

## Information Literacy

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### *Information Literacy Instruction – The Major Challenge of Contemporary Library Science*

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#### **Abstract**

One of the biggest challenges of the XXI century technology and library science (library consortia, library services assessment, information literacy, RFID technology and institutional repositories), information literacy enjoys the greatest interest. People access to information is a complex processes that requires continuous training conducted by the librarians who have to assume a teaching positions. Users are taught to identify, locate and use information with efficiency and responsibility. In order to be able to optimally carry out this activity, libraries must have a detailed plan, from which institutional collaborations are a must.

**Keywords:** information literacy, access to information, library literacy

#### **Introduction**

When talking about *information literacy instruction (ILI)* there were and still are used one of the following terms: *library instruction, user education, bibliographic instruction.*

Today, in Romania, in order to define all the activities connected to the *information literacy instruction*, we use the term *cultura informatiei*, term which has been established by consensus since 2009 by the Romanian librarians at the XX-th National Conference of the Romanian Library

Association (ABR) held in Constanța. On that occasion there also was founded the *Information Literacy Section*.

For more than three decades, in the Romanian librarianship we use to talk about the need of educating the users. We must teach them how to search, evaluate and use efficiently and responsibly the information resources of the libraries.

In the specialists' opinion, the library education has its beginnings since 1800. The first steps were made in USA, where special technologies were created in order to support the users in accessing more rapidly the information stored in libraries. Gradually, as the information resources developed, the library's efficiency begins to be more and more dependent on assimilating the new technologies of searching and using the information.

At the end of the XIX-th century and the beginning of the XX-th, a systematic educational process for the library user is developed.

In an article published in 1980, John Mark Tucker (1) examines 100 years of user education and talks about a survey made in 1912 by the American Library Association (ALA). The results of the survey show that 57% of the 200 libraries questioned answered that they organize training courses for the library's users.

This kind of training courses, more and more specialized in this field, begin to be developed in U.S.A. school libraries before the second World War and only after the 50's in the university libraries, too.

This was the classical education named bibliographic instruction. At that time, the training courses aimed to teach the catalogues and the controlled vocabulary. In 1982 there were published two works which have as subject this kind of training (2).

At the same time as the computers were introduced in the library's activities, initially for solving the management collections problems and finally for the documents' identification and location problems, the training courses for the users are more developed. Now it is more important to form a critical thought of the users in order to make them be able to participate more active in the educational process.

The modern concept of information literacy, as we understand it now, is used after 1980 even if it was still called bibliographic literacy. In a chronological order, we have to emphasize that around 1990, the education in information literacy develops simultaneously with higher education. The education in information literacy, in its concept, having as main elements the evaluation and liability of using the information, is one of the authorizing criteria of all the American agencies within higher education. In

conclusion, the education in information literacy is officially recognized as an important activity tightly connected to the mission of the university library. However, both the users and most of the librarians in the world still make the confusion between information literacy and information technology instruction.

After 2000, some great international organizations as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), introduced in their programmers documents concerning library education (3).

These documents emphasize that the ILI training courses appeared due to the need of reducing the anguish and despair of many users who were not able to obtain the desired information.

In order to establish uniform forms of work in the users' education activity, in USA were created standards for this field as: *Standards for twenty-first Century Learner* and *Information Power and Standards for the twenty-first Century Learner* (authorized by the American Association of School Librarians, a division of ALA). Furthermore, *Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning* accomplished in co-operation by the American Association of School Librarians and the Associations for Educational Communications and Technology. Finally, the standard used now worldwide, *ACRL – Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, was imposed by the Associations of College and Research Libraries. Besides the above mentioned standards, librarians have at their disposal reference books and guide books regarding the information education.

The main types of libraries involved in information literacy instruction are the school libraries and the university libraries. The other types of libraries also recognize that the library is the main factor in the users' training in order to control the instruments of accessing the information.

For example, the specialized libraries feel the need to create a so called "society of information literacy". These libraries are tightly connected to the most important areas of the society – health, law, economy, culture – which they have to support with updated information and to create the most performant access tools to information.

Instruction in information literacy is more and more present even in the public libraries which in most of countries are a real popular universities and where people of all ages and all professions learn how to use information effectively, efficiently, ethically and critically.

## **Structures**

The complex structures connected to the education in information literacy were founded in USA beginning with the 8-th decade of the XX-th century.

Since 1970, within ALA, it was created the Bibliographia Instructions Section (BIS), which became Instruction Section and, at present, is Library Instruction Round Tables (LIRT). It is to be mentioned the great number of training publications edited for supporting the librarians. Among them we can mention: *The LIRT Library Instruction Handbook*; *Sourcebook for Bibliographic Instruction*; *Learning to Teach: Workshop on Instruction*. Besides this publications we can mention the periodical *Journal of Information Literacy*, the portal *Libraries and the Academy, Communications in Information Literacy*, the site *ACRL Information Literacy*.

So, there is a constant activity concerning the supporting process of teaching and learning the librarians who want to become trainers in the information literacy.

## **Planning**

The training activities are planned both at a macro level and at a micro one. A large range of teaching methods is used as follows: guidance tours, hand-books, workshops, courses, on-line tutorials etc.

