

## **Information literacy, policy issues and employability**

JOHN CRAWFORD

Independent Libraries Professionals, United Kingdom

CHRISTINE IRVING

Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom

**ABSTRACT** Although the term information literacy dates back to 1974 it has developed as a powerful information ideology only in the past twenty years. There is still much debate about how it should be defined and what topics it embraces. It remains largely located within the information profession but within the past ten years it has been promoted as an international ideology with links to civil and human rights, lifelong learning and employability. Much of the research and development work within the sector has taken place in higher education where, while it has been promoted as an employability skill, it has been taught as an individual, rather than a collective skill and has been librarian directed. However information literacy as a collaborative, team based skill is now more recognised in the workplace although skill levels are often poor and there is a lack of overall strategic thinking. In promoting information literacy as an employability skill working with appropriate partners is essential as is the identification of specific appropriate information skills. Examples of good practice are included drawn from research and development work and community of practice activities. Sharing practice issues are explored and the role of communities of practice is explained.

*Key words:* Information literacy, lifelong learning, information society, employability, skills development, workplace, librarianship

### **Definitions of information literacy**

The practice of identifying different types of literacy is a relatively modern one and literacies now include digital literacy, computer literacy, political literacy and cultural literacy (National Writing Project 2014). Of these information literacy is one of the oldest, the term having been coined by Paul Zurkowski in 1974 (Zurkowski, 1974) and its origins were not specifically located in higher education. Zurkowski used the phrase to describe the "techniques and skills" known by the information literate "for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solutions to their problems". Zurkowski himself was founding president of the US Information Industries Association, a trade and industry association which represented the USA's leading print publishers. One advocacy strategy he employed was to insist that because information products and services, aided and abetted by the exploding ICT technologies, were beginning to multiply it was necessary for informed citizens and policy makers to become more 'literate' in their use of these information services and products. However Zurkowski himself admitted that there was little understanding of what the term meant until about ten years after he had coined it (Horton 2011).

Other writers at the time expanded the concept to include an instrument of political emancipation and a requirement for competitiveness in organisations (Pinto et al 2010). The 1980s was a transition decade characterised by the rapid development of ICT technologies and in particular the appearance of the first personal computers. A key early and enduring document is the American Library Association's *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report* (ALA 1989). The committee outlined six principal recommendations:

1. To "reconsider the ways we have organized information institutionally, structured information access, and defined information's role in our lives at home in the community, and in the work place";
2. To promote "public awareness of the problems created by information illiteracy";
3. To develop a national research agenda related to information and its use;
4. To ensure the existence of "a climate conducive to students' becoming information literate";
5. To include information literacy concerns in teacher education; and
6. To promote public awareness of the relationship between information literacy and the more general goals of "literacy, productivity, and democracy"

This wide ranging statement shows that a clear role was identified for information literacy in the workplace, lifelong learning and as a civil and civic right. However the 90s was a period when librarians became increasingly dissatisfied with traditional user education and began to search for a more meaningful and appropriate term for an age of increasingly self directed learning and the term information literacy began to replace user education. It was also a period when information literacy became principally located in education and especially in higher education where the librarian became both its main advocate and also its proprietor. The new century has seen the internationalisation of the concept with increasing support from UNESCO which has resulted in two

major international policy statements, the Prague Declaration (UNESCO 2003) and the Alexandria Proclamation (Garner 2005). These are major advocacy tools. The Prague Declaration outlined the following principles:

- The creation of an Information Society is key to social, cultural and economic development of nations and communities, institutions and individuals in the 21st century and beyond.
- Information Literacy encompasses knowledge of one's information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand; it is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and is part of the basic human right of lifelong learning.
- Information Literacy, in conjunction with access to essential information and effective use of information and communication technologies, plays a leading role in reducing the inequities within and among countries and peoples, and in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding through information use in multicultural and multilingual contexts.
- Governments should develop strong interdisciplinary programs to promote Information Literacy nationwide as a necessary step in closing the digital divide through the creation of an information literate citizenry, an effective civil society and a competitive workforce.
- Information Literacy is a concern to all sectors of society and should be tailored by each to its specific needs and context.
- Information Literacy should be an integral part of Education for All, which can contribute critically to the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These principles link information literacy to wider human rights issues, specifically links it to the information society, defines it and links it civil rights, the closure of the digital divide, reduction of inequality and improvement in workplace performance. It also suggests that information literacy is not a fixed concept but 'should be tailored by each to its specific needs and context'. The Alexandria Proclamation (Garner 2005) reiterates some of these points. Information literacy:

- comprises the competencies to recognise information needs and to locate, evaluate, apply and create information within cultural and social contexts;
- is crucial to the competitive advantage of individuals, enterprises (especially small and medium enterprises), regions and nations;
- provides the key to effective access, use and creation of content to support economic development, education, health and human services, and all other aspects of contemporary societies, and thereby provides the vital foundation for fulfilling the goals of the Millennium Declaration and the World Summit on the Information Society; and
- extends beyond current technologies to encompass learning, critical thinking and interpretative skills across professional boundaries and empowers individuals and communities.

It links information literacy strongly with critical thinking and goes on to urge links with lifelong learning.

Information literacy and lifelong learning are related concepts: they are both largely self motivated and self directed and do not need the mediation of an outsider, individual or corporate (assuming, of course, that the individual has the necessary knowledge and skills), they are both self empowering and benefit everyone irrespective of social or economic status and there are both 'self actualising' or self enlightening processes especially if practiced over a lifetime (Horton 2008: 3-4).

Information literacy is therefore about personal and civil rights, participative citizenship, lifelong learning, using technology wisely, the reduction of the digital divide, skills and economic development, education and critical thinking and the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle.

How information literacy should be defined has been the subject of much scholarly debate (Bawden 2001). Paul Zurkowski described information literate people as: 'People trained in the application of information resources to their work...' emphasizing the importance of the workplace but in 1979 the US Information Industries Association widened the definition of an information literate person as someone who 'knows the techniques and skills for using information tools in molding solutions to problems' and C. S. Doyle (1994), succinctly defined it as 'the ability to access, evaluate and use information from a variety of sources', a definition which in various forms has survived ever since. However, by the early 90s two critical factors had emerged: there was little agreement within the information profession about what information literacy actually is and there was little understanding of the concept outside the profession. There was also criticism of the idea as being too 'library-centred' and that information should include films, television, posters, conversations etc. The coming of widespread use of the Internet in the 90s greatly strengthened this view. In 1989, the American Library Association (1989) offered a new definition:

*To be information literate an individual must recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed.... Ultimately information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how information is organised, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them.*

Despite attempts to broaden the definition of information literacy and make it less 'library centred' it became increasingly linked with formal education and was taken up enthusiastically by academic librarians who saw it as a natural progression from traditional bibliographic instruction and who, in the United States had seen a considerable expansion in student demand for training in information skills at the expense of reference services. However it is not clear to what extent this was a genuine policy change or simply a rebranding exercise. Information literacy in higher education came also to be linked with the idea of a hierarchy or 'laddering' of skills by which various levels of information skill were linked to successive levels of undergraduate and post graduate learning, a good example of which is the SCONUL Seven Pillars of information Literacy (SCONUL 2011). This has led to dominance of the concept by academic and to a

lesser extent by school librarians which has reinforced the ‘library centred’ model of information literacy as a skill imparted by and dominated by librarians and one which has an element of academic assessment. This has led to a focus on individual student performance and the development of self sufficiency through independent learning. However the debate is now widening thanks to a growing interest in workplace and wider community studies although these, for the most part, are attempts to translate librarians’ perceptions in relation to the operationalisation of a list of skills and standards derived from the education sector. There is little reflection on whether information skills appropriate to the education sector are valued by workers and their employers. It also appears to be accepted that information literacy focuses on individual information use rather than information use as a collective activity. In reality workers use other workers embodied knowledge and experience as a source of evaluated information. Research suggests that the role of the community is central to information literacy practice and that information literacy is not a skill but a practice which takes place through a range of social activities. Information literacy is therefore to be understood as a collaborative and communal activity. To complicate matters further the language used by the information sector does not mean much outside it, which means that, when the term, information literacy, leaves its domain, it loses its power (Lloyd 2011: 279-283). Within the profession itself sectoral approaches tend to be dissimilar and specific to the needs of the sector. In the health sector information literacy tends to be evidence based but in special libraries a more corporate approach may apply. Academics tend to be concerned with learning outcomes and pedagogy while public librarians are more concerned with social inclusion. A study of the use of the term in the published literature showed that 50% of the documents analysed derived from the subject areas of information, education and computing. Business and management were insignificant areas (Pinto et al 2010: 14). For those concerned with information literacy in relation to lifelong learning issues the previous emphasis on education, problems with definitions and authority outside the information world represent major challenges.

