

Information literacy goes international

By Barbara J. Ford

Worldwide programs address users' needs

Information literacy is one of the areas in which librarians around the world are sharing their expertise and learning from one another. As countries like South Africa, Australia, and the Netherlands gear up to be competitive in a global information age, issues related to information access and use become of increasing concern, and concepts of user education and information literacy are being incorporated into their school and higher education curriculums.

Australia

The first issue of *InformaSA*, the newsletter of the South Australian Forum for Information Literacy (SAFIL), was published in September 1992. SAFIL was established to bring together community groups, professional associations, educators, and people from business and industry, all with the common goal of enhancing the information skills of the community.

In December 1992 a conference focusing on strategies for promoting information literacy as a means of personal and national empowerment in today's information-dependent society was held in South Australia. Patricia Senn Breivik (Towson State University), one of the most prominent writers and speakers on information literacy, was the keynote speaker.

Recommendations from the event included: expanding training for library staff and educators; conducting more research to provide evidence of the impact of information literacy programs; establishing partnerships and networks

among librarians, educators, and businesses to improve information skills; and developing strategies to increase information literacy for specific groups. The important role of information literacy in economic development means that the education system should encourage learning and critical analysis and that information use in companies should be investigated.

In 1990 the Commonwealth's Report on library provision in higher education institutions examined the role of higher education libraries in preparing those training for the professions in information literacy. The report concluded that higher education has a critical role in the acquisition by adults of information literacy, but this form of literacy is part of a continuum that should begin with school education. At the University of South Australia there is a specific requirement that the university librarians ensure that students achieve information literacy. A Centre for Teaching and Learning is being established to promote awareness of the issues and to facilitate cooperation to address them.

At the tertiary level, most schools are expected to empower their own students by giving them the basic skills that will make them information literate. The concept of information literacy as an integral part of the whole notion of literacy has been furthered by recent training and development programs.

In schools of library and information science, lecturers are concerned about the issue of linking information literacy to the future well-being of the profession. At the University of South Australia, students enrolled in user education courses provide personalized assistance to politicians by developing pathfinders on topics of concern to them. At the School of Information

Studies at the University of Technology in Sydney, information literacy is part of the teaching and research programs and extension activities. Faculty are researching the specific information skills needed by beginning tertiary students in a range of disciplines and how to integrate information skills into the curriculum by collaborative planning and teaching. Beginning in 1993 a two-day program on information skills for tertiary students is being offered to all new students enrolling at the University of Technology.

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South Africa

In South Africa there are challenges and opportunities with the changing government and the large number of people who are seeking educational opportunities. If access to institutions is increased without creating a support structure enabling people to succeed, there will likely be anger and frustration. In such an environment, academic leaders and librarians recognize that there is a need to modify the learning process to encourage information literacy abilities and lifelong learning.

A report prepared for the Ford Foundation on the Western Cape Library Cooperative Project by a consulting team of U.S. librarians recommended an Information Literacy Pilot Project. The vision of the Cooperative Project is to promote information literacy and economic development for the area by providing information to users in a form they want, when and where they need it. Enhancing cooperative efforts among the libraries at Cape Technikon, Peninsula Technikon, the University of Cape Town, the University of Stellenbosch, and the University of the Western Cape to enhance instructional and research efforts among the faculty and students at these campuses is the first undertaking. During the first year they recommend creating joint faculty/librarian task forces to initiate planning necessary for information literacy and remedial education pilot projects.

The Ford Foundation report asserts that: access to a variety of information resources in many formats is necessary to move away from the traditional lecture and textbook teaching approach; assignments that develop students' information accessing and evaluation skills will

prepare them for life-long learning; cooperation between faculty and librarians is essential.

Faculty from education and library and information science at the University of South Carolina are working with the Teacher Opportunity Programme to develop library and information services for teacher education programs

in South Africa. An agreement with ERIC and DIALOG allows the University of Durbin-Westfield (the only nonwhite school in the area with the service) to use ERIC. This access is especially important because of the economic crisis and geo-

graphic isolation from other world information centers. Such programs help universities play a leadership role in education and economic development.

The importance of information literacy was demonstrated by Wieland Gevers (vice-rector, University of Cape Town) who visited the U.S. last winter and traveled to a number of universities to learn more about programs and activities relating to information literacy and resource-based learning. He attended the December meeting of the National Forum on Information Literacy and viewed a television newscast which aired in Cape Town in fall 1992 and documented the importance of information resources and services made available through public libraries in two shantytowns. Gevers's visit was one of the first such international visits focusing on information literacy.

Europe

In Europe there is considerable interest in user instruction. Some countries are more interested in user instruction in schools and others in institutions of higher education. In England the majority of the literature focuses on user education in the school environment. In Scandinavia, literature relating to user education and higher education is now common. In the Netherlands the Advisory Committee for Education and Information Technology, which was formed in 1981, recommended in 1982 that learning about information technology be part of general secondary education. By the 1990s an information and computer literacy course was taught in nearly all secondary schools in the Netherlands. The course covers both manual

and computerized data gathering and use. While slanted toward computer applications, the course has shifted since the 1980s toward general information handling knowledge and skills with emphasis on problem solving by finding relevant information.

France has a government body to coordinate functional literacy. The best programs have been found to be those that integrate literacy with job and vocational training. Taking a global approach of how the skills can be used seems to be the most effective. A library and information science faculty member at the University of California, Los Angeles, is researching in this area.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

At the 1993 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) conference in Barcelona, Spain, the working group on user education proposed that a roundtable be established. This working group attracts a significant number of participants to its programs. This proposal will be considered by the IFLA Professional Board at its fall meeting. While the phrase "information literacy" is not used, the resolution for establishing the roundtable recognizes the importance to all members of society the development of information retrieval, selection, use, and evaluation skills.

The objectives of the proposed roundtable on user education include fostering international cooperation in the development of user education, promoting research into the development of information skills and user education, promoting the establishment and devel-


opment of user education programs in libraries, developing guidelines for user education programs and for their integration into education curricula at all levels, disseminating information on the development of curricula and teaching methodologies, encouraging the development and dissemination of appropriate teaching materials, and encouraging the development of education and training for librarians in user education.

Papers at the 1993 IFLA conference focused on evaluation of user education at the Helsinki University of Technology Library in Finland and on U.S. experiences with instruction for networked resources presented by librarians from Rutgers University's Library of Science and Medicine. For the 1994 IFLA conference in Havana, Cuba, the working group is planning a program and is organizing a workshop on teaching.

Conclusion

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology at Syracuse University works with the National Forum on Information Literacy to collect materials on information literacy activities around the world.

Information literacy is being interpreted and applied in various locations around the world. The proposed IFLA roundtable will provide an established forum for librarians from around the world to share expertise on user education and information literacy. Such efforts should reinforce and expand current efforts to bring about future generations of information-literate people who are well equipped for effective decision-making and lifelong learning. ■

 <p>ACRL 7th <i>National Conference</i></p> <p>CONTINUITY & TRANSFORMATION The Promise of Confluence</p>	<h2>Update your skills</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Attend programs & preconferences on:<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Document delivery■ Surfing the Internet■ Networked environments■ Attend user groups held by well-known vendors <p>Pittsburgh ■ March 29–April 1, 1995</p>
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