Information Literacy and the Connection to Lifelong Learning –

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Being information literate, which the American Library Association (ALA) defines as the ability to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information, is inextricably linked to the development of learning and the level to which we engage with the world we live in.

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) states in the 2005 Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning that information literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. That it 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 of all nations. It further states that lifelong learning enables individuals, communities and nations to attain their goals and to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the evolving global environment for shared benefit.

These statements on information literacy are unequivocal and should empower all of us to consider the implications of them on our New Zealand society, while we also consider how we equip our current population and prepare our future population to become highly functioning citizens in every capacity of their lives.

Background

Increasingly educators have come to recognise that information literate individuals are those who have learned how to learn, and therefore students need to be appropriately prepared for both academic pursuits beyond secondary education and for the workforce where employers are seeking those who have essential skills to contribute to our productivity and success.

Information literacy (IL), a term first coined by Paul Zirkowski over 40 years ago, does not stand apart from other literacies. Instead it intersects and complements traditionally understood literacies with new and developing ones such as digital literacy, media literacy and transliteracy, defined as the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks. It also underpins critical literacy, which is more often associated
with the seeking and information behaviours observed in commonly understood library practices vi.

**New Zealand Context**

The New Zealand Education Review Office in their 2005 report Student Learning in the Information Landscape defines IL as a process of acquiring the skills, attitudes and values for effectively navigating and using the information landscape, including the internet. vii They go on to state information literacy needs to be taught explicitly throughout students’ schooling and across the curriculum to ensure they learn to apply it, as a matter of course, in all their encounters with information. It is about giving students the skills to “engage with information as the basis for developing a sophisticated understanding of the world and their place in it and for becoming informed, fully-contributing citizens.” viii

The most recent iteration of the New Zealand Curriculum, published ten years ago, implies the development of IL skills by using terms such as: life-long learners; learning to learn; managing self; critical and creative thinkers, and active seekers, users and creators of knowledge throughout the document. ix However, nowhere in the statements or descriptors of the vision, key competencies, values or principles of this important document does it explicitly use the term information literacy, allowing for the potential for it to be unintentionally overlooked as schools implement them into their curriculum teaching.

Educational research consultant Penny Moore asserts

“Rather than being merely an ‘add-on’ to the curriculum or requiring ‘integration’ with it, the information literacy demands of learning need to be exposed and explicitly supported. They weave together the essential skills of the National Curriculum to provide the fabric of learning in all curriculum areas.” ix

Three years prior to the adoption of the current New Zealand curriculum, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa Services to Schools partnered with the Ministry of Education to develop The School Library and Learning in the Information Landscape: Guidelines for New Zealand Schools.
In the resulting publication, IL is listed as the first of six guiding principles, which make up a framework for schools seeking to develop and improve their libraries. The IL guiding principle describes the school library as a learning environment central to the development of an information-literate school community, and among the eight critical success factors listed is included:

- the school’s staff share an educational philosophy of and a commitment to a school-wide information literacy programme in which the library plays a critical role
- library staff have information literacy expertise and work collaboratively with all teaching staff in the information literacy programme
- an on-going professional development programme in information literacy is established for classroom teachers

The Education Review Office based their assessment of student learning in the information landscape on these guidelines during visits to 314 state schools during Term 4 of 2004 and Term 1 of 2005. Their assessment focused on three broad areas:

1. Connection – the infrastructure that brings information resources into the learner’s environment;
2. Content of those resources, and
3. Capability and confidence – the skills, attitudes and values related to information literacy.

The resulting report found IL was a particularly weak area. In most primary and secondary schools, teachers had incorporated aspects of IL into their teaching but there were few examples of a school-wide, integrated approach using an information process model.

The report goes on to make several clear recommendations around government agencies taking a national leadership role in several key areas including, aligning IL development, reviewing current assessment tools, establishing a school-wide cross-curriculum approach to IL development, designing whole-school professional development in teaching and assessing IL skills, and linking the school library’s role in supporting IL.

Sadly, there is no evidence of the government actioning any of these key recommendations and a dozen years later there is still no comprehensive, consistent and visible IL approach in
New Zealand schools. That said there are pockets of excellent examples of an IL strategy in some schools around the country.

**Information Literacy Frameworks and Models**

There are numerous IL frameworks and models\(^{\text{xvi}}\), which schools can adopt to ensure an integrated process and development of specific skills taught through all curriculum areas. This example is a hybrid of several of these and while simple enough to introduce younger students to the concept, remains suitable to use with students through to NCEA level achievement standards.