The Americans elaborated a step by step methodology based on the librarian-user relationship (4)In their opinion, this relationship develops three work manners: reactive, interactive and proactive. The reactive manner is based on the librarians' expertise in their relationship with the users, answering to their questions. The interactive manner means that the librarians answer by phone or e-mail to the users' special requests. The proactive manner is based neither on preexistent situations nor on directional communication but on the librarian's experience. As a trainer, he can create an optimal communication style.

In the planning process the aim and the objectives must be distinctly defined. At the macro level, the programme of education in information literacy has to fulfill the mission and purposes of the organization. After that, the users' needs of information are evaluated. At the micro level, there must be settled the requests, environment and policy based on the interests of each individual.

The programme will contain the location, staff, time and allocated budget. All these elements should be planned in a realistic manner and based on the user's needs for allowing him to reach a high level of

knowledge at the end of the training process. Efficient methods for the users' final evaluation must also be provided.

When planning the programme we have to make a difference between *the digital natives* (those who accumulated digital technology skills since childhood) and *the digital emigrants* (those who grew up in the digital era but learned this technology later on).

The software and hardware should also be taken into account. On the other hand we must consider the type of instruction preferred by the library, the one preferred by the user (in the classroom, direct search, on-line communication), the age and training level of the users .

In planning, a special attention must be given to the transmitted quantity of information. It is considered by teachers that "less information often means more". The American teachers consider that a student is more efficient if he remembers exactly three things instead of remembering seven incorrectly or not at all. So, when we appreciate the amount of knowledge which must be disseminated we should choose between the following options: *he have to know, it is good for him to know and he doesn't need to know now.*

One of the essential elements within ILI projects concern the actions of marketing, advertising and promotion. These actions are meant to sustain the informational policy of an organization, institution or department and emphasize the advantages offered by these training courses and give examples of accomplishments.

### **Instruction**

The instruction methods could be different. The experience has an important role in the educational process contributing to the storage of the information for a long time. In the instruction process of the users, the librarians must take into account the following important elements: self-motivation, team work, workshops, on-line exercises, on-line tutorial, digital interactive references, memory games, challenging, competition.

The best results are obtained if the training activity is organized in groups of users. When the groups are formed, we should consider the reactive activities which enable a better memorizing of the information and the development of the own mental pattern in order to implement the acquired knowledge.

Each lesson plan should be an experimental model able to be put into practice. First, the knowledge level of the students must be tested. The new information enables the student to better understand the old ones. Two

or three theoretical lessons are followed by a practical one where the students put the theory into practice (5).

### **Assesemnt**

The assesemnt of the course results is very important because it helps us to know if it is necessary to improve or change something (for example, the staff structure). The Americans propose that the evaluation should be made on the following levels: *reaction, instruction, behaviour, results*. Reaction: the extent in which the course was liked (estimated on a graduated scale from low to high, so called “happiness scales”). Instruction: the extent in which knowledge were acquired. Behaviour: the extent in which the knowledge can be put into practice, the efficiency of teaching. Results: the consequence of the instruction is that the student can find a better school or job. “One-Minute Paper” is an on-line evaluation form widely used for testing the knowledge acquired at the courses.

Once the technology developed a new range of facilities for teaching and learning appeared: Web sites, on-line tutorials, guide-books, bloggs, wikises, mashups, podcasts, RSS feeds etc. These facilities are also socializing tools. We must admit that the contemporary technology supports the unskilled users who often have little time at their disposal to search and evaluate the large quantity of information received in different forms. So, the development of the critical thought may be considered as an important goal of the education based on the electronic resources.

In the last 30 years we learned that the essential problem for a researcher is to retrieve the information but recently, we learned that the estimation of the information is of the same importance. It is not an easy task to make a good estimation.

American libraries which I have already mentioned several times, obtain good results in the education in information science due to the partnerships with those who need to be trained in this field: teachers, politicians, people from business, health and culture fields. The main areas of interest are as follows: higher education, research, commerce and entertainment. It is well known the traditional partnership between faculties and libraries and the one between teachers and librarians (6).

The cooperation on local, regional and national level has an important role in developing the systems of education in information literacy. Unfortunately, this co-operation does not exist in the Romanian librarianship environment. If such co-operation would exist there could be obtained important grants which would allow more efficient activities. The

librarian who becomes information literacy instructor must have certain skills as: to be a good teacher, co-worker, marketing agent, expert in technology. He must improve his knowledge and skills permanently, elaborate new work methods, use new documents in order to extend his abilities in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary conditions. He also has to develop relationships with those more experienced, to acquire team or pair learning techniques, to elaborate teaching courses.

### **Conclusions**

It is admitted worldwide that ILI has become an essential function of the contemporary libraries, and important efforts are made to develop a more efficient instructiv system.

There is a vast specialized literature which deliberates upon the most efficient techniques in ILI field.

Moreover, opinions are changed by: chats, web sites, bloggs and other forums supporting continuously the development of this field.

ILI presumes the existence of a partnership, planning, commitment, evaluation and support. The librarians are challenged to elaborate new and more efficient work techniques, to promote themselves in the professional communities, to prove their abilities in their relation with the users. In order to achieve the objectives they must enter into partnerships in the education field, in the business environment and government.

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