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Editorial

Towards universal information literacy 40 years on

As the year draws to a close many of us start to turn our thoughts to the New Year and 2014 will mark a milestone in the information literacy (IL) world. Next year will be 40 years since the coining of the phrase 'information literacy' by Paul Zurkowski (1974). As we approach this anniversary, it is worth reflecting on how IL has developed. For many people a 40th birthday is often a milestone, a signal we have reached a certain level of maturity and a time to reflect on where we are in our lives. The 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, speaking of life, said: "The first forty years of life give us the text: the next thirty supply the commentary." When a discipline reaches a 40-year anniversary it is surely only right to reflect on its history, to celebrate the achievements and be ambitious for its future. IL still feels like a relatively new field that is defining itself and battling for recognition; however, reading Zurkowski's paper now, I have been struck by how little has changed. His original definition of an information literate person was: "…anyone who has learned to use a wide range of information sources in order to solve problems at work and in his or her daily life" (Zurkowski 1974). Had the paper received the recognition it deserved, 'universal information literacy' would have been widely established by 1984. We are still some way off that and yet now, 40 years on, we have a rich body of evidence and an established discipline. So let's see next year as a chance to celebrate IL, but also to be ambitious for the future.

I am delighted with the range of contributions we have in this issue of JIL, and it seems particularly apt that we have a short interview with Paul Zurkowski. I was fortunate enough to meet him at the first European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL) which took place in late October 2013 in Istanbul. In many ways Zurkowski's original work was ahead of its time and unsurprisingly it fell on deaf ears. To hear him speak in his keynote at ECIL about why IL remained a passion for him was inspiring. Paul spoke of the lost generations who could have benefitted from his universal IL training, had his advice been heeded back in the 1970s. He spoke of IL and democracy, using examples from history such as William Tyndale, to illustrate how access to information has always been about power. Paul had no simple answer for the problems many IL researchers and practitioners experience, in getting the term understood and recognised outside the library profession. Yet his commitment and passion for IL has continued unabated.

Nancy Graham (left) and Jane Secker (centre) with Paul Zurkowski (right) at ECIL, October 2013
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ECIL was an exciting event, not least because it attracted over 350 delegates from 59 different countries. Perhaps not surprisingly we still found ourselves debating terminology. 'Media and

Information Literacy' (MIL) is the term that UNESCO currently favour and Ralph Catts urged the audience to work with media professionals in his closing keynote and to adopt this term. Speaking to an international audience it was notable that the continuing vogue for the term 'digital literacy' in the UK is not so well understood elsewhere, although I note that the US launched a digital literacy campaign in March 2013 designed to get the 60 million Americans who don't use the internet online (Connect2Compete 2013). There were numerous themes at ECIL, many of which are reflected in this current issue of JIL. Several of the articles in this issue suggest that teachers and faculty are becoming more aware of the value of IL. We also have several papers outlining practical approaches that are working. So as we move into the 40th anniversary of IL work, let's approach it with optimism and bolder ambitions for our research and practice.

This issue has four papers from the Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) and the first, presented in 2012 from Clare McCluskey, reports on action research into the role of academic librarians. Her theoretical framework draws on the notion of 'communities of practice'. McCluskey argues that a key way to support research as a librarian is to become embedded in the practice of research oneself. This study is heartening as I've been concerned by the increased focus on research support services in UK academic libraries, sometimes to the neglect of IL support. In this study librarians are involved in knowledge creation rather than simply providing information or support services related to open access issues. By participating in a research group the librarian can also share expertise and provide IL support for researchers.

A recurring theme at ECIL 2013 was the link between IL and democracy, which is central to Lauren Smith's article from LILAC 2013. Smith's paper, entitled 'Towards a model of critical information literacy instruction for the development of political agency' is thought provoking. Building on the fields of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, Smith argues that IL should adopt a critical approach in order to meaningfully engage with its democratic social goals. She further argues that critical IL could be of benefit to young people of secondary school age, in terms of increasing their political agency through increased critical abilities. The paper is based on an ongoing doctoral study, which promises to challenge our ideas of what and how we teach IL at school level.

