Information Literacy: The Future and the Past

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Abstract

This paper discusses the topic 'Information Literacy: The Future and the Past' which provide brief examples of areas where we believe information literacy efforts will expand in the future also briefly reflect upon what we have learned about information literacy.

The broad educational and library communities are increasingly recognizing the value of information literacy and are in the process of integrating information literacy skills instruction with the curriculum. What began as an expansion of traditional library skills instruction in K-12 and bibliographic instruction (BI) in higher education is now a major focus of education and an increasing interest of societies worldwide, with organizations like the partnership for 21st Century Skills and AOL Time Warner taking up the charge.

Keywords- information literacy, K-12, Higher Education, libraries

1. IMPACT OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Efforts to infuse information literacy throughout the educational community are firmly established. These efforts are still expanding thanks to such endeavours as

- The inclusion of Information Literacy standards for Students Learning in the publication Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning, developed by the American Association of School Librarians(AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and technology(AECT)

- The development of information literacy skills standards by many states;

- The decision by some national accreditation agencies to include information competency as a component of accreditation;

- The development of information competencies by the Association of College and Research Libraries(ACRL) as well as individual colleges and universities; and

- The beginning of societal attention through the work of groups like the Partnership for 21st centaury skills and AOL Time Warner

2. WHERE WILL WE SEE INFORMATION LITERACY EFFORTS EXPAND IN THE FUTURE?

Challenges posed by new technologies and the rapidly increasing amount of information available from a variety of sources make it clear that information literacy skills are important for everyone. Now we take a brief look at areas where information literacy programs have potential for growth.

(i) K-12 and Higher Education

The k-12 arena has been one of the greatest success stories for information literacy integration thus far. In the future, K-12 and higher educators will continue building on current efforts, with an acceleration of information literacy efforts. Within five years, information literacy will be pervasive in most educational situations.

Particular contexts for the growth of information literacy will be in evaluation and standards. As states respond to No Child Left Behind with the development and refinement of state subject standards, they will realize that the application of these standards will need to be broad and include concepts of information literacy. This will lead to a redoubled effort to find efficient and standardized ways to evaluate information literacy skills in students of all ages.

The various technology literacy efforts going on around the country will merge into more broad, information literacy-based efforts-whether called information literacy, information and technology literacy, information and communications technology(ICT) literacy, or fluency. There will be less of an emphasis on technology and computing skills education out of the context of curriculum and broader information skills.

(ii) Public Libraries

The public libraries are still the place where anyone may have free access to information

in both print and electronic formats. Public Libraries teach information literacy skills to groups and in one-to-one sessions. The Deerfield (Illinois) instruction to the public libraries, For example, is typical of public library programs that provide instruction to the people on how to use computers to access information in various formats including the World Wide Web. The library's basic computer searching classes are repeated several times each month, and there are special sessions designed specifically for home-based business owners who want to learn how to use the Internet.

The science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL), located in Manhattan and part of the New York Public Library, is the world's largest public information center devoted entirely to science and business. The library has an extensive research collection, a wealth of electronic resources, and more than 170 public workstations. To help and encourage the public to use both electronic and print resources, SIBL offers free classes. As many as five classes are offered each day in a state-of-the-art- teaching facility. The library trains an average of 1,000 people each month. SIBLs Web workshops are particularly popular. Designed for both beginners and intermediates, they focus on the skills needed to search the World Wide Web. SIBL is developing a new course to teach the public how to evaluate information found on Web sites (Bentley, 1997)

Information Literacy is a key component of user education at Seattle Public Library. The Librarian use information literacy as a guiding principle in many interactions with users, from formal instruction to reference helps.

(iii)   Adult Education

The Skills needed to access, evaluate and use information to maintain employment, or make personal decision, are constantly changing. Adult learners need to commit to lifelong learning to improve their information skills. In a project sponsored by an NFIL Literacy Leader Fellowship, Cowles (1997) found that there were little differences between the Internet skills of literacy students and the rest of the adult population. Her project team conducted a needs assessment of 245 adult learners and 123 adult education instructors in Oregon. Survey results were used to develop and test curricular materials focusing on information skills for adult learners. Participants were instructors and learners in Oregon, Washington, North Carolina, Ohio, Illinois, and other states. A staff development team representing various educational settings such as corrections, family literacy, welfare reform, ESOL, adult basic education, and adult secondary education presented the curricular materials to the Adult Literacy and technology Conference. Cowles reports that the project is ongoing with additional support coming from the Northwest Regional Literacy Resource Centre and some additional funding sources(Cowles, personal communication. March 1998).

(iv)   Education Programs in the Private and Public sector

Companies must have information literate workers to maintain a position in today's economy. Kanter (1996) reported on efforts by the Bank of Boston to teach its employees how to use technology and information. The bank has a long-range education plan that emphasizes information technology training and makes such training available when and where users need it by offering over 100 self-paced courses.

As the importance literacy reaches public consciousness (and as the cost of workplace

technical infrastructure continues to mount), expect to see information literacy programs put in place throughout the government, with programs mirrored in public affairs schools. Analysis of global information issues will provide meaty content for a new generation of policymakers and politicians, and this issue will come to the fore in the next decade.

A similar movement will begin in information-rich profession like medicine and law. The overwhelming amount of information and wide range of resources lawyers and doctors are exposed to will point to a need for information literacy skills for these individuals. The medical informatics field shows enormous promise and will continue to grow and develop.

3. CONCLUSION

Although no one can predict the future, we believe that we are simply at the beginning of the information literacy movement. An explosion of interest in this topic is imminent, with libraries, K-12, higher education, and community groups leading the way.

4. REFERENCES-

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