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Strategic Promotion and Expansion of Information Literacy Education

Professional development and outreach programmes

Paulette A. Kerr

While information literacy (IL) has increasingly become a core area in many Library and Information Science (LIS) programmes, courses taught in these programmes are geared specifically for an academic audience in formal credit bearing agendas. Drastic changes in information technology as well as differences in what constitutes information literacy demand changes in approaches to IL training and education.

Is there a role for LIS programmes to address information literacy needs of information professionals outside the formal academic environment? Should LIS programmes address workplace information literacy needs? What should the content of these programmes include to be relevant to workplace needs? Further should LIS programmes aim at developing information literacy among high school students? Or is this role restricted to school librarians and teachers?

Beginning the 2012/13 academic year, The Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) at the University of the West Indies (UWI)¹, Mona, Jamaica, significantly expanded its offerings in IL education and training beyond courses in its formal degree programmes.

This article outlines the work of the DLIS in strategically positioning itself as a key player in promoting and offering information literacy education outside its core courses. The DLIS also seized an opportunity afforded by UWI outreach to high schools, to create and offer IL workshops for high school and community college students. The article details recent workshops designed and presented for these communities. It also brings to the fore information literacy research intended to inform practice.

Keywords: Information literacy; workplace learning; LIS education; professional development; high schools, MIL

Introduction

While information literacy has increasingly become a core area in many Library and Information Science (LIS) programmes (Ishimura & Bartlett, 2010; Jiyane & Onyancha, 2010; Stewart & Bravo, 2013), courses taught in these programmes are geared specifically for an academic audience in formal credit bearing situations. It seems, however, that as higher education diversifies worldwide, there is a need to adapt and diversify information literacy initiatives to meet the needs of new populations (Lange, Canuel & Fitzgibbons, 2011), and the changing requirements of existing populations. Gadagin (2012) extends this argument and notes that with new learning experiences which have come about from the explosion of knowledge and information technology, there is a need for drastic changes in educating Library and Information Science professionals beyond the classroom. The author advocates for workplace learning as part of continuing education for these professionals. Weiner (2011) states however that while it is important to address the differences between academic IL and workplace competencies, the question of who should assume the responsibility for teaching information literacy as applied to the workplace is unresolved.

Is there therefore a role for LIS programmes in information literacy education and training outside the formal academic environment? What of the workplace information literacy needs of information professionals? Further, should LIS programmes aim at offering IL training to high school students? While researchers like Fraser, Shaw & Rustin (2013), among others speak to collaborative initiatives between academic librarians and school librarians in offering IL training to students, there is little about the role of LIS faculty in schools.

At the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, Jamaica, the Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) took the initiative in 2013 to design and offer a range of IL workshops to information professionals as well as high school students.

Information Literacy Education at UWI

Information literacy has been in the curriculum of the Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) at the University of the West Indies (UWI) since 1997/98 when Dr. Cherrell Shelley Robinson, then a member of the fulltime Faculty in the DLIS, developed LIBS 3602 Information Literacy: Concept and Practice. The course, a first among LIS Programmes worldwide, was developed primarily to equip future librarians with requisite IL competencies and became a popular choice for teachers-in-training in the School of Education, UWI. Increasing demand for the course has resulted in it being offered in a number

of off-campus sites. In 2012/13 as part of the DLIS curriculum review and enhancement process, the fare of formal IL courses was increased to include LIBS3604 Teaching Information Literacy; and LIBS6003 Information Literacy Instruction to ensure that all graduates (undergraduates and postgraduates) were equipped to assume teaching of IL (Stewart & Bravo, 2013).

A formal programme of information literacy training is also offered by the Mona Information Literacy Unit of the UWI, Mona Library (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/library/information-literacy-0>). The MILU has made significant strides in ensuring that graduates of the UWI, Mona are equipped with information literacy attributes (Kerr, 2012).

DLIS and professional development

As part of its mission in developing information professionals equipped to deal with constant change in the information environment, the DLIS has been very involved in offering continuing education programmes to information professionals on wide ranging topics. Most recently its annual Summer Institute and workshops have examined areas including information technology, business information resources, advanced cataloguing and metadata as well as legal information sources. However this suite of workshops did not include information literacy teaching.

This decision by DLIS, UWI to offer professional development training and education in IL was informed by i) the growing importance of information literacy education in all levels and types of educational institutions in Jamaica; ii) an absence of structured IL initiatives in some of these institutions; iii) the institution's central role in promoting and delivering IL education as part of the UNESCO MILID UNITWIN² Chair; iv) a resulting need to change its offerings to incorporate issues of media literacy as part of UNESCO'S thrust at a combined concept of media and information literacy (MIL). In addition, as Weiner (2011) indicates, there is evidence that the information needs and information-seeking behaviours of those in the workforce are different than those of students.

