ANCIL in action: progress updates on A New Curriculum for Information Literacy

Emma Coonan[1], Jane Secker[2], Katy Wrathall[3] & Helen Webster[4]

Introduction

Secker & Coonan's 2011 research on *A New Curriculum for Information Literacy* (ANCIL) positions information literacy as a vital, holistic and institution-wide element in academic teaching and learning. Rather than taking a competency-based approach in which abilities and performance levels are delineated prescriptively, ANCIL is founded on a perception of information literacy as a continuum of skills, competences, behaviours and values around information, centred in an individual learner engaged in a specific task or moving towards a particular goal. This approach is strongly informed by Bruce et al.'s relational model, which sees IL as a 'complex of different ways of interacting with information' (Bruce, Edwards & Lupton, 2006, p.6) and by the view of Hepworth and Walton (2009) who argue that information literacy is a matter of an individual completing a task in a given context, involving an interplay of behavioural, cognitive, metacognitive and affective states.

The curriculum places the student at the centre of a continuum of abilities, behaviours and attitudes that range from functional skills to high-level intellectual operations. At the same time, it presents a broad vision of information literacy across 10 'strands', which include the social, ethical and affective dimensions of dealing with information (see Figure 1, below).
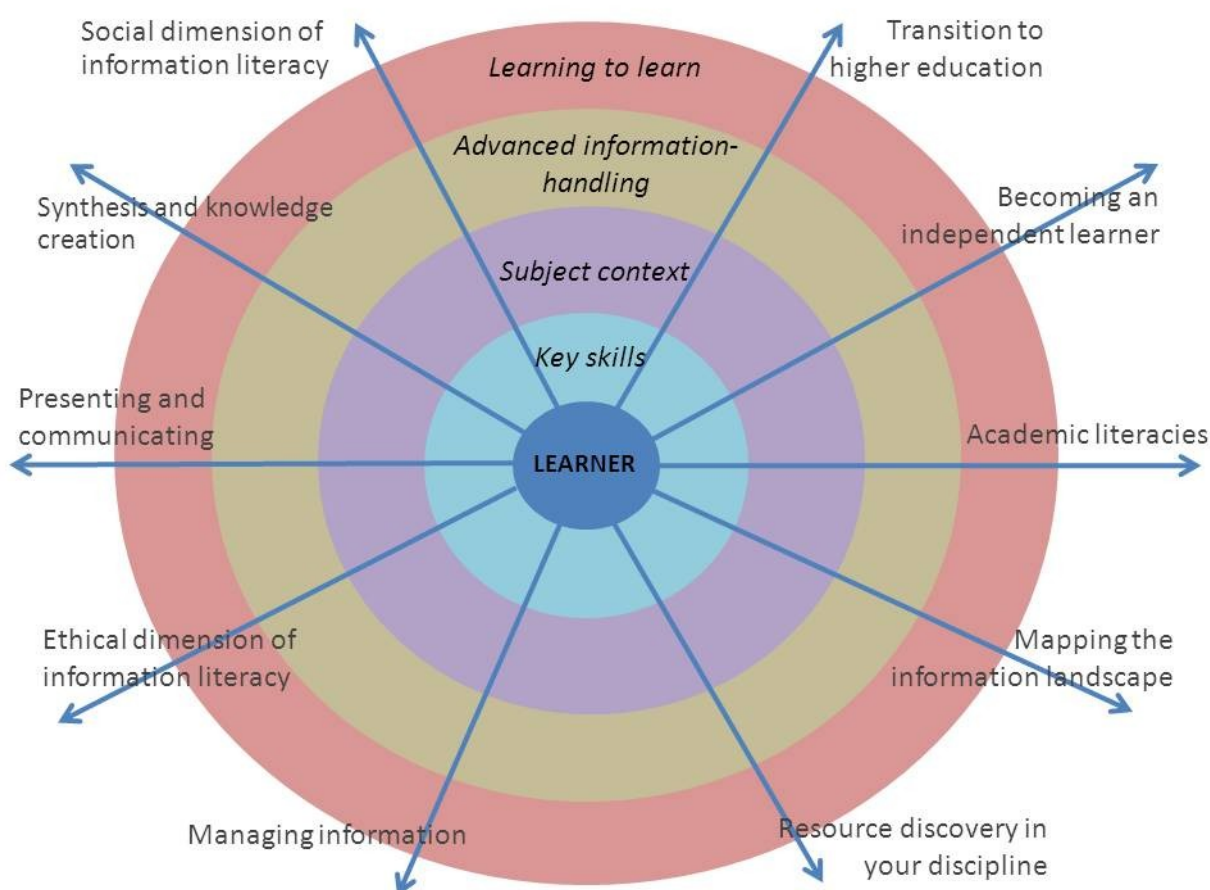

