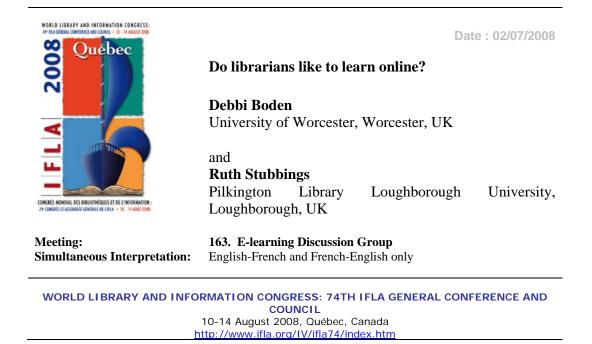Loughborough University

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Do librarians like to learn online?

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Abstract

Information skills, academic literacy, information fluency and information literacy – the terminology have caused considerable debate in the UK, but in what ever guise information literacy appears it is having a huge impact on the role of librarians. It is now seen as one of the major keys to problem solving and life long learning.

 A considerable amount of resources in the UK higher education (HE) library sector is put towards enhancing student's information literacy skills. Teaching has therefore become a core part of a librarian's role. Courses are being designed and delivered by library staff to students in various formats including face-to-face, online, blended learning, in formal classroom time and informally on the enquiry desk. Library staff, both professional and non professional, are expected to have an understanding on the concepts of information literacy and online learning so that they can become effective teachers either in the classroom or at the enquiry desk. The question is, how do library staff acquire these skills and how do they view their roles in relation to information literacy?

Having recognised that information literacy is no longer just the province of HE, but as an essential part of life long learning and digital citizenship, library

schools are beginning to recognise a need for information literacy within the curriculum. They are not however, actively developing librarians teaching skills, library staff tend to obtain these skills through trial and error, short courses and professional teaching qualifications. In addition, few library oriented continuing professional development programmes in the UK provide elements of online learning, so it is difficult to experience online learning as a student. To overcome this, the CILIP Community Services Information Literacy sub-group have created two online modules which are aimed at enquiry desk staff and at those who are teaching Information literacy in a more formal environment.

1. POP-i and LolliPop were designed to assist enquiry desk staff in enhancing their own information literacy skills so that they can then assist readers in becoming independent information seekers. POP-i was piloted by Bradford Public Libraries. LolliPop was piloted by two university libraries in the UK. Both are being adapted by other HE institutions and public libraries.

2. SirLearnaLot aims to help library staff enhance their understanding of pedagogy so that they can feel confident in designing and delivering courses to students. SirLearnaLot will be piloted in the very near future by at least two university libraries.

Both courses are written in HTML format which facilitates them being used in any Virtual learning Environment. Both programmes will be freely available under a Creative Commons License.

This paper will outline:
    a) how POP-I and LolliPop were piloted with library staff
    b) how the modules were evaluated
    c) staff feedback re content and their online learning experience
    c) how similar / dissimilar library staff are in relation to their learning experience

d) how the feedback has impacted on the design and delivery of the modules, so the needs of the learner is paramount.

Article

Information literacy (IL) is high on the library agenda and has been for many years. Raising awareness of IL outside the sector has been more difficult and progress is slow, despite lobbying of the UK government and other appropriate bodies. Over the last few months, there has been various news reports on plagiarism, Web 2.0 and more recently IL has hit the headlines in the United Kingdom (UK) press. The Guardian (Wallace 2008) ran an article on the CIBER report called *Information behaviour of the researcher of the future.* The report was written by Ian Rowlands (2008) and funded by the Joint Information Services Committee (JISC). Wendy Wallace saw the report as a "wake up" call for libraries. The report investigated the searching behaviours of both young and mature researchers and discovered:
a) there were no significant differences in behaviour
b) there was a tendency for searchers to use shallow searching techniques
c) young people lacked the skills to evaluate the information they found.

