

## **UNESCO and INFORMATION LITERACY : a short discussion paper**

I can remember when the first meeting of IL experts met in Prague and being very sceptical of how this could change the world! Compiling this short paper has shown me that I was wrong to be so cynical, but right in that the impact of the work has a long way to go. I shall sketch the UNESCO aims and their main areas of activity and then suggest some ways that IL stakeholders could assist in this country.

As we can see from the statement to the right, UNESCO has taken a wide view of IL applying to everyone in the educational process. They are therefore firmly taking the lifelong learning rather than the library skills for passing your course view of IL. They are interested in IL as a means of helping individuals to play their full part in society – transformational and potentially disruptive. IL should be considered in relation not just to education but also work, civil society, and health and well-being.

*UNESCO's main strategy in the area of Information Literacy consists of awareness-raising about the importance of information literacy at all levels of the education process – basic education, primary and secondary education, technical and vocational training and lifelong education – and of establishing guidelines for integrating information literacy issues in curricula.*

### **The Prague declaration**

This excerpt from the Prague declaration reinforces the idea that IL is very large and a basic entitlement of every citizen. This is likely to be well beyond what most librarians consider when they are doing in their information skills sessions. This is not surprising because, as Patricia Iannuzzi remarked at LILAC 2009 “Librarians should not expect to cover all of IL”. Here lies the central problem: IL is often seen as a librarian thing, is in fact called different things by different groups, yet undeniably, the phenomenon does exist and is crucially important in 2009. We need to engage with other stakeholders to ensure that as many people as possible become information literate and able to cope in an uncertain future. Surely UNESCO can play a part in this as an international agency.

*“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 lifelong learning.”*

*Prague Declaration, 2003*

## Further Meetings

UNESCO have convened at least 3 large meetings (Prague 2003, Alexandria 2005 and Ljubjana 2006) and the quotes here give only a flavour of their deliberations.

Other examples :

UNESCO sponsor Conferences throughout the world.e.g.Jamaica Library Service Annual Conference 'Public and School Libraries: Your Partners in National Development',Feb 2009, sponsored by UNESCO

UNESCO sponsor many projects around the world on IL including Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Ghana, VietNam, Uganda, China, Congo, South Africa, Egypt.

*IL "is a basic human right in the digital world" as it empowers individuals "in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals"*

*included in  
Alexandria  
Proclamation, 2005*

## Recent major initiatives

1. Training the Trainers initiative. This major recent initiative has organised 11 Workshops throughout the world where IL experts provide a platform for creating a group of IL trainers for their respective countries which can be cascaded downwards through schools and universities. Here are some examples :

- Montego Bay, Jamaica (30 May – 1 June 2008) (31 on-campus)
- Quebec City, Canada (8 –9 August) (35 on-campus)
- Port Dickson, Malaysia (11 – 14 August) (78 on-campus)
- Tallinn, Estonia (21 – 23 August) (47 on-campus)
- Ankara, Turkey (3 – 5 September) (50 on-campus)
- Cape Town, South Africa (4 – 6 October) (27 on-campus)
- Wuhan, China (21 – 23 October) (104 on-campus)
- Granada, Spain (27 – 30 October) (50 on-campus, 134 online)
- Alexandria, Egypt (4 – 6 November) (94 on-campus)
- Patiala, India (5 – 7 November) (66 on-campus)
- Lima, Peru (22 – 24 January 2009) (45 on-campus)

There is an executive summary of the final report, dated 12 February 2009, to UNESCO prepared by Albert K. Boekhorst and Forest Woody Horton, Jr. the Project Co-Coordinator.

<http://www.infolit.org/reports/TTT%20Final%20Report%20Exec.doc>

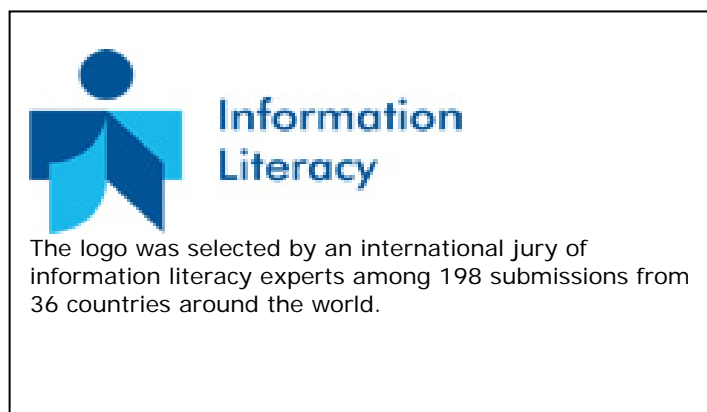
This gives a number of ideas about future strategy, which is of interest.

