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Information literacy for lifelong learning

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Information literacy is concerned with teaching and learning about the whole range of information sources and formats. To be "information literate" you need to know why, when, and how to use all of these tools and think **critically** about the information they provide.

Information literacy aims to develop *both* critical understanding *and* active participation. It enables people to interpret and make informed judgments as users of information sources; but it also enables them to become producers of information in their own right, and thereby to become more powerful participants in society. Information literacy is about developing people's critical *and* creative abilities. Digital media – and particularly the Internet – significantly increase the potential for active participation; but they also create an environment of bewildering choices.

Information literacy is part of the basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy. Information literacy is essential for good governance and represents a basic condition for any successful e-governance programme. Media literacy, a major component of information literacy, is about how to actively analyse, evaluate and produce media in all their forms. It is no longer enough simply to read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images, how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from irony... There is considerable value of including media and media literacy curricula in civics education or infusing media education across numerous subjects, so as to prepare students for democracy and the lives they will lead beyond school. Issues of source credibility, long taught in journalism classes, have taken on even greater significance today with so many students now relying on the Internet for their information and knowledge.¹

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments and to all levels of education, while recognizing the disparities in learning styles and in the nature and development of literacy in different countries. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning, information literacy should be introduced wherever possible within national curricula as well as in tertiary, non-formal and lifelong education.

An effective information literacy programme for the whole society should be developed and delivered in two parts: one as part of the formal education, and another as part of an informal education, in course of, and as part of, the day-to-day activities and life of people. The target audience should not only be the teachers or students, but also professionals, decision makers, etc. who need to acquire the necessary information skills to make informed decisions. Information literacy is essential for workforce performance and economic development.

You will not become information literate overnight. Just as with speaking skills and writing skills, your abilities will improve over time as you gain expertise in the topics you choose to investigate and as you practice searching for, selecting, and evaluating the information and ideas you encounter. Information literacy classes can take place in a range of institutional settings, both 'formal' and 'informal'; and they can be provided by bodies from both public and private sectors.

¹ Robert Kubey. Media Literacy and the Teaching of Civics and Social Studies at the Dawn of the 21st Century. *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 48, n°1, September 2004, pp. 69-77.

As information is increasingly codified in digital forms, new skills are needed to operate the technology to search for, organize, manage information and use it to solve problems and create new knowledge and cultural products. Since the Internet is a common information and communication tool, information literacy is often understood as digital literacy. Computer literacy is an essential component of information literacy, media education forms another important part of information literacy, but there are differences between computer literacy, media education and information literacy.

Community Technology Centres, Telecentres and Community Learning Centres provide in many countries training related to the use of hardware, software and the Internet, as well as other services. Information literacy is closely related to information technology skills, but has broader implications. Information technology skills enable a student for example to use computers, software applications, databases, and other technologies to achieve a wide variety of academic, work-related, and personal goals. Computer literacy is a first essential, but beyond that there remains the huge black hole of information literacy, that is the awareness that information can be of help, that the resources exist if you know where to look, that the skills to use the resources can be learned, and that once the information has been acquired that there is still some critical evaluation yet to be done.

Information literacy is an intellectual framework and a social process for understanding, finding, evaluating, communicating and using information—activities which may be accomplished in part by fluency with information technology, in part by sound investigative methods, but most important, through critical discernment and reasoning. Information literacy initiates, sustains, and extends lifelong learning through abilities which may use technologies but are ultimately independent of them.

Introducing new media technology – let alone the kinds of ‘critical thinking’ and the new pedagogies associated with information literacy– is almost bound to meet with considerable inertia, if not overt resistance. A vigorous information literacy campaign may result in the long run in the emergence of an ‘information culture’. In the new information environment information is not only used in an effective and ethical way, but also people understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use and sharing of information.