Figure 1: ANCIL information literacy mapping (2012 revised version)

---

[1] Research Skills & Development Librarian, Cambridge University Library
[2] Copyright and Digital Literacy Advisor, Centre for Learning Technology, LSE
[3] Academic Services Team Leader, York St John University
[4] Research Associate, Digital Humanities Network, Cambridge University

The focus of the curriculum is on the individual learner's development of an independent and judicious relationship with information. This includes the ability to generate strategies for dealing with new contexts, and to evaluate and interrogate information in any format - textual, data-rich, visual, multimedia - and on any platform. ANCIL represents this development in four progressive 'bands' which radiate outwards from the learner at the centre, starting with the development of practical skills and expanding through increasingly complex processes. These include establishing an evolving subject context within which to deploy the skills, high-level cognitive operations including critical evaluation, synthesis, and creating new knowledge, and culminate in the development of the conscious, reflective framework that is key to managing one's own learning.

Within the academic arena, the curriculum is designed to support the *whole* process of study or research. This broad, learner-focused view of information literacy includes, but is not limited to, the library's remit: it requires collaborative input from a wide range of academic and support departments. Rather than hingeing on a narrow view of bibliographic skills or 'library training' taking place in isolation from academic practice, therefore, the ANCIL curriculum approaches the learning processes involved in study and research holistically, and as such, it thus calls for interprofessional collaboration across subject-specific teaching staff and other stakeholders such as librarians and learning developers.

ANCIL's definition of information literacy therefore foregrounds its crucial role in academic learning, study and research:

> Information literacy is a continuum of skills, behaviours, approaches and values that is so deeply entwined with the uses of information as to be a fundamental element of learning, scholarship and research.

> It is the defining characteristic of the discerning scholar, the informed and judicious citizen, and the autonomous learner.

The curriculum thus offers an opportunity to rehabilitate the contested and often undervalued standing of information literacy within higher education.

Practical applications

ANCIL offers both micro- and macro-level approaches to reviewing the information literacy support offered in an institution. With its emphasis on active, reflective and transferable elements in learning, ANCIL lends itself well to practical course design and lesson planning. By reviewing the structure and content of individual sessions through the ANCIL lens, it is possible to enhance information literacy teaching significantly even where provision is restricted to one-shot or front-loaded training sessions.

In addition, ANCIL's holistic mapping of information literacy, together with the interprofessional and collaborative approach this entails, allows departments or whole institutions to audit where, how and when provision is offered to and encountered by the student in the course of his or her learning career.

Lesson planning at Cambridge

As part of the documentation developed in phase 2 for use with pilot institutions, Helen Webster designed a template for using ANCIL principles to inform lesson planning. This document was used as the basis of a session-level audit of classes in the Research Skills Programme at Cambridge University Library during Spring 2012.

Lesson planning for research skills sessions at Cambridge University Library has been relatively underdeveloped to date. While most presenters create a reasonably detailed structural overview for their sessions in consultation with the Research Skills Librarian, there has been no standard form in which to record the details, and most session plans are not filed centrally. In addition, few plans offer any analysis of the session content, generally being created to act as a structural prompt or crib sheet for the presenter. Activities are identfied and described as part of the 'running order', but not linked to specific learning

outcomes or assessments. At their briefest, the session plans do not identify learning outcomes or session aims beyond a greater familiarity with the resource or interface being demonstrated.

Creating even a basic lesson plan forces the presenter to step away from a merely descriptive or structural overview and towards a more analytical stance in which the 'why' of the lesson - not just the 'how' - is defined. In this way creating a lesson plan for an existing session acts as a practical review and overhaul of the session's content and alignment with the desired learning outcomes. The ANCIL template offers a further enhancement by including categories relating to the four learning 'bands' described above and shown in Figure 1. Thus the template asks the session designer to evaluate the session content in terms of:

- the key 'take-home' skill being taught in this class
- the subject or discipline-specific elements in which that skill is contextualised in the session
- the higher-level cognitive abilities being developed around information handling
- what opportunities it gives for the student to reflect on how the learned skills, abilities and values can be deployed in other situations

The ANCIL lesson plan template also includes specific sections for describing the active and reflective elements of the session, and the assessment and feedback mechanisms. Finally, the template asks session designers to consider which of the 10 strands are represented in the session's content (generally more than one strand is present), and to think beyond the impact of the individual session by considering how it fits in with other provision in this area across the institution.