Evaluation of the evidence of student ability to grasp IL skills leads to targeted teaching taking place while research and inquiry is undertaken in classrooms.
In order to explicitly teach and embed these skills across year levels and departments, the author has developed an Information Literacy Skills Framework. This framework has been developed to show an explicit progression of skills, establish a shared school-wide understanding of IL concepts and initiate discussion between teachers and librarians, as well as promote collaborative planning and teaching of IL skills. This approach to teaching IL skills draws on the expertise and knowledge of both the teaching and library professionals and ultimately leads to a richer and contextual learning experience for students. It also deliberately determines that core IL skills be taught more than once and in more than one subject area to promote deeper levels of understanding. This repetition of skills leads students to be better able to select and use particular skills to suit their needs.

**Information Literacy and the Internet - The Google Effect**

As finding and using information via the internet becomes increasingly ubiquitous, so does the need for people to have a greater understanding of how search engines such as Google operate, how to identify what their information need is, and then how to use search tools effectively to find, select and evaluate what is relevant and appropriate information.

Author Eli Pariser in his book The Filter Bubble, What the Internet is Hiding From You, explains how web companies such as Google and Facebook strive to tailor their searches based on your preferences, but as a consequence we can become trapped in a filter bubble. This can lead to us not being exposed to information that could challenge or broaden our worldview and which Pariser and others argue could be bad for us and ultimately bad for
democracy. xvii We could in effect by operating in an echo chamber, only hearing what we want to hear.

While we need to become proficient at manipulating search engines to work best for us, we also need to understand when and why to move beyond relying solely on Google to find information. There is a wealth of quality information contained in areas of the web not simply accessed through a search engine. Databases are used extensively in the academic tertiary context, but all New Zealanders have access to databases through their public libraries and at school through the government providing access via Electronic Purchasing In Collaboration (EPIC), xviii a consortium of member libraries negotiating the purchase of databases for all New Zealanders.

There is also a vast array of other curated online sources, many initiated and administered by National Library of New Zealand, including AnyQuestions, Topic Explorer Digital NZ and Papers Past. While some of these resources may show up in a Google search, many will not, and it is important we are able to seek information in a wider sphere when necessary.

A recent PEW Research Centre report indicates one of the positive impacts on students’ interactions with online information is the greater depth and breadth of information available, which can lead to more engaged researchers, however the need for IL skills becomes crucial when those same students face selecting and evaluating relevant, quality information. xix

**Current New Zealand Research**

In 2013 Associate Professor Lisa Emerson, along with associates Angela Feekery and Ken Kilpin began action research into investigating how to more effectively enable students’ transition to tertiary learning through academic literacy learning interventions at senior secondary school and first-year tertiary study. xx At the conclusion of the two-year teaching and learning research initiative, the team found that:

“The gap between secondary and tertiary education in terms of literacy and the learning environment is bigger than anyone is acknowledging.”xxi

Their research identified three issues:

1. independent learning skills,
2. a significant disconnect between secondary and tertiary sector views about the role of writing in relation to learning and,

3. students’ search skills were limited—often restricted to simple Google searches—and they showed a lack of awareness of available databases; in many disciplines, they rarely engaged with primary texts; and they were insufficiently trained to avoid practices which might lead to plagiarism

A programme that addresses both the academic transition literacy gap identified by Emerson and her team and the ERO recommendation for schools’ IL development is The Tertiary Prep Programme. This is a series of tutorial-style sessions designed to support and develop skills and learning needed for students, not only to elevate results achieved during level 3 NCEA but also to bridge the gap between learning and succeeding at a secondary and tertiary level.

Each session covers a particular aspect of learning and set of skills required for academic study. This programme includes support in managing research, information, resources and study. The programme has been used as the basis of transition programmes in several New Zealand secondary schools, including a pilot transition programme between Waimea College and Canterbury University in 2016.

Continuing to increase the current New Zealand research into IL competencies and learning across the senior secondary and tertiary sectors, Emerson and an expanded team of researchers successfully secured in 2016 a three-year Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. This initiative is looking at a collaborative teacher/librarian action research approach to addressing the gap between intention and outcomes around IL skills for students in both sectors.
During her doctoral study and the initial research initiative in 2013-14, Dr Angela Feekery became very interested in developing her understanding of IL as an holistic concept and was strongly impacted by the ANCIL IL Landscape model. xxvii As Feekery’s understanding of IL and its relevance to a range of contexts developed, she began to explore key concepts that underpinned IL in what she and the research team identified as a complex ‘space’. xxviii The Feekery Model shows a wider development of connections than the original ANCIL model it is based on.