General objectives:

Within the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), the new Information Literacy Programme of UNESCO will be launched during the 2004-2005 biennium. The initial budget amounts to US\$300 000. This programme will be supervised by the Information Society Division (Communication and Information Sector) in close co-operation with the Education Sector and the Field offices. The general objectives are to:

- Foster the development of an information literate citizenry with the technical and critical thinking skills and abilities needed to identify, acquire, manage and use information to enrich all aspects of their work and personal lives.
- To identify and encourage effective practices in information literacy around the world.
- Promote information literacy through regional approaches and to facilitate exchanges
- Propose innovative curricula about information literacy
- Improve co-operation between government officials, researchers, educators, librarians and media practitioners

The recently concluded World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva highlighted the empowering element of information as a tool for development. In its Declaration of Principles, the participants declared their “common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life”.

Proposed strategy

- There is an ongoing need for clear, coherent and authoritative documents that define information literacy and provide a rationale for its implementation. If it is to be effective, any international document or **policy statement** of this kind will also need to be followed up with an ongoing process of monitoring at a national level.
- In addition to broad statements of purpose, there is a need for more specific documentation outlining frameworks for **curriculum** development and practice. A document of this kind would need to include: a clear model of learning progression, details of specific learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competencies; and criteria and procedures for evaluation and assessment.
- Well-intended documents and frameworks are worthless without trained staff to implement them. Elements of training in information literacy should be included in initial and in-service training programmes, and be available as part of **teachers’** ongoing professional development. **Distance learning** may be appropriate in many circumstances, but this should be complemented by sustained opportunities for face-to-face tuition.
- Information literacy efforts should involve **community** based organizations and be promoted through informal learning environments as well as formal learning.
- While manifestations of information literacy will vary according to a country's culture and current economic and technical situation, **models** of best practice can assist in the adoption of information literacy skills.
- Despite the changing and sometimes ephemeral nature of the content of media education, teaching materials can have a long shelf-life if they are carefully and professionally produced. Information literacy does not by any means have to be a ‘high tech’ enterprise, but it should at least reflect the **levels of access** that students and teachers have to technology outside the school environment.
- Information literacy practice should obviously reflect current **theoretical advances** in our understanding of people’s relationships with media, and of pedagogy. In terms of pedagogy, issues that are in need of more systematic and sustained research might include: the nature of student learning about the media; the relations between ‘conceptual’ and ‘affective’ dimensions of media education; and the relations between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’.
- There is a need for international dialogues and exchanges to be sustained, rather than merely in the form of one-off conferences taking place every few years. International

exchange will be much less superficial if practitioners have more sustained opportunities to visit each other's countries, for example through job exchange programmes and a system of longer-term internships.

- All the above elements are inter-related. If any one of these is absent or weakened, it puts the entire construction at risk. For instance, policy documentation or curriculum frameworks in the absence of professional development can be merely a matter of empty rhetoric. Professional development and self-organisation by teachers is fairly meaningless if there are no clear curriculum frameworks for them to work within. Policy, teaching and research should be interconnected: development in each area should support development in the others.

Proposed activities

- Launching of an international awareness-raising campaign and an international alliance for information literacy.
- The convening of a high-level international colloquium of experts in the field, leading to the agreement of a declaration re-stating and re-defining the case for information literacy in the 'Digital Age', for circulation to national education ministries and other relevant bodies. Support would need to be provided for delegates from developing countries.
- Drafting of a publication aimed at teachers and policy makers. This is intended to provide an introductory guide to information literacy, covering the following key questions: why (rationales for information literacy); what (definitions); where (curricular and institutional locations); and how (issues of pedagogy and practice).
- Preparing a modular curriculum for information literacy, targeting teacher education programmes
- Regional institutes in information literacy, aimed at national experts in the field, who will be encouraged to spread their expertise via 'cascade' training.
- Empowering communities through information literacy pilot projects. Information literacy enhances the pursuit of knowledge by equipping individuals with the skills and abilities for critical reception, assessment, use and production of information in their professional and personal lives.
- The establishment of a website which will facilitate the sharing of resources by teachers. Support would need to be given here for translation, since existing web resources on information literacy are heavily English-language-dominated.

- The development of an accessible international collection of teaching and learning resources in information literacy; and support for those involved in translating or adapting existing resources to specific national contexts.

