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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

Chat Literacy: Reflection on approaches and methodology towards setting up a community of practice on information capability in an international context

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Chat Literacy is an online community of practice dedicated to broadening conceptions of information literacy (IL) across disciplines within an international context. It is free to join and hosted on the Eldis Communities platform as the Chat Literacy group. There is also a dedicated Facebook page and Twitter account.

Figure 1: The Chat Literacy Community page



Our broad understanding of what it means to be information literate includes individuals who “know when they need information, and are then able to identify, locate, evaluate, organise and effectively use the information to address and help resolve personal, job related, or broader social issues and problems.” (UNESCO 2002, cited in Bundy 2004, p.3)

Chat Literacy launched in March 2011 with 247 members; a collaboration between information professionals based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and partner organisations including: University of Botswana, University of Zambia and Loughborough University. The initiative responded to a need for ongoing support and mentoring of IDS IL Programme participants. We focused, initially, on information supply but later adopted an information capacity-building approach to facilitate a more active engagement within (and beyond) the community. Chat Literacy currently has 500 members from Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, and North and South America.

Methodology and approaches

Chat Literacy provides a peer-to-peer learning platform and knowledge management system using a capacity-building approach to stimulate learning and knowledge sharing.

To engage a wider community, we facilitated an e-discussion on “conceptions of information literacy in an international context” (4 to 6 September 2012). The discussion was based on pre-defined areas of need through a mutual process. The facilitation team (based at IDS) defined the overarching theme and scope. We created an online survey to consult our active members and to initiate collaboration with a team of 9 information professionals in the IL field. The responses we received were then used to refine the approach, the content and to structure the programme into three distinct threads: conceptions of IL; links with research skills; and effective tools and approaches.

There were over 730 total visits (109 within IDS) and 213 replies to the three discussion threads over the 3 days. The discussion attracted 164 new members from 63 different countries. There were approximately 1500 views of the daily summaries through email and it engaged some high-profile experts.

Since September 2012, our approach has focused on strengthening reflective writing skills through commissioning articles from both new and existing members. We ask authors to write from their direct personal and/or professional experience, to share best practice and talk about barriers to IL that they encounter. The articles are discipline-specific, context-specific, and/or focus on a particular theme. From November 2012 to March 2013, we commissioned a series of articles on supporting young learners' IL (Sung 2012-13) - one, in particular received over 9,000 views (Sung 2012). A series of articles on health literacy appeared in July 2013 (Bukenya et al. 2013).

This commissioning approach allows us to work with individual writers, building their capacity around communication and editorial skills, reflective approaches, confidence-building, developing their style and voice, and also to model on Chat Literacy the sharing or journaling of direct experience from different contexts and regions around the world.

Resources

Chat Literacy on:

Eldis Community: <http://community.eldis.org/chatliteracy/files/aboutcl.html>

Facebook: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/ChatLiteracy>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/infolitdoodle/>

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Bukenya, D. et al. (2013). *Health Literacy Month*. Available from: <http://bit.ly/17E7ef1> [Accessed 2 October 2013].

Sung, H. (2012-13). *Chatters' Reflections Series: Supporting Young Learners' IL through applications of ICTs*. Available from: <http://bit.ly/1bMBMyf> [Accessed 2 October 2013].