INFORMATION LITERACY: RELEVANT SKILL IN PRESENT ERA

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ABSTRACT

Information literacy is a key focus of educational institutions at all levels and in order to uphold this standard, institutions are promoting a commitment to lifelong learning and an ability to seek out and identify innovations that will be needed to keep pace with or outpace changes. Educational methods and practices, within our increasingly information-centric society, must facilitate and enhance a student's ability to harness the power of information. Key to harnessing the power of information is the ability to evaluate information, to ascertain among other things its relevance, authenticity and modernity. The information evaluation process is crucial life skill and a basis for lifelong learning. According to Lankshear and Knobel, what is needed in our education system is a new understanding of literacy, information literacy and on literacy teaching. Educators need to learn to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies. We also need to take account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies.

Keywords: Information literacy, multimedia technologies, National consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

According to the American Library Association, "Information literacy is 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.'"

A number of efforts have been made to better define the concept and its relationship to other skills and forms of literacy. Although other educational goals, including traditional literacy, computer literacy, library skills, and critical thinking skills, are related to information literacy and important foundations for its development, information literacy itself is emerging as a distinct skill set and a necessary key to one's social and economic well-being in an increasingly complex information society. According to McTavish (2009), in order to increase and maximize people's contributions to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and maintain a prosperous and sustainable economy, governments and industries around the world

are challenging education systems to focus people's attention on literacy. In Canada, because of a great focus on a supposed literacy crisis, it has caused some alarm in some educational sectors. Brink (2006) researched government organization, such as Human Resources and Skill Development Canada, claims that almost half of working-age Canadians do not have the literacy skills they need to meet the ever-increasing demands of modern life.

HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

The phrase *information literacy* first appeared in print in a 1974 report written on behalf of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science by Paul G. Zurkowski, who was at the time president of the Software and Information Industry Association. Zurkowski used the phrase to describe the "techniques and skills" learned by the information literate "for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems" and drew a relatively firm line between the "literates" and "information illiterates".[ ]

The Presidential Committee on Information Literacy released a report on January 10, 1989, outlining the importance of information literacy, opportunities to develop information literacy, and an Information Age School. The report's final name is the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report.

The recommendations of the Presidential Committee led to the creation later that year of the National Forum on Information Literacy, a coalition of more than 90 national and international organizations.

In 1998, the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology published *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, which further established specific goals for information literacy education, defining some nine standards in the categories of "information literacy", "independent learning", and "social responsibility".

Also in 1998, the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy produced an update on its Final Report. This update outlined the six main recommendations of the original report and examined areas where it made progress and areas that still needed work. The updated report supports further information literacy advocacy and reiterates its importance.

In 1999, the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) in the UK, published "The Seven Pillars of Information Literacy" model to "facilitate further development of ideas amongst practitioners in the field ... stimulate debate about the ideas and about how those ideas might be used by library and other staff in higher education concerned with the development of students' skills."A number of other countries have developed information literacy standards since then.

In 2003, the National Forum on Information Literacy, together with UNESCO and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, sponsored an international conference in Prague with representatives from some twenty-three countries to discuss the importance of information literacy within

a global context. The resulting Prague Declaration described information literacy as a "key to social, cultural, and economic development of nations and communities, institutions and individuals in the 21st century" and declared its acquisition as "part of the basic human right of lifelong learning".

The Alexandria Proclamation linked Information literacy with lifelong learning. More than that, it sets Information Literacy as a basic Human right that it *"promotes social inclusion of all nations"*.

In May 2009, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed Executive Order S-06-09, establishing a California ICT Digital Literacy Leadership Council, which in turn, was directed to establish an ICT Digital Literacy Advisory Committee. "The Leadership Council, in consultation with the Advisory Committee, shall develop an ICT Digital Literacy Policy, to ensure that California residents are digitally literate." The Executive Order states further: "ICT Digital Literacy is defined as using digital technology, communications tools and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information in order to function in a knowledge-based economy and society..." The Governor directs "...The Leadership Council, in consultation with the Advisory Committee... [to] develop a California Action Plan for ICT Digital Literacy (Action Plan)." He also directs "The California Workforce Investment Board (WIB)... [to] develop a technology literacy component for its five-year Strategic State Plan." His Executive Order ends with the following: "I FURTHER REQUEST that the Legislature and Superintendent of Public Instruction consider adopting similar goals, and that they join the Leadership Council in issuing a "Call to Action" to schools, higher education institutions, employers, workforce training agencies, local governments, community organizations, and civic leaders to advance California as a global leader in ICT Digital Literacy".