Abdelaziz Abid
Information Society Division
UNESCO
a.abid@unesco.org

Annex

Awareness-raising campaign and international alliance for information literacy:

The main strategy consists of awareness-raising about the importance of information, media and ICT literacy at all levels of the education process - basic education, primary and secondary education, technical and vocational training and lifelong . A particular focus will be on training teachers to sensitize them to the importance of information, media and ICT literacy in the education process to enable them to incorporate information literacy into their teaching and to provide them with appropriate pedagogical methods and curricula. An essential element of the strategy is the integration of libraries into information, media and ICT literacy programmes. Libraries provide resources and services in an environment that fosters free and open inquiry and serve as a catalyst for the interpretation, integration, and application of knowledge in all fields of learning.

Awareness is a somewhat broad and vague term, yet one that is intuitively widely understood. It might be useful, though, to explore some of the conceptual notions behind awareness raising and its relation with knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. All awareness-campaigns aim to influence behaviour and achieve a specific goal here information literacy. It can be set by politicians, researchers etc. and includes the many existing initiatives by citizen groups. There is a widespread recognition of the need for community involvement in government or NGO-initiated programmes. Awareness raising on information literacy should be seen as an interactive movement in which different parties are engaged, each with their own roles, responsibilities and ways, to make their voices heard and create social pressure. The possibility that awareness campaigns turn into pure propaganda should, of course, be avoided.

The purpose is to raise a debate about information literacy among involved stakeholders and to come up with initiatives for production of guidelines.

The following activities are proposed by UNESCO field offices:

Beirut: Many libraries have existing IT facilities, but they are not used, because librarians lack IT skills and also because of lacking knowledge about services among the larger population. UNESCO Beirut Office is being implementing a project with the library community in Lebanon..

Montevideo: The 'Committee for Democratization of Information Technology' has been an initiative aiming at the promotion of IT literacy in low income areas. The consolidation and expansion of CDI network in MERCOSUR countries, particularly as regards the use of free software, will be implemented through:

- publication of best practices and lessons learnt;
- improvement and development of web sites;
- interaction with institutions offering recycled ICTs equipment;
- use of recycled equipment;
- training;
- integration of CDI to UNESCO Free Software Telecenters Network.

A special effort will be made to introduce the use of free software within CDI network.

Preparing a modular curriculum:

Information literacy enhances the pursuit of knowledge by equipping individuals with the skills and abilities for critical reception, assessment and use of information in their professional and personal lives. Moreover, the ever intensifying transnational flows of satellite TV channels, electronic games and Internet tend to threaten or marginalize media content designed for young people, women and minority groups in most countries. Many UNESCO partners have stressed the importance of media education or media literacy for young people to increase their knowledge and awareness of how the media function. UNESCO's action in this area also underscores the significant role of news collection and distribution institutions particularly news agencies in media landscapes which enable individuals and social groups to make informed decisions.

Cairo: Based on the regional market demand for the European ECDL certification, we believe that UNESCO must lead the road by 'setting the standards' for a similar certification aimed at teachers and faculty. UNESCO Cairo will produce a standard curriculum for certification of teachers/faculty as 'online teachers'.

New Delhi: In the Asian region the necessity for training modules for IT and information literacy has not received the kind of attention that it may deserve. There have been many remarkable initiatives. But these initiatives in the Asian Region have largely been individual institutional endeavours and ad hoc programmes. Consequently, the developments have been sporadic and disparate. There has not been a coordinated approach based on a concerted programme benefiting from collective experiences and best practices.

The goal is to have various modules developed for different target groups for the Asian region.

Moscow: Recent publications by educational associations are advocating for a more meaningful use of technology in schools. Educational technologists are clearly describing what students should know and be able to do with technology. They are advocating integrating computer skills into the content areas, proclaiming that computer skills should not be taught in isolation and that separate 'computer classes' do not really help students learn to apply computer skills in meaningful ways. There is increasing recognition that the end result of computer literacy is not knowing how to operate computers, but to use technology as a tool for organization, communication, research, and problem solving. This is an important shift in approach and emphasis.