- Each major geographic area, and country with in that area, be encouraged to do additional on-campus workshops 2009-2010. These should take account of users with special needs. "UNESCO should dialogue and negotiate with appropriate regional intergovernmental organizations, appropriate member country ministries, their own

UNESCO field offices, country missions to UNESCO, and international and regional professional LIS and Educational associations and societies.”

- UNESCO should sponsor a meeting of TTT presenters to reflect on best practice, and move toward a template for future workshops, which could be virtual and customizable.
- Establish a TTT workshop wiki.
- Longer term objective – reach out to all sectors of society (see *Understanding Information Literacy : a primer*, which is discussed later)
- INFOLYMPIAD (an Information Skills Olympics)– idea that was discussed at Alexandria Conference – how would this work. Who would organise and pay for it?
- Need to pull together UNESCO IL and media literacy strands more coherently

2. Logo for badging Information Literacy throughout the world. During the UNESCO session of the World Library and Information Congress held in Quebec, Canada, in August 2008, Mr Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, awarded the winner of the international Information Literacy Logo Contest : is a young Cuban designer, Mr Edgar Luy Perez from Havana.



3. UNESCO has set up a major initiative to provide guidance on how IL can become part of the teacher training curriculum. This has been taken forward at an International Expert Group to develop teacher training curricula for media and information literacy held 16-18 June 2008 in Paris.

*“Empowerment of people through information and media literacy is an important prerequisite for fostering equitable access to information and knowledge, and building inclusive knowledge societies.*

*Information and media literacy enables people to interpret and make informed judgments as users of information and media, as well as to become skillful creators and producers of information and media messages in their own right.”*

*UNESCO’s mission in this area consists of fostering information and media literate societies by encouraging the development of national information and media literacy policies, including in education.*

Preamble to Teacher Training curriculum meeting in Paris 2008

Documentation including background paper and final report are at [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=27064&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=-465.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27064&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=-465.html)

Crawford, John and Irving, Christine. (2008) Going beyond the ‘library’ : the current work of the Scottish Information Literacy Project. *Library and Information Research*. 32(102) details the important work being done in Scotland to improve digital literacy in schools.

## Context and Advocacy

The UNESCO IL initiative should be seen as part of the UN Literacy Decade 2003-2012. Libraries should be playing a part in this. There is a very useful case study by Sayers which could help this to improve.

Sayers, R. (2006) *Awareness raising for Information Literacy, a case study*.  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001476/147637e.pdf>

This comprehensive guide is particularly aimed at the UN Literacy Decade 2003-2012. It looks at how to plan a campaign: the various approaches (personal, mass communication, education, public relations, and advocacy). It considers special audiences (aged, special needs, adult learners, children). It's a very useful guide with some excellent tips.

Mentions models of IL (Big 6, SCONUL Seven Pillars and Empowering 8).

- Big 6 relates to schools and projects in the US and is a commercial product.
- Empowering 8 has been developed in Sri Lanka from 2004 and aims to be take into account the “composite culture and local conditions” of Asian countries.
- SCONUL model seen as a progression from basic skills through to more sophisticated ways of understanding and using information.. It “provides a practical and robust framework with which we can identify and examiner the skills an average person in any society across the world requires to be an active and informed citizen.” It sees Pillars 1-4 as common to all issues and topics but 5-7 as more challenging. Within a known context like health science for nurses these pillars could be understood and mastered but with no firm context they would be difficult. He sees solutions to this by ensuring there would be sufficient general information about a topic or issue available or to provide independent advisers to interpret, translate or re-package information to suit the needs of that community. (pp79-82.)

In the past awareness-raising of IL has been through :

- Policy statements (e.g. Prague declaration)
- Curriculum development for schools (learning outcomes, competencies, and evaluation criteria)
- CPD for academics, teachers, librarians etc.
- Development of IL teaching and resource materials, including online.
- Ongoing dialogues through conferences, workshops and exchange programmes of IL researchers and practitioners, e.g. International Workshop on Information Skills for learning, Sri Lanka 2004.

## Publications

There have been some notable UNESCO publications including :

- Horton, F.W. Jr. (2007) *Understanding information literacy : a primer.* (UNESCO) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001570/157020E.pdf>

Claims to be “an easy-to-read, non-technical overview” of what IL means, and is designed for “busy public policy-makers, business executives, civil society administrators and practicing professionals”.

