

Information literacy: a definition

Dr. Sophia Kaane

Association of Parliamentary Libraries in Eastern and
Southern Africa (APLESA) 10th Conference, Kampala
Presented on 26 May 2009

Outline

- An updated definition of information literacy
- Wider context of information management
- The Library
- Librarians

Why Information Literacy (IL)

- Proliferation of information and information sources
- End-users overwhelmed and frustrated with sheer abundance of information
- Rapid technological changes (e.g. causing over-reliance on the Internet)
- Special skills needed to access and use information
- Information literacy (IL) vital tool in 21st century
- Everyone needs IL skills

Information literacy definitions: a brief history

- **The idea phase:** the term “information skills” was first introduced in 1974 by Paul Zurkowski to refer to people who are able to solve their information problems by using relevant information sources and applying relevant technology (Zurkowski, Paul G. 1974. *The information service environment: relationships and priorities*. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science). The importance of the idea was later confirmed by the US Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989), which defined “information literacy” as being able “to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information”
- **Differentiation phase:** distinctions between “information literacy”, “library skills” and “information skills” are debated in the 1980s and 1990s. There is also latent confusion about other “literacies”, such as “academic literacy”.

Information literacy: refinement

In the 1990s, “stage” and “process” models appear (e.g. “Seven dimensions”, “Seven pillars”) representing formalist approaches. Typical is the American Library Association *Objectives for information literacy instruction*, which define “Competencies” and “Standards” for each standard.

(<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/objectivesinformation.htm>)

What is Information Literacy?

- A set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (ACRL 2000)

The wider context of the management of information

In the 2000s, “situational” models have begun to appear, representing realist approaches that recognise that the social and economic context has a strong determining effect on the flow of information and, therefore, on what and how it can be sought.

“We have adopted the commonly accepted distinction between information literacy and skills. Information literacy is about providing all members of society with the information competences necessary to function effectively within society - it might be termed functional information literacy. The debate over information skills relates to the higher level competences of information specialists” (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Policy Advisory Group, 2002. *Report on a National Information Policy*. Section 3.2. Available: http://www.la-hq.org.uk/directory/prof_issues/nip_report.rtf

What is Information Literacy?

cont'd

- A self empowering attitude and commitment by individuals and people, at all levels of society, to seek, access, analyse, translate, transform information and create knowledge to solve problems to achieve personal, social occupational and learning goals for the improvement of their quality of life (IFLA/ALP 2007).

What is Information Literacy?

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- A fusion or integration of library literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, critical thinking, ethics and communication
(Parang, Raine and Stevenson, 2000)

The overall view

- The Alexandria Proclamation of 2005 describes information literacy and lifelong learning as the "beacons of the Information Society, illuminating the courses to development, prosperity and freedom. Information literacy empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion in all nations

Is “managing” enough?

- The creation of an Information Society is key to social, cultural and economic development of nations and communities, institutions and individuals in the 21st century and beyond.
- Information Literacy encompasses knowledge of one’s information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand; it is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and is part of the basic human right of life long learning.

Is “managing” enough? cont.

- Information Literacy, in conjunction with access to essential information and effective use of information and communication technologies, plays a leading role in reducing the inequities within and among countries and peoples, and in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding through information use in multicultural and multilingual contexts.

The Prague Declaration “Towards an information literate society”
<http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/post-infolitconf&meet/PragueDeclaration.pdf>

The Key

- **Empowerment through knowledge: this is to be information literate**

This means being able to:

- reflect critically on our surroundings and experience
- sense a need for additional information
- judge the best sources amongst members of communities and resources of information
- Gather and apply the information, infusing it with our own knowledge
- Pass on what we have learned with the wisdom of its proper use, in fidelity with its originators

And so what about the library?

- One of *many* information resources – but one that is *organised* and should be *accessible* by the community it seeks to serve
- “Value-added” is in *quality* of collections and *facilitated* access

And librarians?

- Changing roles – but this is nothing new
- Our “value-added” is in
 - ✓ knowledge of sources
 - ✓ approachability
 - ✓ understanding of individuals
 - ✓ understanding and experience of searching
 - ✓ caution as to quality of resources
 - ✓ ability to think round a problem

What is, and what is not, information literacy

- Information literacy is about using *appropriate* information resources, regardless of medium; this may embrace oral, printed, electronic and other resources
- Information literacy is *not* about learning to use computers: it *is* about the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Note

- IL not just a library issue
- Partnership creation
- Librarians at the forefront

Thank you