Information literacy rose to national consciousness in the U.S. with President Barack Obama's Proclamation designating October 2009 as National Information Literacy Awareness Month.
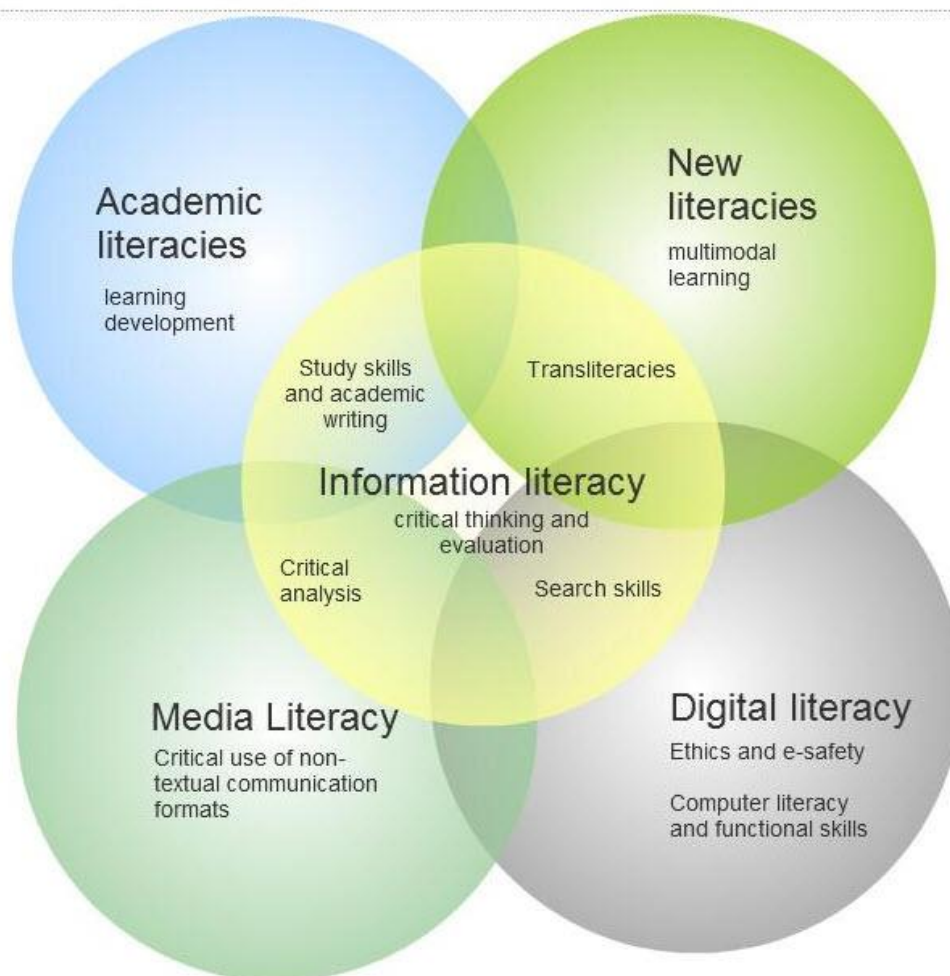
Presidential Committee on Information Literacy

The Presidential Committee on Information Literacy was formed in 1987 by the American Library Association's president at the time Margaret Chisholm. The committee was formed with three specific purposes

- to define Information Literacy within the higher literacies and its importance to student performance, lifelong learning, and active citizenship
- to design one or more models for information literacy development appropriate to formal and informal learning environments throughout people's lifetimes
- to determine implications for the continuing education and development for teachers[18]

National Forum on Information Literacy

In 1983, the seminal report "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" declared that a "rising tide of mediocrity" was eroding the very foundations of the American educational system. It was, in fact, the genesis of the current educational reform movement within the United States. Ironically, the report did not include in its set of reform recommendations the academic and/or the public library as one

of the key architects in the redesign of our K-16 educational system. This report and several others that followed, in conjunction with the rapid emergence of the information society, led the American Library Association (ALA) to convene a blue ribbon panel of national educators and librarians in 1987. The ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy was charged with the following tasks:

(1) to define information literacy within the higher literacies and its importance to student performance, lifelong learning, and active citizenship;

(2) to design one or more models for information literacy development appropriate to formal and informal learning environments throughout people's lifetimes; and

(3) to determine implications for the continuing education and development of teachers.

The forum today

Since 1989, the National Forum on Information Literacy has evolved steadily under the leadership of its first chair, Dr. Patricia Senn Breivik. Today, the Forum represents over 90 national and international organizations, all dedicated to mainstreaming the philosophy of information literacy across national and international landscapes, and throughout every educational, domestic, and workplace venue.

The National Forum on Information Literacy will continue to work closely with educational, business, and non-profit organizations in the U.S. to promote information literacy skill development at every opportunity, particularly in light of the ever-growing social, economic, and political urgency of globalization, prompting citizens to re-energize our promotional and collaborative efforts.

Specific aspects

In "Information Literacy as a Liberal Art", Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shelley K. Hughes (1996) advocated a more holistic approach to information literacy education, one that encouraged not merely the addition of information technology courses as an adjunct to existing curricula, but rather a radically new conceptualization of "our entire educational curriculum in terms of information". Seven important components of a holistic approach to information literacy:

Tool literacy, or the ability to understand and use the practical and conceptual tools of current information technology relevant to education and the areas of work and professional life that the individual expects to inhabit.

Resource literacy, or the ability to understand the form, format, location and access methods of information resources, especially daily expanding networked information resources.

Social-structural literacy, or understanding how information is socially situated and produced.

Research literacy, or the ability to understand and use the IT-based tools relevant to the work of today's researcher and scholar.

Publishing literacy, or the ability to format and publish research and ideas electronically, in textual and multimedia forms ... to introduce them into the electronic public realm and the electronic community of scholars.

Emerging technology literacy, or the ability to continuously adapt to, understand, evaluate and make use of the continually emerging innovations in information technology so as not to be a prisoner of prior tools and resources, and to make intelligent decisions about the adoption of new ones.

Critical literacy, or the ability to evaluate critically the intellectual, human and social strengths and weaknesses, potentials and limits, benefits and costs of information technologies.

Critical literacy as "[habits] of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse".

CONCLUSION

Education professionals must underscore the importance of high information quality. Students must be trained to distinguish between fact and opinion. They must be encouraged to use cue words such as "I think" and "I feel" to help distinguish between factual information and opinions. Information related skills that are complex or difficult to comprehend must be broken down into smaller parts. Another approach would be to train students in familiar contexts. Education professionals should encourage students to examine "causes" of behaviors, actions and events. Research shows that people evaluate more effectively if causes are revealed, where available. Information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via a selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences (Association of College, p. 5).

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