The definition adopted for this article is proposed by The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP 2004) which could be ‘understandable by all information-using communities in the UK’:

*Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner.*

This definition implies several skills. We believe that the skills (or competencies) that are required to be information literate require an understanding of:

- A need for information
- The resources available
- How to find information
- The need to evaluate results
- How to work with or exploit results
- Ethics and responsibility of use
- How to communicate or share your findings
- How to manage your findings

The present writers have used this definition in a variety of contexts including workplace and employability studies in which interviewees were presented with this definition. It was found that they understand it immediately and then began to reinterpret it in the contexts of their own education, qualifications, work experience, personal and professional contacts and life experiences. Information literacy has sometimes been compared to a chameleon which changes colour according to the circumstances in which it finds itself and this is a useful metaphor for a concept which changes with the needs of the situation.

The problem with definitions is not just a theoretical issue. It confuses the debate about policy making and advocacy for it. The policy process itself is complex. It includes groups of people from a variety of sectors including government agencies, legislatures, research, journalism and the general public. The process itself can take at least ten years (Weiner 2011:298). A policymaking issue should be unambiguous and this poses a problem while information literacy is still relatively unclear both as a concept and a practice (Haras and Brasley 2011: 368).

Based on their experience of the Scottish Information Literacy Project, Crawford and Irving (2013:251) have noted:

*To understand information literacy today we have to include not only the evaluation and use of traditional 'library' sources but also social policy issues, relating to the relief of inequality and disadvantage, skills development for a post industrial society, critical thinking and lifelong learning, an activity which information literacy informs and supports. There is also the issue of digital literacy, school and higher education curricula, early years learning, health issues, the dynamics of the workplace, learning and teaching skills and strategies with an increasing emphasis on teaching and learning in informal situations.*

And Haras and Bradley have warned:

'effective policy formulation and implementation rely on an unambiguous definition of the problem, while information literacy remains difficult to characterize.' (Haras and Brasley 2011: 368)

### **Information and the information society**

What information is has attracted various definitions and interpretations. It is often related to such concepts as meaning, knowledge, communication, truth and representation and mental stimulus (UNESCO 2009:123-124).

Elizabeth Orna, coming from an organisational perspective has noted:

'One of the ironies of the "information revolution" is that so few of those involved can give any definition of what information is' (Orna 1999: 18). She offers her own definition:

*Information is what human beings transform knowledge into when they want to communicate it to other people. It is knowledge made visible or audible, in written or printed words, or in speech.*

From the point of view of the *user*, information is what we seek and pay attention to in our outside world when we need to add to or enrich our knowledge in order to act

upon it. So we can usefully think of it as the *food of knowledge* because we need information and communication to nourish and maintain our knowledge and keep it in good shape for what we have to do in the world. Without the food of information, knowledge becomes enfeebled.

The transformation of information into knowledge, and knowledge into information, forms the basis for all human learning and communication... ' [Italics are author's] (Orna 1999: 8-9).

The idea of information as a form of enrichment is helpful as is the emphasis on communication. There are other definitions available, many of which focus on the idea of reducing uncertainty although this presupposes that information must be useful and reduces uncertainty which is not necessarily the case. Information can also be viewed as having two distinct elements: an act or process and a communication or message (Walker 2010: 37-38). It seems however that the appearance of a concise, generally accepted definition is unlikely.

Behind information literacy lies the concept of the information society. The term, information society, defines a society in which the creation, distribution and treatment of information have become the most significant economic and cultural activities. The information society is often contrasted with societies which are primarily industrial or agrarian. An information society also covers many related sectors which include industrial and economic policy, technology policy, telecommunications policy and a huge sector: social issues and policies that comprise e-government, education, e-health, media policy and cultural issues within which much of the material of information literacy lies (UNESCO 2009:123-124). Although information literacy activity takes place in agrarian and industrial societies in information societies information flows through information and communications technologies which can lead to confusion as to the difference between information and information technology.

