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Working it: Information literacy within employment contexts

After a long wait, our workplace information literacy (IL) issue is finally here! Recent issues of JIL have been characterised by their diversity of approaches – from explorations of academic and school information activities to a growing focus on IL within everyday contexts. However, the June issue of JIL has, quite unexpectedly, ended up with a rich array of articles exploring various aspects of how IL is understood, enacted, and taught in relation to employment contexts. A happy accident rather than something planned, this luxuriance? plethora? of articles each contribute in their own way to broadening our understanding of the facilitators and inhibitors of competent workplace practice as well as, importantly, the transition between academic and workplace settings.

The unplanned theme means that this issue may also form an opportune time to reflect upon the current state of workplace information research given that interest in the topic seems to have waned slightly since the heyday of the late 2000s and early 2010s. In this period, which was kickstarted by research examining the information activities of white (Cheuk, 2000) and blue collar professions (Lloyd, 2004), we saw the growth of a number of papers synthesising how IL was defined and understood in the workplace (Inskip, 2014; Williams, Cooper & Wavell, 2014) and research examining employment contexts, including business (De Saulles, 2007), transportation (Moring, 2012) and various health professions (e.g. Johannisson & Sundin, 2007). However, since the ECIL (European Conference on Information Literacy) conference dedicated to workplace IL in 2017, research has been far less visible. It is not clear why this might be so – pandemic aside, workplaces continue to adopt new technologically shaped ways of accessing, disseminating and recording information while further engaging in a range of new (and exploitative) labour practices, all of which have information implications. One potential reason for decreasing research may be that workplace IL has typically been focused outside the United States, which remains the largest producer of IL research (Majid et al., 2017). Another reason may be the perception that we are running out of workplace populations to study, an idea that perhaps serves as an indication of the need to move beyond the typical bounded professional focus to engage with broader research questions. These could include questions related to pandemic career changes and the porous borders between workplace and everyday information contexts as well as the impact of increasing surveillance and dangerous working conditions within digital and gig economies. Workplace IL is a vibrant topic of research, and I hope this issue will inspire new research in the field.

In contrast, the JIL workplace has been heaving with activity since the last issue, having welcomed new Managing Editor, Dr Meg Westbury, to the fold. We are delighted that Meg, who brings a wealth of experience with learning technology and academic IL to the role, is on board. We would also like to thank Ruth Stubbings, who has done a sterling job as interim managing editor for the last 8 months or so. We further welcome new members to the Editorial Board: Dr Noora Hirvonen, from the University of Oulu, Dr Lauren Smith, from Queen Margaret University, and Veronica Arellano Douglas, from the University of Houston. Bringing expertise in health, critical, academic, public, and school library contexts, the appointment of these board members demonstrates JIL's commitment to broadening the scope of IL research and practice. I'd also like to thank retiring board members, Dr Jane Secker, Ruth Stubbings and Michelle Bond for their years of service, and all the many contributions they have made to establishing and maintaining JIL's position as a diamond open access journal.

So what workplace treasures does this issue hold?

Starting off this issue of JIL is an article by Zbigniew Osiński, who examines IL within Polish local government offices. Employing a range of research methods, including content analysis and focused group interviews, Osiński draws out how information access and use is linked to the concept of good governance, even though IL is underestimated by state administration. Broadening workplace IL into a Polish context, this study also contributes to the handful of studies that have examined information use within public office.

Local government also forms one of the three case studies in the second article, written by Gunilla Widén, Farhan Ahmad, Shahrokh Nikou, Bruce Ryan and Peter Cruickshank. Examining workplace IL from a methodological perspective, this article draws upon studies of small and medium enterprises, universities, and community councils to examine how workplace information activities can be measured by quantitative measures and instruments. Extending workplace IL's typical qualitative focus, this article presents methodological strengths and challenges that arose through comparing different approaches.

The third workplace IL study of the issue is written by Charlie Inskip and Sophia Donaldson and centres on examining staff and student perspectives on information use within a London insurance firm. Employing content analysis methods, the study compares and draws parallels between findings from staff and student interviews to produce personas that could be used as career studies teaching aids. Combining workplace and academic IL work, this study also draws out useful connections to careers services and the important role that these staff play in mediating transition to employment.

The fourth study, which is written by Ellen Nierenberg, Torstein Låg, and Tove Irene Dahl, does not look at workplace IL but continues the quantitative theme of Widen et al.'s writing. Focused upon the assessment of academic IL, this article develops and analyses findings from three quantitative measures designed to measure both knowledge and practice. Addressing the gap between what students know and what students do, this article extends understanding related to how learners evaluate and use information sources within an academic context.

The final study takes a different tack again, focusing on teaching librarian practices within the UK context. Written by William Shire and Pam McKinney, the study employs a mixed methods design to examine adoption of teaching technologies within IL sessions, including which tools are used in the classroom and the pedagogical reasons for doing so. Finding that teaching librarians are, by and large, comfortable with the use of technology, the study nevertheless points to several barriers that impact the use of technology, including a lack of time and support from management.

The workplace IL theme continues in the project report section, which introduces us to a handful of innovative new teaching methods. In the first project report, Angela Feekery, Katherine Chisholm, Carla Jeffrey, and Fiona Diesch report on an online learning module designed to support the development of professional IL competencies and the transition to the workplace. Written by a project team in New Zealand that includes lecturing staff and librarians, this project report also stands out for its presentation of indigenous-informed evaluation methods, which embed Māori spirituality into teaching practices.

Alexandra Hamlett extends these ideas in her project report looking at the design and development of a career-centred IL course in the United States. Emerging from the premise that students often struggle with the transition to the workplace, this project report draws upon

ethnographies of work to develop a course structure that will support the development of career skills as well as professional research capacities.

Finally, Paul Thomas, Matthew Jones, and Spencer Mattingly report on a teaching assignment that used Wikipedia to teach students about scholarly review processes. Grounded in principles of open pedagogy, the project report details how the production of material for the open web led to the creation of a useful learning opportunity as well as providing an example of IL teaching that moves from throwaway to renewable assignments.

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