent months have brought a renewed focus on information literacy (IL) issues, they have also brought a great deal of pressure – from pivoting online, to the introduction of new shiny technologies and doing more with less. To those of you who are feeling these strains, I hope that you are able to be kind to yourself; IL teaching and scholarship is so much more than the new, the shiny and the flashy. Whilst JIL welcomes research that explores new teaching techniques, we are also very much here for work that unpicks assumptions and challenges orthodoxies; the cool, critical interrogation rather than the hot take. Our admissions page is open for when you have time to take a breath.

At the same time, I hope that we can also be kind to the learners with whom we work. Research has demonstrated that academic IL standards and models are not always particularly kind at the best of times; communities of colour (Morrison, 2017), first generation students (Folk, 2018; Ilett, 2019), international students (Conteh-Morgan, 2003) and transfer students (Heinbach et al., 2019), amongst other groups, are all often found to be penalised when we rely on universal indicators of IL. These issues are only intensified in a pandemic classroom where the use of IL tests and measures could verge upon the unethical if they are being used to censure and condemn in the current traumatic environment. A thoughtless use of shiny new technologies could also aggravate issues by exposing already vulnerable learners to greater risks of surveillance (Collier, 2017), tracking (Lamdan, 2019) and harassment (Savigny, 2020). IL, with its focus on empowerment and lifelong learning may seem to embody kindness itself, but it is clear that these goals must be seen as constantly evolving rather than as a given.

The December 2020 issue of JIL comprises five research articles and one project report – and in focusing on IL in primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as in public libraries and health contexts, this issue manages to, somewhat amazingly, cover almost every major area of IL practice. (And never fear, fans of workplace and critical IL – forthcoming issues mean you won't be left out for long). The variety of contexts is a fantastic testament to the growing scope of IL research.

The complexity of online research is the topic of the first article within the issue, where Eva Engelen and Alexandra Budke examine how secondary school students in Germany research geographical conflicts using the internet. Focusing on how these learners engage with cartographic and spatial information as well as more common textual sources, this article stands out for the employment of ethnographic methods in its research design, including the use of audio and screen recorders.

Digital literacy is also the topic of the second article by Fei Victor Lim and Weimin Toh, which discusses the vital role that IL plays within the development of digital reading skills. Highlighting the complexity of digital reading, where texts may include multimedia elements as well as other social elements, this article also creates a new and underexplored connection between IL and education studies.

From digital literacy we move to IL outreach programmes in an article by Sharon Wagg and Pam McKinney. Using a case study approach, this study examines the impact of an IL outreach programme that aimed to mediate the transition between secondary and tertiary education. The project, which forms part of a university's widening participation programme, recognises the value of increased dialogue between secondary and tertiary education providers while pointing to tensions related to staffing, curriculum and access to resources.

The state of IL teaching is also the subject of the article by Miriam Matteson and Beate Gersch, who studied the provision of IL instruction within eight public libraries in the United States. Emerging from the premise that IL instruction takes on numerous shapes and forms, Matteson and Gersch's research used an online diary instrument to highlight how individual librarian-patron interactions form the site of important point-of need IL interventions.

We return to digital literacy in the article by Anne Wade, Philip Abrami and Larysa Lysenko, albeit in the less explored context of primary and elementary school education. Detailing the development of an inquiry-based IL web platform, the authors used pre- and post-tests to understand student learning. The study, which notes student and teacher satisfaction with the tool, draws attention to the importance of IL education with younger children as well as with older learners.

Finally, we end with a project report that explores the creation of an evidence-based practice IL intervention for nursing students. Written by Bryan Chan and Ruth Wei, this project report describes the development of an online teaching module in Australia that included micro-credentialing, e-portfolios, split-screen tutorials as well as screen capture videos. While this was developed pre-pandemic, this project points to the new and evolving ways in which IL teaching can be approached within professional contexts.

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