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# Information literacy, competencies and curriculum: an international round-table: Milano (Italy) Palazzo Stelline: 15-16 March 2007

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The annual Italian conference on Information Literacy (IL) took place in Milan from 15 to 16 March 2007 at the Palazzo delle Stelline. It was a very popular event, with over 2000 attendees recorded by the conference committee.

The conference hosted a round-table organised by the International Masters in Information and Communication Sciences, a programme of the Università di Parma and Northumbria University at Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. The goal of the round-table was to connect academic teachers and professionals for a joint debate on the competencies required from librarians involved in Information Literacy activities as well as the development of Librarianship and Information Science (LIS) school curricula.

The round-table was chaired by Pat Dixon and Anna Maria Tammaro (University of Parma, Italy) and offered a broad international perspective, thanks to the presence of teachers and professionals from different countries.

**Terry Weech** from the United States presented the experience of the LIS School at the University of Illinois, where IL is introduced as a subject in two courses: *Introduction to Reference Services* and *Instruction and Assistance Systems*. These courses are devoted to training future librarians how to develop and teach IL. The contents include an overview of theoretical and applied research on IL and introduce various levels of instruction such as; one-on-one instruction, group instruction in the library, and web-based instruction. Students are required to design and present an instruction or assistance program.

**Sylvie Chevillotte** represented both the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), as secretary of the Information Literacy section, and ENSSIB, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de l'Information (France). At ENSSIB, students are prospective librarians who come from different disciplines and want to add a professional competency to their initial training (which is very often at a Masters level). They are offered a broad, general curriculum, covering numerous subjects in a short time, in which IL plays a crucial role. The curriculum offers both a general introduction to IL for all students (12 hours) and an optional course named *Training the trainers* (30 hours). The methodological approach is a practical one: it involves participants in case studies, requiring them to approach different pedagogical models by practising them.

**Sirje Virkus** from Tallinn University, Estonia, offered a broad European perspective, since she had led the IL and learning subgroup in the EUCLID project *LIS in Europe: Joint Curriculum Development and Bologna Perspectives*, in 2005. The group (Albert K. Boekhorst from the Netherlands, José A. Gomez-Hernandez from Spain, Annette Skov from Denmark and Sheila Webber from UK) involved many specialists within Europe and issued a report under the title *European Curriculum Reflections on Library and Information Science Education*

The report defines IL essentials for LIS students: to become information literate themselves and to learn how to facilitate others to become information literate. The adoption of modern teaching and learning approaches is recommended, with a focus on knowledge construction rather than knowledge transmission, and on reflective practice and supportive learning. The promotion and sharing of good practice is also encouraged, in order to stimulate LIS schools to integrate or embed IL into the LIS curriculum. The report, in addition, stresses the need for collaboration amongst LIS educators to ensure that IL is appropriately recognised as an essential element within the LIS curriculum.

**Judith Broady-Preston** from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK, focused on Information Literacy with relation to the concept of professionalism and stressed the link between competence, skills and employability. She presented the LUK project (Lifelong Learning in the UK) which promotes a set of four core skills: team working and management skills, information skills, ICT skills and customer focus. The LUK project was also illustrated: its purposes are: enhancing the provision of skills-based teaching

materials, documenting key skills for future employability and establishing communities of practice. Judith also stressed the role of professional associations and proposed a critical approach to the issues of career progression, currency and validity of formal education courses and recognition of non-traditional routes to the profession.

**John van de Pas** Saxion Hogescholen, Deventer, The Netherlands started his presentation from the perspective of students' learning needs. Many students entering university lack some basic skills such as; the ability to write a consistent text, to make correct summaries, formulate research questions and to distinguish between quality information and trivia. Dutch higher education institutions are therefore forced into starting repair programmes, teaching students basic information literacy skills. According to Van de Pas, this could represent a new market for LIS professionals. In the Netherlands, the ACRL competencies standards have been translated and are proposed for an application to the Dutch context. Information literacy (translated into Dutch as "information skills") is being taught with strict connection to subject learning. The attempts at introducing students to IL outside a subject area failed just because of students' lack of a meaningful subject context.

**Helen Boelens**, School librarian at the Kalsbeek College, The Netherlands, offered an interesting perspective on IL by showing the results of some research into school libraries in Europe. She found that the position of school librarians within Europe is a critical one, with poor image and salary, and a lack of young school librarians graduating. While there are a number of low level vocational courses and commercial courses for school librarians, many library clerks are employed in school libraries without the necessary credentials. Helen, who comes from Australia but works in the Netherlands, presented a new initiative for an international e-learning programme founded on the Australian experience in this field. The programme, whose intended audience is teaching librarians and school librarians, will be delivered in different languages and is to be recognised by different countries.

**Petra Hauke** from the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, illustrated an initiative where IL was integrated in a project course. *Turning an Idea into a Book* is a project where LIS students are involved in producing a LIS related book, following different stages, from peer reviewing to proof reading. The book is then issued both in printed and in electronic format. This project aims at encouraging students to be aware of information quality and to care for it.

The debate that followed involved librarians and teachers in a lively discussion around some *hot* topics:

- Do we have a straightforward and shared definition of IL? What are its most important elements?
- Should all LIS students be required to take a course on IL before graduation?
- Do all librarians in all types of libraries need to be able to teach IL?
- Can IL have an impact on information behaviour as well as on skills?

Even if the focus of the round-table was on librarians' competencies, the discussion was broadened to include a comparison of different theoretical approaches and definitions of IL. The role of information professionals in the learning society and the need to include pedagogical contents into the LIS curricula were also stressed, together with the importance of linking Information Literacy practice and research. All the participants agreed on the importance of international cooperation and on the role that professional associations can play for the development, promotion and communication of Information Literacy.