### **Is there a role for international policy documents?**

As indicated above the new century has seen the appearance of international policy documents, the Prague Declaration (UNESCO 2003) and the Alexandria Proclamation (Garner 2005) but there must be doubt about their impact, as despite a strong congruence with UK educational and skills policies, they have attracted no Government support in the UK although CILIP rather belatedly adopted the Alexandria Proclamation in 2012. More recently the IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations 2014) Media and Information Literacy Recommendations have appeared. The core recommendations are somewhat sharper than previous documents and aim to embed information literacy in all aspects of learning and teaching, skills development and employability:

- Commission research on the state of Media and Information Literacy and produce reports, using the Media and Information Literacy indicators as a base, so that experts, educators, and practitioners are able to design effective initiatives;
- Support professional development for education, library, information, archive, and health and human services personnel in the principles and practices of Media and Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning;

- Embed Media and Information Literacy education in all Lifelong Learning curricula;
- Recognise Media and Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning as key elements for the development of generic capabilities which must be demonstrated for accreditation of all education and training programmes;
- Include Media and Information Literacy in the core and continuing education of information professionals, educators, economic and government policy-makers and administrators, as well as in the practice of advisors to the business, industry and agriculture sectors;
- Implement Media and Information Literacy programmes to increase the employability and entrepreneurial capacities of women and disadvantaged groups, including migrants, the underemployed and the unemployed; and,
- Support thematic meetings which will facilitate the acquisition of Media and Information and Lifelong Learning strategies within specific regions, sectors, and population group.

What distinguishes this document from its predecessors is the explicit support it has received from UNESCO which recommends its adoption within member states ((International Federation of Library Associations 2014). This clearly represents an opportunity for information literacy advocates.

### **The role of the librarian**

#### *Information literacy research and development*

As indicated above, although information literacy originated in the business world, it has found a natural home in higher education and to a lesser extent schools where it has become linked to curriculum development and innovative learning strategies related to independent learning. Higher education librarians teach information literacy which is promoted as a lifelong employability skill and a subject which can be assessed just like any other. In this context information literacy is conceived as an individual, rather than a collaborative skill and one on which the student is directed along learning paths pre-determined by the librarian. This has had an impact on the role of the librarian who has moved from being a collection manager to a facilitator and teacher and it has to be said an authority figure. There is no doubt that this change of emphasis has been beneficial to librarians who have seen their status grow as they involve themselves in independent learning strategies which place a strong emphasis on problem solving and constructivist learning.

Until relatively recently the workplace and the wider community have attracted much less interest and the role of the librarian has been much less significant. In the workplace there is more interest in information and its value in the public sector rather than the private sector. As with other spheres of information literacy activity subject is a major factor with organisations concerned with health, welfare and management showing more interest in the value of information than organisations concerned with engineering or IT (Webber et al 2005). Information usage in the workplace is a col-

laborative and frequently unstructured activity and not librarian directed. The problem is most acute in small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) employing a handful of staff who have information needs but lack the necessary training.

*Moving beyond higher education*

Other information sectors present a contrasting picture. In public libraries learning is informal and formal assessment is less likely to be used as this is seen as discouraging to learners. Library staff are rarely trained in teaching methods and tend to use instructivist methods derived from their own learning experiences (O'Beirne 2010:69). However this is to a greater or lesser extent compensated for by the excellent customer care skills which librarians have developed over the past twenty years (Crawford 2000: 1-3) and the IT skills which they increasingly possess. Learning activities in public libraries are often linked to disadvantage and training has something of a remedial character and typically entails basic IT skills training and employability skills development often with a substantial information literacy component. Unlike other sectors collaboration with other organisations such as Jobs Centre Plus and Community Learning and Development staff is a key feature. Considerable sensitivity is needed in training public library learners as they have often had negative experiences of scholastic education and any teaching style redolent of the classroom is to be avoided. Overall the public library represents the antithesis of higher education as encouragement and the exercise of empathetic skills is valued over academic achievement (Ashcroft et al 2007).

The school library more closely resembles the higher education environment although formal assessment linked to the curriculum is rare. Typically the school library provides a wide range of non-fiction and fiction that expands pupil's minds and horizons. The school librarian encourages pupils to develop good information literacy skills through the use of books and internet and advises on its safe use. Using the library at lunchtimes and after school hours helps pupils develop, self confidence and self esteem and the school librarian can help pupils to find career information and assist pupils with college, university and job applications and personal statement preparation (McCracken 2014)

*Information usage in the workplace*

While all the environments above are, to a greater or lesser degree structured the same, the same cannot be said for the workplace. While in other sectors information seeking is linear and structured, in the workplace information seeking is by trial and error. The formulation of search strategies is often poor and getting information is not always equal to getting the answer the organisation needs. Information seeking also tends to be a group, rather than individual activity (Lloyd 2010: 75-76).