Professional development workshops in Media and Information Literacy

The Department of Library and Information Studies at UWI, Mona, significantly expanded its offerings in IL education and training beyond courses in its formal degree programmes based on a number of events. Firstly, there has been an increased demand for information literacy training by graduates of the

DLIS, UWI who had not benefited from the formal IL courses. Many of these graduates were placed in higher education institutions, including community and teachers colleges, and with the growing importance of information literacy in these institutions, were required to provide instruction and training. Other members of teaching staff in these institutions are also expected to assume responsibilities for teaching IL. Unfortunately no structured programmes existed for equipping these professionals as teachers of IL. Further many of these persons expressed the inability to appropriate the formal courses offered by the DLIS because of time constraints. Summer workshops were therefore designed to meet the workplace needs in IL teaching. Other IL and Media and Information Literacy (MIL) workshops were delivered to promote the DLIS and its work.

Summer workshops

During summer 2013, the DLIS offered the following workshops.

1. Information Literacy for Teachers and Information Professionals. June 2013

This workshop included 20 participants from a range of educational institutions including teachers colleges, community colleges, high schools, and research and academic libraries.

2. Information Literacy for HEART Trust/NTA Library and Information Personnel. July 2013

This workshop was requested by the HEART Trust/NTA³ to address a need for IL training among library and information personnel who are responsible to provide IL instruction throughout the multi-level educational institution. Twenty-one participants from HEART Trust/NTA institutions across Jamaica attended.

These were intense, hands-on, two-day workshops which were tailored to the specific target groups. It was decided to include a module on media literacy especially as teachers and information personnel were expected to offer media literacy training. The workshops examined the following areas:

- Information Literacy: Concept, Standards, Models & the Curriculum
- Approaches to Teaching Information Literacy
- Teaching Media Literacy: Definition, Content and Strategies
- Model Lesson: “How to Search for Information”
- Practical Lesson Planning, Implementation and Evaluation
- Teaching Information Literacy: The research Process
- Teaching Information Literacy: Challenges and Strategies
- Teaching Information Literacy using Web2.0

In summer 2014, the DLIS will deliver a workshop in St Lucia on media and information literacy to library and information professionals from the Caribbean. This is part of the strategic objective of the DLIS to provide professional development initiatives in the Caribbean region.

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Curriculum Workshop

In February 2014, as part of the MILID UNITWIN Exchange Programme⁴, the DLIS offered a workshop to teachers and information professionals on aspects of the UNESCO *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers* (2011) in partnership with the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC), UWI. This workshop which was geared primarily for high school teachers and college lecturers, represents part of the thrust of UNESCO via members of the MILID UNITWIN Chair to adapt, promote and integrate the curriculum in educational institutions, especially teacher training colleges. Participants included librarians, college lecturers, primary and high school teachers and graduate students in the MILID Exchange Programme from across the island. Select areas of the MIL curriculum addressed during the workshop included:

- Core Teacher Competencies
- Deconstructing Media
- Teaching Information literacy: the Curriculum
- Internet Opportunities and Challenges

Information Literacy workshops to public librarians

As part of a National Information Literacy Initiative of the Jamaica Library Service⁵, Dr Cherrell Shelley Robinson, adjunct lecturer in the DLIS conducted a series of workshops to train senior staff members to develop online tutorials for teaching library patrons, information literacy skills.

UNESCO MIL Caribbean workshops

The UWI through the Department of Library and Information Studies was also a key player in two UNESCO led workshops on media and information literacy to policy makers and information professionals in the Caribbean.

Workshop 1, held in Castries, St Lucia, July 2013 was developed for Policy Makers from OECS territories and examined i) overview of MIL as separate and combined concepts; designing strategies for national and region MIL Policy deployment ; the MIL Assessment Framework and building national MIL Assessment Strategies.

Workshop 2 held in Tortola, BVI, December 2013 targeted journalists and information professionals in the British Virgin Islands. The workshop included sessions on MIL as a 21st century competency framework; importance of MIL for personal, professional development and for lifelong learning; Strategies for MIL development at national and institutional levels; strategies for MIL Policy and MIL assessment strategies.

Head of the Department of DLIS, author of this paper was as a key presenter in both workshops delivering in various areas towards assisting participants to understand theoretical MIL concepts and develop strategies for moving MIL from theory to practical policy development.

Sharing IL research

As part of its mission to promote and deliver IL education, the DLIS is committed to provide the highest standard of research to inform teaching and practice in LIS. Research projects in information literacy provide avenues for promoting the work of the DLIS to a larger audience, as well as updating LIS Professionals.