Moving from teaching isolated technology skills to an integrated approach is an important step that takes a great deal of planning and effort.

A meaningful, unified information technology literacy curriculum must be more than an isolated skills, such as knowing the parts of the computer, writing drafts and final products with a word processor, and searching for information using the World Wide Web.

All learners should be able to recognize what they need to accomplish, determine whether a computer will help them to do so, and then be able to use the computer as part of the process of accomplishing their task. Individual computer skills take on a new meaning when they are integrated within this type of information problem-solving process, and students develop true 'information technology literacy' because they have genuinely applied various information technology skills as part of the learning process.

Some technology literacy competencies that may be relevant in some situations include: (1) knowing the basic operation, terminology, and maintenance of equipment, (2) knowing how to use computer-assisted instructional programmes, (3) having knowledge of the impact of technology on careers, society, and culture (as a direct instructional objective), and (4) computer programming.

IITE has undertaken a wide range of study in this areas. And this activity will be the continuation of the IITE work in this direction.

Empowering communities through information literacy projects

Empowerment of people through information, media and ICT literacy is a prerequisite for harnessing ICTs for education and fostering equitable access to information and knowledge. Information literacy enhances the pursuit of knowledge by equipping individuals with the skills and abilities for critical reception, assessment and use of information in their professional and personal lives.

The impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on teaching and learning has been increasing at all levels, from basic to higher and life-long education, providing new perspectives and opportunities for expanding traditional education processes and systems. ICTs are more and more becoming an integral part of educational strategies, providing greater flexibility in learning situations, promoting increased interactivity for learners and connectivity to people and learning resources in different parts of the world. However, ICT-enhanced learning offers often do not meet expectations in terms of access equity, quality, diversity and affordability, particularly for developing countries. In the last biennium, cooperation was established between Major Programmes I and V to study, promote and disseminate the use of ICTs in education, as a follow-up to the Second World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000). A number of studies and pilot projects including a study on new information and communication technologies and education were carried out, in close cooperation with the Education Sector and concerned UNESCO institutes, notably IICBA and IITE, to identify and test a continuum of technologies to support and enrich learning, and to improve the way technologies are used to better respond to learning needs.

Rabat : Le Maroc dispose d'un important réseau de centres culturels/centres pour jeunes, placé sous la tutelle du Secrétariat d'Etat à la Jeunesse. Le Programme Infojeunesse de l'UNESCO a déjà contribué au renforcement de ce réseau. Le Bureau de Rabat pourrait prolonger l'action entreprise en offrant son assistance aux autorités compétentes pour diffuser des modules pédagogiques dans ces centres multimédias (télécentres) à destination de la jeunesse.

L'UNESCO pourrait notamment organiser des cycles de formation à l'intention des animateurs de ces centres. Ces programmes pourraient être proposés en arabe et en français, et s'appuyer sur des thématiques sectorielles ou intersectorielles importantes pour l'UNESCO (prévention contre le VIH/SIDA, culture de la paix, promotion de la question genre, protection du patrimoine culturel, etc.)

Montevideo: The lack of access to information by indigenous populations is an obvious consequence of the digital exclusion. In this context, cooperation with institutions working in the zones of exclusion (such as Chaco and Amazon forest) will be pursued within this activity. This pilot project will make use of existing telecenters in the hinterland of areas of exclusion (such as Amazon forest, Chaco in Paraguay) and help them to:

- produce adapted learning materials to indigenous population on IT literacy
 - hold two pilot workshops on IT literacy to indigenous population.
- Sinergy with other projects dealing with indigenous knowledge will also be considered.

San Jose: ICTs bring new challenges for freedom and cultural diversity, gender equity and reduction of disparities and new forms of exclusion existing in access to and participation in the information society. UNESCO's action in this area underscores the significant role of institutions for collection and distribution of news, particularly news' agencies in media landscapes which enable individuals and social groups to make informed decisions

The Goal: Increasing community access to information about the nature, functions and uses of ICTs to improve participation in the development process and contribute to empowerment of citizens and get better quality of life.

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a.abid@unesco.org