Crawford and Irving in their study of information usage in the workplace (2009) found a picture very much at odds with the traditional library and information environment. The traditional 'library' view of information as deriving from electronic and printed sources only and one which characterizes higher and secondary education is invalid in the workplace where people, usually colleagues, are viewed as sources of

information and who can be evaluated just like conventional sources. The views of people with appropriate qualifications, experience and training are valued over those who are not viewed as expert. An understanding of what constitutes information literacy is widespread in the workplace but is often implicit rather than explicit and is based on qualifications, experience, and networking activities. Formal information literacy policy statements are rare.

Structured information searching based on education and skill levels using ladder frameworks such as the SCONUL Seven Pillars (SCONUL 2011) are unknown in the workplace but a substitute does exist in the skill levels and qualifications of staff with those with higher level qualifications better able to formulate information enquiries and identify sources than those without. The public enterprise with its emphasis on skills and qualifications linked to employment level is an environment where the need for information and how it may be found offers more scope for information literate activity than much of the private sector, especially SMEs where there is less understanding of the need for information. In fact the assumption is often made that staff come to the workplace already equipped with information seeking skills (Irving 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Such information literacy skills that such people have were probably acquired at university. While advanced Internet training which explains such procedures as search refining greatly extends employees' information horizons, information literacy training programmes must be highly focused on the target audience. Generic training programmes which do not address the specific needs of particular workplace situations are unlikely to be successful.

These findings have been confirmed and extended by Alison Head's research (2013: 87-88). She undertook a study of newly employed American university graduates (new hires). Information problems in the workplace often call for retrieving information using a variety of formats and although graduates demonstrated a high level of skill in searching the internet, employers found new recruits were less likely to use other sources, such as offline documentation, specialized databases, and sources of tacit knowledge within their organizations.

Interviews with employers showed that they expected new recruits to explore a topic thoroughly upon being presented with an information problem. Instead, employers found graduates lacked both patience and persistence in engaging with a research topic, and were eager to find the one "right" answer, rather than approaching information work as a solid base for building personal knowledge in the workplace.

### **Finding partners**

In promoting information literacy as an employability skill it is necessary to find groups or organisations to work with although some are more promising than others. Skills development agencies which exist in all the nations of the UK are fruitful territory as staff working in these organisations recognises the value of information literacy skills in job seeking and developing skills in employment. They recognise the value of information literacy as a CPD skill. Employers' organisations seem an obvious area where information skills should be valued but the present writers have found little interest among employers' organisations although chambers of commerce with their local con-

nections are perhaps more promising. During the time of the Scottish Information Literacy Project the present writers made contact with trades union learning representatives. While these initial contacts were much more fruitful than those with employers' organisations, in a time of recession trade unions have more pressing commitments and limited resources.

In the wider community public librarians work successfully in partnership with community learning and development workers and other agencies, some of them voluntary, to support employability skills development in which information often has a place. Because much of this training is aimed at the unemployed and the under skilled the academic level is quite low but this work provides essential training in deprived communities with high levels of unemployment.

### **Needed employability skills**

What information literacy skills are needed to support employability? Reedy et al (2013) in designing a workplace information literacy training programme identified the following.

- selecting and evaluating sources, assessing quality, filtering the information
- evaluating, prioritising and identifying the significance of information
- analysing and interpreting, making inferences and deductions and understanding the significance of information
- synthesising, translating, drawing implications and making recommendations
- using available tools, e.g. Google, internal search engines etc.
- managing e-mail, e.g. organising e-mail received and sent

The list is not particularly surprising as it includes most of the key issues of the information literacy paradigm. The problem the authors found was the difficulty in engaging with SMEs, the workplace sector most in need of information literacy skills and there is always a danger that these packages are too academic and reflect the background of the authors, rather than the practical needs of the workplace.

### **Employability and workplace case studies/exemplars of good practice—collecting and sharing practice**

Having looked at the discourse on information literacy and policy issues and its relationship to employability, we turn our attention to some of the employability and the workplace case studies and exemplars of good practice that have informed the writers thinking and research and development activities. Case studies and exemplars of good practice that are included in the Scottish Information Literacy Project (2004-2010), the Scottish Information Literacy Community of Practice 'The Right Information' (May 2012 onwards) and in *Information literacy and lifelong learning: policy issues, the workplace, health and public libraries* (Crawford and Irving, 2013). We also look at the benefits and issues of collecting and share case studies and exemplars of good practice and share lessons learned on strategies to employ.