The Feekery Model is now informing the parameters for the current IL research team.

**Information Literacy in action**

One of the most common barriers to schools not having an integrated whole-school approach is not willingness but rather understanding of how to approach it and embed skills into the curriculum. Using a defined research process and the ILSF to inform planning and identify the professional learning required for teachers will lead to engagement of staff with the process. Most teachers understand the need to teach IL skills and the educational pedagogy that underpins it, but many struggle with how that will successfully translate into their teaching practice.

In the student context, the use of an explicit process and understanding why they need to use these skills will move them beyond rudimentary to proficient use and selection, and enable them to identify where in the process they are in a more explicit, visible and contextual manner.
An example of this seen through the development of the note taking and making progression on the ILSF could look something like this.

### Year 7
Mind Maps: Introduction to recording prior knowledge (if any) of a topic, identify areas of interest for inquiry, form questions & make connections between key ideas.

### Year 8
Fact Gathering: Recording facts uncovered in initial phase of research. Key questions developed and specific information gathered using Dot Jot method.

### Year 9
Synthesis of Information: combining notes made to evaluate information & consider links in the research (understanding new knowledge) Examples: Pros & Cons – Fact or Fiction – Causes & Consequences.

### Year 10
Making Notes: Introduce note making and the difference from note taking and encourage selection of notes format to suit the information need.

### Year 11
Notes Revision: In preparation for first external NCEA exams, teach how to use subject notes for revision purposes.

### Year 12
Annotated Notes: Add the skills of annotating resources, identifying potential quotes to use in assignments and using those in essays and reports.

### Year 13
Cornell Note-taking: Teach and practice the skill of active note-taking while listening to lectures or instructions.

Teachers and librarians can examine how the progressions build and connect to engage and instruct students’ learning cohesively from Years 7 to 13.
Everyday IL skills

The New Zealand government has been working towards implementing its national 2.0 digital strategy since announcing it in 2008. The four enablers to achieving goals and targets are based on feedback from key stakeholders and the Digital Future Summit in November 2007.

- Connection (widespread, affordable, fast broadband and access to content across multiple platforms using multiple devices)
- Capability (the digital skills of our population create a competitive advantage for New Zealand)
- Confidence (secure and trusted digital networks and universal understanding of online safety, security and privacy issues)
- Content (unlock the creative potential of New Zealand’s content, both digital and non-digital).xxix

In order for New Zealanders to harness and engage with the government’s digital outcomes, it is imperative that they have the commensurate IL skills to take full advantage of an increasingly digital world.

While the government policies around ultra-fast broadband accessibility to all of New Zealand continues to be rolled out, it must be acknowledged that this is only a conduit by which people access the internet, not the mechanism by which they engage meaningfully with the content. In fact, the current government digital direction only increases the urgency for comprehensive understanding of how mastering IL skills fits into everyday lives. IL skills can commonly be mistaken for computer skills. However, this is less about understanding how to turn on a computer or use hardware and software, and more about finding the relevant content to engage with to create and communicate new content and knowledge where applicable or desired.

As we come to terms with the constantly morphing and shifting tectonics of our current global political landscape, which reaches into our own New Zealand context, our need for critical thinking and evaluation skills have never been more crucial. In the Brexit-Trump alternative facts, fake news environments, it has never been more pertinent to be able to analyse and synthesise the information bombarding us via a multitude of channels, including social media commentaries.
The recently shared How to Spot Fake News information from IFLA has shone a timely beacon of light on the place of libraries in this arena. It creates excellent discussion opportunities and is a teaching tool for educators to use in their lessons on critical evaluation while also being something parents can use to initiate discussions with their children at home.

This information is not only timely but of huge importance in clearing the blurred lines between news reporting and social media gossip. It sits firmly alongside the CRAAP test (currency, relevancy, accuracy, authority & purpose) that has been a staple of online searching and evaluating resource lessons in school libraries for a number of years.

IL is in fact pervasive in every aspect of human lives but remains largely hidden or obscured. While librarians have been wrestling with the concept of IL and other literacies, we as a society have only just begun to scratch the surface, mine the opportunities and unearth the potential for meaningful, deep and satisfying interactions in the Information Age we live in.
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