Goes through various 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies, sees IL as a life cycle in 11 stages and is a “cross-cutting consideration that affects the entire curriculum, and permeates all subjects and courses.” Includes access to health information as a human right for citizens. Also “IL offers the promise that people are now able to become independent learners, and critical thinkers. And when they are able to do that over the course of their lifetime, they become Lifelong Learners.”

There is a big section on advocacy and awareness-raising within various communities – Government; Business; Academic; Library, Archive, Museum, Publishing, Media, Public Interest, Information Science, Information Content and ICT Communities ; Practising Professions.

Frankly it’s a very interesting and useful document which should get wide dissemination.

- Catts, R. and Lau, J. (2008) *Towards Information Literacy indicators.* (UNESCO) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001587/158723e.pdf>  
Acknowledges the difficulty of trying to find a measure usable across all sectors and recommends the UNESCO find indicators of IL through use of data elements which could be valid indicators of IL within existing international surveys. In particular this could come from the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) Household Survey, the International Adult Literacy Survey (OIALS), the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) and the Programme for International Student assessment school survey (PISA). Items used should be validated by information professionals. The importance of identifying IL competencies for school teachers was emphasised.
- Choovong, L. and Singh, D.(2005) *Development of Information Literacy through school libraries ion South-East Asian countries..*(UNESCO) <http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/06INF/information.pdf>

## **Database**

Information Literacy International Resources Directory  
<http://www.infolitglobal.info/directory/en/home>

The Information Literacy section of IFLA has created this huge database on behalf of UNESCO. Librarians, educators and information professionals are invited to participate. If we have developed information literacy materials and would like to share them with the world community, we can submit them!

I suspect that this is an underused resource.

There are examples of advocacy toolkits, assessment tools, credit courses, tests of competencies, tutorials, workshops, publications, organizations, training the trainers, communication mechanisms including blogs. In fact a relevant and important site for all of us!

## **Conclusions**

UNESCO have been very good at articulating the importance of IL. They have initiated important meetings and Conferences allowing exchange of ideas. Other meetings and initiatives should help to bridge the growing digital divide in the world, by sharing experience and expertise. The Training the Trainers (TTT) initiative is a good idea but the task is huge. (If 104 participants were trained in the TTT session in Wuhan they each have to feed back to 12,000,000 people...using 2006 population figures!) The attempt to influence the teacher training curriculum is also laudable, but they have had to acknowledge this will not be easy to achieve at an international level. There are some very useful publications. The Understanding Information Literacy is first rate and should get wide exposure. The Sayers Raising Awareness case study is extremely helpful in helping more advocacy initiatives.

What more can be done? Here are some suggestions :

1. Schools - Assisting teachers in schools at primary and secondary level to become information literate and to be aware of its importance in the curriculum should be a priority. They are in a position to help the students that we meet in HE. The CIBER report drew attention to this. John Crawford's work in Scotland shows what can be done and should be replicated in England and Wales. SCONUL and other agencies should be working together to move this forward. The UNESCO initiative should provide encouragement and their framework can provide some guidance

2. Advocacy of IL – this is critical. I am concerned that the IL message is clearly not getting into the national papers. A quick search on NewsBank revealed very paltry mentions of IL. I acknowledge that IL is being reported under other names (like critical thinking) but if IL is our brand it has been a dismal failure! UNESCO is therefore not succeeding. Use of the IL logo should help. IL needs more forceful advocacy and presence in the media. We need attractive easily understood examples where IL makes a difference in daily life, (e.g. mini case studies like the girl who saved lives in the Tsunami, in business, in other professions, in government (e.g. wmd document copied off the internet). Raising awareness about IL goes wider than SCONUL and perhaps it would take a group of organisations (e.g. OFCOM, BECTA, ILLA, CILIP etc etc) alongside UNESCO to really make an impact.
3. The SCONUL model is praised by Sayers and this should encourage us to raise its profile within UNESCO and internationally, but how? It has proved to be “robust” and I guess we need to “shout” about it more!
4. The TTT initiative needs to be followed up. How can we best do this? I expect IFLA to be involved but what about SCONUL or JISC? The UK presenters would be the best persons to answer this and they may welcome support from the various organisations. Is the electronic template or wiki side where we could play a part?
5. The Infolympiad idea is ambitious but we should investigate it, for the sake of advocacy and promoting exchange of ideas. Who knows where it might lead?

This paper has gone on much longer than expected! I had wanted a Ronald Reagan length document! I hope it will help to spark some further thought and even action!!

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