As part of the Scottish Information Literacy project, good practice from different organisations, sectors and countries was sought to inform, use and develop a National Information Literacy Framework (Scotland), an overarching framework that all sectors of education could recognize and develop or that could be applied to the world of work (Irving and Crawford, 2007). During the drafting and the piloting exercise that followed there emerged a need for the framework to be enriched with exemplars of good practice to demonstrate how specific competencies can:

- be applied in practice for different academic subjects, year/age levels of pupils and students and how this could be linked to the framework, the steps involved and showing the connection
- demonstrate links to higher level complex thinking skills and innovation.

Case studies and exemplars of good practice were identified through project partnerships; personal and professional networks; professional publications, articles, websites, weblogs and other forms of social media. However more were needed. Emails sent out asking for exemplars of good practice resulted in silence and a more proactive strategy had to be adopted. Unfortunately people do not see their practice as ‘exemplars of good practice’, and a more proactive strategy needed to be devised. One that entailed the need to explore, identify, discuss, visit and see information literacy activities being carried out: then ask if the activity could be used as a case study / exemplar of good practice (Irving, 2009). At first many of these were based in schools but as the project and the framework expanded and more research was undertaken, examples of employability and workplace case studies and exemplars of good practice were identified or brought to the projects attention.

Listed below are some of the employability and workplace case studies and exemplars of good practice that the project was involved in, contributed to or helped promote. Included in the list is a national skills strategy, this is included an employability and workplace case studies supplied by the project and one of its partners, the Scottish Government Information Services.

- *NHS Scotland information literacy competency framework*—for NHS staff, patients, general public <http://www.therightinformation.org/temp-exemp-nhs/>
- *Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy*—sets out change required: a focus on individual development, a response to the needs of the economy, the demand of employers <http://www.therightinformation.org/temp-exemp-skillsforscotland/>
- *Scottish Government Information Services IL activities*—workplace training <http://www.therightinformation.org/temp-exemp-scottishgovt/>
- *iKnow (Information and Knowledge at work)*—workplace training materials <http://www.therightinformation.org/silp-blog/2009/12/16/iknow-information-and-knowledge-at-work.html>
- *Inverclyde Libraries*—employability course <http://www.therightinformation.org/temp-exemp-inverclyde/>
- *Carephilly Public Libraries* <http://www.therightinformation.org/temp-exemp-caerphilly/>

- *Govan High School Future Skills Symposium*—core transferable skills that pupils can use in schools and beyond / employability. <http://www.therightinformation.org/silp-blog/2009/5/8/govan-high-school-future-skills-symposium.html>

The next selection of case studies and exemplars of good practice is from the Scottish Information Literacy Community of Practice ‘Information skills for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scotland’ (2012) (<http://www.therightinformation.org/>). It is important to point out that whilst the community of practice has a website, the community is more than the website. Communities of practice are groups of people who ‘share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.’ (Wenger-Trayner, 2006). Members are asked to:

- Share practice
- Contribute to the communities’ knowledge of information literacy: Activities; case studies; News; conferences and events; new research
- Become involved / engage in information literacy: Advocacy; Strategies; Projects, proposals

In addition cross sector community members who act as facilitators for their sector attend bi-annual face to face meetings. Employability is a topic that is raised and discussed by all sectors. At the first face to face meeting, the sector facilitators’ main areas of interest included, information literacy in relation to employability and workplace issues. Issues such as:

- Information literacy as an employability skill
- Instructing teachers in information literacy
- Workplace information literacy skills social media
- Identifying training and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) needs

To date, activities shared through the community of practice have included:

- Dundee College’s Literacy Information Skills Project
- SMILE – a free information literacy resource
- National Library of Scotland’s new information literacy resource ‘Project Blaster’ toolkit for producing projects aimed at Primary 6/7 children (11 – 12 years old). Project partners were recruited through the community of practice.
- Royal Society of Edinburgh digital participation enquiry – individual members and the Community of Practice participated in the enquiry.

Whilst the loci of the above case studies and exemplars of good practice are predominately Scottish, other UK (United Kingdom) countries and international examples are not ignored. Examples from the UK, Europe, North America and Australasia are included in Crawford and Irving (2013) *Information Literacy and lifelong learning: policy issues, the workplace, health and public libraries*. The chapters of particular relevance to this article are:

- Chapter 5: The challenge of the work environment

- Chapter 6: The Scottish Government Library: a case study
- Chapter 8: Employability, informal learning and the role of the public library

Having listed some examples and discussed some of the reasoning's behind why and how they were collected, we now look at lessons learned from sharing practice and collecting case studies and exemplars of good practice.

