

Editorial

Information literacy, a worldwide priority for the twenty-first century

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Abstract

Concentrates on information literacy, by way of attendance at an international symposium, which was a common theme by the speakers. Records that information literacy is a worldwide phenomenon and not just a movement in the USA. Concludes it is important that students build on a strong foundation of information literacy skills and abilities using the faculty-librarian partnerships fully to do this.

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Recently, I went to an international symposium in San Francisco titled, "Emerging visions for access in the 21st century library" presented by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), an independent nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC and the California Digital Library (CDL), the 11th university library of the University of California established in 1997 to build the university's digital library. The symposium attracted attendees from around the world and was advertised as focusing on key information issues in information science relating to digital libraries, the economics of information, and resources for scholarship.

Prominent speakers, addressing the topic of "The library and society: emerging roles for the library as a civic institution," were chief administrators from the Danish National Library Authority, the Australian National University, and the Queens Borough Public Library.

Much to my surprise, and delight, a common theme in each speaker's remarks was information literacy.

We tend to think of information literacy as primarily an academic library movement in the USA, but it is truly an international phenomenon with active programs under way in Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe, Mexico, the Middle East, New Zealand, Scandinavia, South America, the UK, the USA, and elsewhere.

We know that information literacy is no longer just a library issue. It is the critical issue for the twenty-first century, of keen importance to all educational stakeholders, including faculty, librarians, and administrators. The increasingly complex world in which we live contains an abundance of information choices and formats. Those individuals who are knowledgeable about finding, evaluation, analyzing, integrating, managing, and conveying information to others effectively and efficiently are held in high esteem. These are the students, workers, and citizens who are most successful at solving problems, providing solutions, and producing new ideas and directions for the future. They are the lifelong learners, and can stay globally connected in our multicultural world.



As noted by Anthony Comper, former president of the Bank of Montreal who spoke to the 1999 graduating class of the University of Toronto: "Whatever else you bring to the twenty-first century workplace, however great your technical skills and however attractive your attitude and however deep your commitment to excellence, the bottom line is that to be successful, you need to acquire a high level of information literacy"[1].

Patricia Breivik, Dean of the Library at San Jose State University (California), in a speech delivered at the International Lifelong Learning Conference held in Australia in 2000 adds, "Within today's information society, the most important learning outcome for all students is their being able to function as independent lifelong learners. The essential enabler to reaching that goal is information literacy."[2]

Within the higher education environment, it is important for students to be able to build on a foundation of information literacy skills and abilities by transferring their learning from course to course, and demonstrating ethical behavior and academic integrity as consumers, and producers, of information. Responsibility for helping students to reach this goal, and for assessing their progress, is best accomplished through faculty-librarian partnerships which support both formal and informal learning communities on the campuses.

Yet, much information literacy education is also taking place in public libraries as part of everyday reference work, families for literacy programs, and outreach services to elementary and secondary schools.

In addition, we cannot ignore the importance of developing multiple literacies among our citizens; that is, the abilities to be media literate, visually literate, globally literate, technologically literate, numerically literate, and emotionally literate, to name just a few. All are important in our inter-connected, geopolitical, knowledge-based society. For more information on these and other topics, see the Web page www.21stcenturyliteracy.org/ about the 2002 information literacy summit held last year in Berlin, sponsored by the Bertelsman Foundation and the AOL-Time Warner Foundation.

Let us continue our work to keep the conversations moving forward about the importance of all citizens having access to important information literacy skills in the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 "Information literacy key to success in 21st century Bank of Montreal CEO advises University of Toronto Graduates", *Canada Newswire*, 14 June 1999.
- 2 <http://elvis.cqu.edu.au/conference/2000/home.htm>