Appendix 1 depicts a completed session plan for a class entitled 'How to Find Things on your Reading List'[5], showing how the ANCIL categories are combined with standard lesson plan fields such as audience, learning outcomes, activities and materials. Also included are fields for venue layout, duration and format of each session. These elements are often beyond the control of librarians, yet they have a significant impact on library teaching provision, particularly when we want to include hands-on, active or groupwork elements. It was therefore felt it would be useful to include any limitations imposed by venue or duration as part of the lesson plan.

In the case of the Reading Lists lesson plan, using the ANCIL learning bands to 'unpack' the learning outcomes led to an interesting reflective discovery. The main aim of the session is for students to understand the structure and purpose of reading lists, a goal which appears at first glance relatively low-level and a good fit for the 'take-home skill' band. However, in addition to developing the skill of deploying the reading list as a directional tool, students must also develop an understanding of how these tools function in the context of learning at Cambridge, where the reading list is frequently unstructured, indicative and exceedingly wide-ranging. Few lists are faceted or categorised: many are simply presented in alphabetical order by author, and there is only rarely any indication of what constitutes a source of primary importance as distinct from one of supplementary interest. The underlying expectation is that students will select appropriate material rather than attempting to read everything in sequence.

As a result, what appears at first glance to be a low-level practical skill in fact demands a sophisticated level of critical judgement and contextual awareness that pushes the learning higher up the four bands. In fact knowing how to evaluate a reading list critically and selectively falls into the domain of advanced information-handling, and can be usefully transferred to other contexts (e.g. evaluating and prioritising large volumes of hits on an abstract and indexing database). Furthermore, recognising that this critical intervention is required *in the first place* is a threshold concept that carries powerful reflective implications, giving the student the opportunity to place him- or herself in an active and selective relationship to information rather than a passive, absorptive role.

Using any form of structured lesson plan, therefore, offers a means for presenters to analyse session content more closely, to consider how the timing of various components, e.g. demonstrations and

---

[5] Blank versions of the lesson plan can be downloaded from the ANCIL wiki at http://implementingancil.pbworks.com, and may be freely used and adapted.

activities, fits within the overall structure of the class, and to articulate aims and learning outcomes. Using the ANCIL template increases the benefit in three ways: by adding fields that focus on the learner's ongoing journey into an aspect of information literacy; by asking session planners to identify complementary provision elsewhere in the institution, so that participants can continue to develop their learning in this strand; and by acting as a reflective tool for session planner, thus creating a learning opportunity that is itself embedded in the pedagogic process.

Institutional audit at LSE

In March 2012 LSE started a project to audit information literacy provision for undergraduate students across the institution using ANCIL, to identify which strands of the curriculum were being supported and to discover if there were any gaps in provision. The project is being led by Maria Bell in the Library and Jane Secker and Darren Moon in the Centre for Learning Technology (CLT) who are keen to improve their own support for undergraduate students, and also to map how this compliments the teaching and support offered by other service providers and the academic departments. Katy Wrathall is acting as a consultant to the LSE staff, using her experiences from the second phase of the ANCIL research, where she had explored using ANCIL as an audit tool at an institutional level. Katy's investigations at the University of Worcester and York St John University from October to December 2011 suggested that the curriculum worked at the macro level to audit information literacy provision. Using the curriculum, she devised a series of questions which were trialled as a questionnaire and for use in one to one interviews. The questionnaire approach proved to be less successful when sent out to academic staff in an institution, although it did elicit useful feedback from library staff. Interviews were found to be more effective for capturing activities within academic and support departments.

An initial meeting at LSE was held to scope out the project and devise a suitable methodology. LSE is unusual in having a predominantly postgraduate student population; however, as ANCIL was primarily aimed at undergraduate students, it was decided to survey provision for this group at LSE. Undergraduate students at LSE are also now all required to undertake a compulsory course, LSE100: Understanding the Cause of Things (http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/students/LSE100/Home.aspx), which in addition to covering big questions in the social sciences is designed to develop methodological, information and communication skills. The project team decided to select a sample of academic departments and include both qualitative and quantitative subjects at LSE. Academic Support Librarians were enlisted firstly to complete a questionnaire about how their own work supporting undergraduate student mapped onto the ten strands of ANCIL. The librarians were also valuable sources of advice about who to contact within the academic departments who might be prepared to take part in an interview.