Lessons learned:

- There is a tendency for people to think they are not doing anything special and therefore do not respond to general email calls for exemplars
- They are however happy to share their practice once contacted
- It is therefore essential to leave plenty of time to talk, visit and work with people on submitting their work as a case study / exemplar

As highlighted earlier, calls for exemplars do not work on their own: whether it is the actual term or words used people are reluctant to step forward for whatever reasons. This may be a nationality or professional trait or a combination of both but it leaves the collector with the task of seeking out, investigating and then making a decision on whether it would make a good example, fits the criteria, is of the right quality etc. It is therefore necessary to use a variety of means available, including using personal and professional networks, getting and out and about talking to and hearing or seeing first-hand what people are doing. Despite being time consuming is definitely worthwhile. It provides ideas and benchmarking possibilities. Sharing practice also contributes to professional development both for the individual and their community and to the field of research and practice.

More and more people are looking to case studies and exemplars of good practice so that they can demonstrate the relevance of or how policies, strategies, theories can be put into practice. However in order for this to happen, you need people, individuals from organizations, institutions and countries to share their practice. This brings us back to the problem highlighted above that unfortunately most people do not see their practice as 'of interest to anyone else' and certainly not an 'exemplar of good practice' which makes collecting examples/case studies very difficult. So, consider your own practice and ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you share practice?
- Why do you share or not share practice?
- Do you use exemplars of good practice?
- Do you collect case studies or exemplars of good practice?
- If so what do you collect and or what do you use them for?

## **Conclusion**

Information literacy is a powerful information ideology although there has been much discussion about what it means and what it encompasses. There is also uncertainty about what information actually is. Information literacy has been linked to many issues

but employability and the workplace are now recognised as important sectors where it can make an impact. It was initially mainly promoted within higher education and in schools but more recently it has become viewed as part of a suite of employability skills which can be taught in public libraries. In the workplace it has become transformed into a flexible, collaborative concept which has moved a long way from the traditional librarian's repertoire of print and online sources to become one which is much more dependent on human interaction and less on conventional information sources.

*Correspondence*

John Crawford  
21 Polbae Crescent  
Eaglesham  
Glasgow, G76 0LW  
United Kingdom  
Tel.: +441355 302851  
Email: johncrawford705@yahoo.co.uk

Christine Irving  
102 Springfield Road  
Linlithgow, H49 7JW  
United Kingdom  
Tel.: +441506 842406  
Email: christine.irving8@googlemail.com

## References

- American Library Association (1989) *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: final report*. Chicago: ALA. Available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential.cfm> (23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014)
- Ashcroft, L., Farrow, J., and Watts, C. (2007) Public libraries and adult learners, *Library management*, 28, 3, pp. 125-138.
- Bawden, D. (2001) Information and digital literacies: a review of concepts, *Journal of Documentation*, 57, 2, pp. 218-259.
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (2004) *Information literacy definition*. London: CILIP. Available at <http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/learning/information-literacy/Pages/definition.aspx> (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014)
- Crawford, J. (2000) *Evaluation of library and information services*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Aslib.
- Crawford, J. and Irving, C. (2009) Information literacy in the workplace: a qualitative exploratory study, *Journal of librarianship and information science* 41, 1, pp. 29-38. Available at <http://lis.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/41/1/29?etoc> (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014)
- Crawford, J. and Irving, C. (2013) *Information Literacy and lifelong learning: policy issues, the workplace, health and public libraries*. Cambridge, Chandos.
- Doyle, C. S. (1994) *Information literacy in an information society: a concept for the information age*. Syracuse, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse. (ED 372763).
- Garner, S.D. (2005) *High-Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning*. Available from: <http://www.ifla.org/publications/high-level-colloquium-on-information-literacy-and-lifelong-learning> (Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014).
- Haras, C. and Brasley, S.S. (2011) Is information literacy a public concern? a practice in search of a policy, *Library trends*, 60, 2, pp. 361-382.
- Head, A. (2013) What information competencies matter in today's workplace? , *Library and information research*, 37, 114, pp. 74-104
- Horton, F. W. (2008) *Understanding information literacy: a primer*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Horton, F. W. (2011) Information Literacy Advocacy—Woody's Ten Commandments, *Library trends*, 60, 2, pp. 262-276.
- International Federation of Library Associations. (2014) *IFLA Media and Information Literacy Recommendations* <http://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-media-and-information-literacy-recommendations> (Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014).
- Irving, C. (2006) *The role of information literacy in addressing a specific strand of lifelong learning: the work agenda*. Research article for Learning and Teaching Scotland. Available at <http://>

