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Abstract

This paper discusses how terminology around digital and information literacies can cause misunderstandings and divisions between professionals in higher education, leading to duplication of effort in some areas and gaps in provision in others. The term 'digital literacy' has some currency with bodies such as Jisc and QAA, but it is a disputed term reflecting a tension between the perception of technology as either neutral or culturally situated. The digital environment arguably opens up possibilities and presents new challenges for staff and learners, but do we need new literacies? For over 40 years librarians and information professionals have called this 'information literacy' while other professionals in HE call these 'academic literacies'. Does terminology matter? Do we need a new way of communicating about the critical abilities all staff and learners need to ensure there is collaboration in higher education between the professions and is digital literacy moving us closer together towards an understanding learning?

Paper, 1000 words

The term 'digital literacy' can be troublesome for those who have been teaching and researching what librarians call 'information literacy' and learning developers describe as 'academic literacies'. Information literacy is "knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner." (CILIP, 2013) The term was first used in the library world over 40 years ago (Zurkowski, 1974). It was not intended as a library centric model, but a call to all professions to help people understand the value of information and how to mould it for their needs, which largely went unheeded. Since then, librarians increasingly recognise that information literacy is a key part of their role, particularly in formal education. Researchers and practitioners have worked to develop frameworks and models of information literacy and made efforts to embed it in the curriculum of mainstream education. However, progress has been slow and recognition of the role of librarian as teacher is not widespread, particularly in sectors outside formal education. The author and technologist Seth Godin (2011) argues that the librarian is a 'data hound, a guide, a sherpa and a teacher' not a keeper of books. However, it is fair to say that librarians are only recently developing their role as teachers and many approaches to information literacy still take a functional, skills based approach.

The use of the word 'literacy' signifies not the teaching of skills or competencies, but practices, attitudes and behaviours that are context specific. While there may be some generic 'literacies' that we all need to live, learn and work in society, arguably these are contextual and should be taught

embedded in the curriculum to be meaningful. Lea and Street (1998) writing about academic literacies, advocated moving away from the skills based, deficit model when supporting student academic writing practices. This resonates with an increasing recognition of the need to view information literacy as a framework for learning, for example in recent work by the US Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) who used threshold concepts (Meyer and Land, 2003) to reformulate their Information Literacy Framework for Higher Education in 2015 (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework> . My own research (Secker and Coonan, 2013) to develop A New Curriculum of Information Literacy (ANCIL) developed a learner-centred model and viewed information literacy as a part of a wider curriculum of critical abilities, attitudes and behaviours that underpin learning. However, how does digital literacy relate to academic and information literacies? Nowhere in the ten strands of ANCIL is a technology or 'digital literacy' strand, as our research recognised the term 'information' to encompass digital and print abilities. However, the term information literacy outside the library profession is assumed to be a narrow concept associated with how students find published information, such as books and journals in a library setting. This means that much of the teaching that librarians do is not aligned with other literacies and may sit outside or alongside the curriculum.

In recent years digital literacy has gained attention from bodies such as Jisc and more recently the Quality Assurance Agency. Yet as Hinrichsen and Coombs (2013) argue that defining the term requires taking an ideological position that recognises that technology, like information is not neutral. They also argue that a functional skills based approach of IT literacy, leads to digital literacy being taught outside the curriculum, rather than taught as part of academic practices and that "broader literacy practices are not going to emerge spontaneously as a result of technology proliferation' (Hinrichsen and Coombs, 2013, p.4) It also risks alienating academic staff who may not perceive themselves to be fully digitally literate. However, perhaps the interest in 'digital literacy' presents an opportunity for information and academic literacy experts to reframe their activities. At my own institution we present Digital and Information Literacies as interlinked abilities that underpin learning. The 'digital' in digital literacy can be helpful as many teachers recognise that technology and the availability of online resources has changed students' relationship with information. No longer is information scarce, but the wealth of information means students need critical abilities, to be discerning about what they find online and how they use digital tools to share information for their studies and about themselves.

Whether we call it 'media and information literacy (UNESCO, 2015), 'metaliteracy' (Jacobson and Mackey, 2013) or digital literacy, terminology matters because it helps librarians, learning developers and learning technologists develop a shared understanding of their aims. However, in many institutions there is still work to be done to map these abilities onto a common framework and to develop an approach for embedding this in the curriculum. By recognising the overlaps and

unique aspects of each literacy those supporting digital, academic and information literacies can work together with discipline teachers. Moreover, it should then be possible to develop a shared framework that has a measurable impact on student learning, but avoids prescribing tools and technologies that students should be able to use. This approach can also challenge the myth of the 'digital native' that persists amongst many discipline teachers, despite much evidence to the contrary. Assumptions about how students develop their digital, academic and information literacies need to be challenged if we want to empower students to consider the information they trust, the digital tools and technologies they use, and the ethical issues when using and creating knowledge. The solid foundation in information literacy teaching places librarians as key players as institutions develop digital literacy programmes, but there is much to learn from critical and academic literacy models and from embedding these beyond the library across an institution.

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