Katy recommended that interviews with key members of academic and support services were the best way to elicit information about practices across LSE. Therefore invitations to participate in the project and nominate a member of staff to be interviewed were sent out to key individuals including: the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Director of the Teaching and Learning Centre, Head of the Careers Service, Head of the Language Centre, Student Services Manager and the Programme Director for LSE100. Katy conducted initial interviews with a representative from each of two key support areas. They were used as an opportunity not only to gather information but also to refine the questions to suit the particular requirements of LSE.

Work on the audit will be undertaken over Spring/Summer 2012 and a web page has been set up about the project at LSE where additional details will be posted in due course (http://clt.lse.ac.uk/digital-and-information-literacy/ANCIL-audit.php). The researchers will also be presenting findings from this study at the IFLA Satellite Meeting, The Road to Information Literacy in August 2012.

More information on the ANCIL research, including project reports, can be found at http://newcurriculum.wordpress.com. *Teaching resources, audit tools, and case studies are available on the wiki at* http://implementingancil.pbworks.com.

References

C.Bruce, S.Edwards & M.Lupton, 'Six frames for information literacy education: a conceptual framework for interpreting the relationships between theory and practice' Italics, 5 (1), 2006. Available at: www.ics.heacademy.ac.uk/italics/vol5iss1.htm (retrieved 28 March 2012)

E.Coonan, Teaching learning: perceptions of information literacy, 2011. Available at: http://newcurriculum.wordpress.com/project-reports-and-outputs/ (retrieved 28 March 2012)

M.Hepworth & G.Walton, Teaching information literacy for inquiry-based learning, Oxford: Chandos, 2009

J.Secker & E.Coonan, A new curriculum for information literacy: curriculum and supporting documents, 2011. Available at: http://newcurriculum.wordpress.com/project-reports-and-outputs/ (retrieved 28 March 2012)

Appendix 1: Sample lesson plan

Course title: How to find things on your reading list

Purpose - *what study or research need will be met?*

This session is designed to help students find the books and journal articles they need quickly and easily, using library catalogues and the University's wide range of electronic resources.

Target audience

New undergraduates and taught masters students; also suitable for newcomers to the library

Learning outcome(s) - *what will participants know or be able to do by the end of the session?*

- understand reading list structure and purpose
- understand the various material formats and know where to search for what
- know how to critically evaluate a reading list
- recognise and reconstruct incomplete references

ANCIL learning bands

Practical skill

- Familiarity with catalogue searching and results handling

Subject context

- Enhanced awareness of range and variety of material available on a given topic
- Greater familiarity with types of scholarly publication format and their relative benefits
- Awareness of existence of subject-specific e-resources

Advanced information-handling

- Critically evaluating the reading list as a tool (a form of results list)
- Identifying and applying key value criteria - choosing where to start

Reflection

- Awareness of the need to critically evaluate the reading list as a resource
- Consideration of how to deploy critical evalution to prioritise material in other situations

Practicalities

Format and duration of session

One-hour slide-based talk/demo with hands-on practical elements and group work

Venue layout

Computer room (would work better in café style layout with laptops …)

Equipment

PC and projector, live internet; participant PCs

Content

Materials

Slides (http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/courses/Documentation/reading_lists_2011.pptx)

Handout (http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/courses/Documentation/rdg_list_MT11.pdf)

LibrarySearch guide (http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/courses/Documentation/ABRbeta.pdf)

Active and reflective components - *what will the participants do to reinforce or explore what they learn?*

- Hands-on 5-minute activities: 1. prioritise your reading list; 2. find your material
- Reflection: during final 5 minutes of session, write yourself a postcard (internal address only!) listing three things you want to take away from today's class (presenter to send after 1 week)

Assessment and feedback mechanism - *formative and/or summative*

>> Need to build in formative peer assessment element through groupwork activities

The institutional picture

Which ANCIL strands are represented in the session content?

3: Academic literacies - strategic reading, value criteria

4: Mapping the info landscape - getting to know the main scholarly formats and some of the key resources

Where does this session dovetail with other provision in the University?

GDP speed reading classes (skills focus)

Precursor to RSP session on 'How to do a literature search'