Meanwhile, Pamela Kessinger describes how Portland Community College Library has reviewed their IL programme in order to understand how it addresses levels of IL competencies throughout the curriculum. In a case study which will undoubtedly be of interest to many in further and higher education, the College analysed curriculum documents to understand faculty expectations of information conceptualisation, information seeking strategies and research methods. Following this analysis, a Research Support Framework was devised to guide undergraduate students' progression. The work has also informed discussions between librarians and faculty to develop appropriate IL instruction within courses.

Our final paper from LILAC was presented as a poster in 2012 and Philip Russell and colleagues report on their ongoing work to create, share and reuse learning objects, or open educational resources (OERs) to support IL progression. The team, based at the Institute of Technology Tallaght (IIT) Dublin, has created a suite of reusable learning objects. The article reviews the usage and impact of the learning objects, in terms of student-centred education in their institution. It also highlights how these learning objects have been shared more widely as they serve as best practice models. There are many parallels with this paper and the work of the CILIP Information Literacy group to encourage librarians to share their teaching materials as OERs.

In the first of our articles, Barbara Jean Ganley, Amy Gilbert and Dianne Rosario report on a pilot study at a small Californian university to explore faculty and student perceptions and behaviours related to IL. The research aimed to determine if students were proficient in IL, based on the skills defined by the American Library Association, to define faculty and student perceptions and behaviours related to IL and to test an evaluation rubric using empirical inquiry and triangulated methods. Findings suggested that not all students had satisfactory IL skills even at the senior

student level. An analysis of fourth year student theses led researchers to believe that students were most likely not skilled in this area, and had an inflated opinion of their own IL abilities.

Meanwhile, focusing in more detail on faculty perception of IL, Eleonora Dubicki's research investigates attitudes at eight New Jersey higher educational institutions. The study examines the value and importance faculty place on IL, the infusion of IL into curricular learning outcomes, and an assessment of the competency levels students achieve in mastering IL skills. This study compares two-year and four-year institutions, investigating full-time and part-time faculty perspectives. Once again this study suggests that faculty perceptions are that students fall short of mastering IL skills by the end of their programmes.

Meanwhile Meagan Lacy and Hsin-liang Chen urge us to 'Rethink library instruction'. They adopt a learning-outcome based design and report on the teaching of online search strategies. The research carried out at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), explored how outcome-based instructional design can be used to collect student data, assess student learning, and improve instruction. Using two surveys of undergraduate students, the results suggest that outcome-based instructional design is an effective pedagogical method for gathering assessment data and that the survey instrument was a useful tool for assessing this outcome - by providing both a measurement of student learning and a means of evaluating the librarian's instruction. The results should be useful for those teaching in higher education.

We have several valuable short reports in this issue, including some useful findings from Cathie Jackson on research students' IL. Her results of a diagnostic test suggest a mismatch between students' self-assessment of their IL and how they performed in an objective test. We also have an update from Mariela Hristova (née Gunn) and Cynthia Miree on their 2012 longitudinal study on business IL teaching at different academic levels. Emma Woods and Ellie Murphy report on a digital literacy project at the University of Westminster linking IL and employability and Emma Greengrass provides a useful overview of *Chat Literacy*, the international online community of practice for those interested in IL. Finally Jacquie Widdowson and Darren Smart from CILIP's Public and Mobile Libraries Group provide a short report on IL in public libraries, highlighting how the term is rarely used, but it is a core activity.

Our final two short reports are a conference report from ECIL, written by Marion Kelt and Maria Bell, and a short interview with Paul Zurkowski, authored by Jeffrey Kelly, a US teacher, who accompanied Paul to Istanbul and also presented at the conference himself.

I'm pleased to welcome our new book reviews editor to the JIL editorial board. Ian Hunter has secured two book reviews that are published in this issue. The most recent edition of *Cite them right: the essential referencing guide* by R. A. Pears and G. Shields is reviewed by Jonathan White. Meanwhile Sarah Castle reviews *Only connect…discovery pathways, library explorations and the information adventure* by Emma Coonan and Andrew Walsh, which is available as an ebook for free but also via a print on demand service. We welcomed Ian to the team in August 2013, along with the new Chair of the Information Literacy Group, Nancy Graham. Once again, my thanks to the editorial board for all their work on this issue of JIL; I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed editing it.

References

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