The public forum “Achieving Media and Information Literacy: The Challenge to the Education System” was held in March 2013 to share findings of the award winning UNESCO funded Research Project carried out by Dr Cherrell Shelley-Robinson on media and information literacy among in-service and in-training teachers in four Caribbean countries (Shelley-Robinson, 2013). Over 50 participants comprising lecturers, library and information professionals and students shared with two discussants from higher educational institutions the implications of the findings for educational initiatives.

Award- winning information literacy research by the Head of DLIS and the author of this paper has examined the implications of IL education and training in academic institutions on developing university graduate attributes (Kerr, 2012).

The research on media and information literacy among teachers, conducted by Shelley- Robinson, has been ‘extended’ via a UWI Principal’s funded project in the DLIS aimed at examining the media and information literacy levels of students at the exit stages of schools in the Jamaican education system (exit stages relate to grades 6; 11 and 13: grades at which students may ‘leave’ if they are not moving to another grade). The in-depth study now being conducted will inform policy towards information literacy education in schools in Jamaica and possibly the Caribbean region.

Outreach to high schools and community colleges

As part of its strategic initiatives for the 2012-17 period, the DLIS placed outreach to high schools high on its agenda. This was partly to promote its programmes to potential incoming students in an environment of decreasing student intake and increasing institutional competition. As part of this thrust, a new staff member was assigned responsibility for outreach initiatives and the result was the development of varied tools to market and promote not only the Department's programmes but one of its key areas of research and teaching specialization, information literacy.

One such tool developed in the 2012/13 academic year was an information literacy workshop targeted to equip high school students with research competencies using the Marland's 9 Step Model (Marland, 1981 as cited in Pickard, Shenton and Johnson, 2012). Conceptualization for the workshop came from the new staff member Kerry Ann Rodney Wellington and was developed by Dr Cherrell Shelley-Robinson, IL expert and consultant in the DLIS. The Workshop, *Maximising SBA Scores: Mastering Research Skills* was piloted in November 2012 as part of the UWI promotion to high school and community college students in the Western parishes of Jamaica. The positive impact of the workshop on students resulted in it being requested by the UWI outreach team for presentation in January 2013 to over 700 high school students from a leading secondary school as part of UWI's outreach programme.

The decision to design and offer this workshop to high school students was indeed a strategic one since it afforded the DLIS an opportunity to include a workshop in the suite of SBA⁶ workshops being presented by departments and schools in the Faculty of Humanities and Education at the UWI. This was one way of promoting the DLIS to incoming students. In addition, the workshop represented an avenue to provide information literacy competencies to these high school students, especially as research skills are offered in an ad-hoc manner in schools. Another positive outcome was the reach of the workshop. While the workshop was developed primarily for high school students, it also became popular among community college students pursuing CAPE courses. In addition, teachers accompanying students to these outreach activities participated in the workshops. To date the workshop has been delivered in multiple outreach programmes of the UWI and the DLIS including UWI Research Days 2013 and 2014 and has benefitted over 500 high school students and teachers.

Conclusion

Is there a role for LIS programmes to address information literacy needs of information professionals outside the formal academic environment? Should LIS programmes address workplace information literacy needs? What should the content of these programmes include to be relevant to workplace needs? Further, should LIS programmes aim at developing information literacy among high school students?

The Department of Library and Information Studies at the University of the West Indies Mona has answered these questions with a resounding “yes” via the varied programmes towards promoting information literacy research, education and training.

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Notes

- 1 UWI is a regional university serving the English speaking Caribbean with campuses in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago as well as the Open Campus. For details see <http://www.uwi.edu/index.asp>
- 2 UNESCO and UNAOC (United Nations Alliance of Civilizations) created the UNESCO-UNAOC UNITWIN Global Chair on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (“UNESCO-UNAOC MILID UNITWIN”) of eight universities who have responsibility to among other things promote Media and Information Literacy. For details see <http://www.unaoc.org/communities/academia/unesco-unaoc-milid/>
- 3 HEART Trust/NTA is a national institution for developing technical and vocational competencies. For detail see <http://www.heart-nta.org/>
- 4 MILID UNITWIN Student Exchange Programme 2014 was facilitated by UNESCO and the University of Sao Paulo and included graduate students from 5 of the MILID UNITWIN universities.
- 5 Jamaica Library Service provides a network of public and school libraries at service points throughout the 13 parishes of Jamaica. The service has responsibility for 124 public libraries and 926 school libraries.
- 6 SBA, School-based Assessment is part of the CSEC and CAPE programmes are the official secondary school programmes and examinations of the Caribbean offered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). For details see <http://www.cxc.org/>