[www.therightinformation.org/storage/documents/InformationLiteracyintheworkplacearticle.pdf](http://www.therightinformation.org/storage/documents/InformationLiteracyintheworkplacearticle.pdf) (Accessed 26th June 2014)

Irving, C. (2007a) *The role of information literacy in addressing a specific strand of lifelong learning: the work agenda*. MSc Work Based Learning Project, Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University.

Irving, C. (2007b) Information literacy in the workplace: a small exploratory study. Paper presented at *Information: Interactions and Impact (i3)*, The Department of Information Management, Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.

Irving, C. & Crawford, J., (2007) Information literacy: a framework for life, *Library + information update*, 6, 7-8, pp.52-53

Irving, C. (2009) Collecting case studies / exemplars of good practice to enrich The National Information Literacy framework (Scotland). *Library and Information Research*, 33, 105, pp. 10-18 Available at: <http://www.lirjournal.org.uk/lir/ojs/index.php/lir> (Accessed 26 June 2014).

Lloyd, A. (2010) *Information literacy landscapes*. Oxford: Chandos.

Lloyd, A. (2011) Trapped Between a Rock and a Hard Place: What Counts as Information Literacy in the Workplace and How Is It Conceptualized? *Library Trends* 60, 2, pp. 277-296.

McCracken, I. (2014) Email communication 17.02.2014

National Writing Project (2014) Available at [http://search.nwp.org/search?filter=0&entqr=0&output=xml\\_no\\_dtd&sort=date%3AD%3A%3Ad1&client=default\\_frontend&ud=1&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8&proxystylesheet=default\\_frontend&site=default\\_collection&btnG=Search&q=literacies&x=15&y=14](http://search.nwp.org/search?filter=0&entqr=0&output=xml_no_dtd&sort=date%3AD%3A%3Ad1&client=default_frontend&ud=1&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8&proxystylesheet=default_frontend&site=default_collection&btnG=Search&q=literacies&x=15&y=14) (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014)

O'Beirne, R. (2010) *From lending to learning: the development and extension of public libraries*. Oxford: Chandos.

Orna, E. (1999) *Practical information policies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Aldershot: Gower.

Pinto, M., Cordon, J. A, Diaz, R. G. (2010) Thirty years of information literacy (1977-2007): a terminological, conceptual and statistical analysis, *Journal of librarianship and information science*, 42, 1, pp. 3-19

Reedy, K., Mallett, E. and Soma, N. (2013) iKnow: Information skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, *Library and information research*, 37, 114, pp. 105-122

Society of College, National and University Libraries (2011). The SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy, core model for higher education. Available at [https://www.sconul.ac.uk/groups/information\\_literacy/publications/coremodel.pdf](https://www.sconul.ac.uk/groups/information_literacy/publications/coremodel.pdf) (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014)

UNESCO (2003) *The Prague Declaration: towards an information literate society*. Prague: UNESCO. Available at: <http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/19636/11228863531PragueDeclaration.pdf/PragueDeclaration.pdf> (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014).

UNESCO (2009) *National information society policy: a template*. Paris: UNESCO.

Walker, C. (2010) *The information world of parents: a study of the use and understanding of information by parents of primary school aged children*. PhD thesis. Leeds Metropolitan University.

Webber, S., Boon, S. and Johnston, B. (2005) A comparison of UK academics' conceptions of information literacy in two disciplines: English and marketing. *Library & information research*, 29, 93, pp. 4-15.

Weiner, S. (2011) How information literacy becomes policy: an analysis using the Multiple Streams Framework, *Library trends*, 60, 2, pp. 297-311.

Wenger-Trayner, E. (2006). *Intro to communities of practice*. Available at: <http://wenger-trayner.com/theory/> (Accessed 18 June 2014).

Zurkowski, P. (1974) *The information environment: relationships and priorities*. Washington DC. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science.

8<sup>th</sup> draft 28.06.14 – includes CI section and references – and abstract and conclusion