Wendy Wallace states "there is a clear message that young people have not been taught to construct a proper search and evaluate the results. Libraries are spending a fortune on premium content, but fundamental skills are lacking".

Far from being a wake up call, the CIBER report confirms what librarians, especially those working in the Higher Education (HE) sector, already know. And how do librarians know this? Through interaction with readers at the enquiry desk , questions asked during information literacy classes and the observation of searching behaviours when readers are using the PCs in libraries. In addition there have been several research studies that have presented similar conclusions to the CIBER report. For example, both the Justeis report (Urquhart et al. 2003) and Susie Andretta (2001) illustrate that students often over estimate their IL skills. And the PEW report (Fallows

2005) found that although students were confident in searching for information on the Internet, they were not always aware of how search engines worked and could be considered naive searchers.

A considerable amount of resources in the UK HE sector is put towards enhancing students IL skills. Librarians now deliver IL teaching to students and academic staff both on a one-to-one basis, at the enquiry desk, in an academics office and in the classroom. Classes can be small or large ranging from ten students in a lab or lectures of 350 students. Librarians are also taking an active role in developing online learning materials that can be used as stand alone resource or within a blended learning environment. In the HE sector, teaching has become a core part of a librarian's role.

In the UK IL is no longer seen as just the province of the HE sector. It is now seen as an essential part of life long learning and digital citizenship. All library sectors are now looking at how to enhance readers' IL skills. Librarians working in Further Education (FE) Colleges and schools are actively seeking ways to embed IL into the curriculum. The heads of Public Library (PL) services are beginning to recognise the importance of IL in relation to digital citizenship and social inclusion and the important role enquiry desk staff can play in developing readers' IL skills. Until recently however, there was no specific provision for enquiry staff within the PL sector to gain IL, skills which they could transfer into the work place.

So increasingly, and no matter what sector library staff work in or at what level (professional and non-professional), there is an increasing expectation that they will have an understanding of the concept of IL and that they will be effective teachers either in the classroom, on the enquiry desk or informal one to one sessions.

In 2007 Helen Conroy (Anonymous 2007 & Conroy 2007/2008) on the behalf of the Chartered Institute of Information & Library Professionals (CILIP) Personnel, Training and Education Group (PTEG), the CILIP Community Services Information Literacy Special Interest Group (ILG) and Netskills,

carried out a survey to discover whether library staff were teaching and what skills they needed. There were 463 responses to the survey, mostly from the HE sector, but there were responses from other sectors. Of those who responded:

- over half spent 20 to 40% of their time undertaking teaching activities
- 13% spent over half of their time on teaching activities
- 29% of respondents also carried out assessment during their teaching
- teaching activities ranged from on-the-spot support to large group teaching.

The survey also investigated what skills librarians thought they needed to enhance reader information literacy skills. These included:

- coaching skills (53%)
- facilitation skills (66%)
- writing training materials (78%)
- designing learning activities (79%)
- understanding of teaching & learning (83%)
- finally but not least, presentation skills (85%).

The survey (Conroy 2007/2008) supported anecdotal evidence that librarians are developing their teaching skills through a variety of means. For example:

- 72% by trial and error
- 59% on the job
- 30% by accredited course

Accredited courses included PGCE, City & Guilds, PGCLTHE and pathways for membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The survey discovered that cost and flexibility were chief factors in deciding what course to go on. There was also a desire for library focused teaching courses as respondents felt that it placed the theory of teaching into context.

To assist library staff to develop their understanding of IL, enhance their teaching skills and experience online learning themselves, the CILIP ILG have

created online courses which are aimed at enquiry desk staff and at those who are teaching IL in a more formal environment. The courses have been designed to be delivered online. Few library oriented continuing professional development programmes in the UK provide elements of online learning, so it is difficult to experience online learning as a student. The courses were designed to provide this experience, as well as further develop staff skills. The online courses that were created were: POP-i, LoliiPop and SirLearnaLot.

POP-i was a collaborative venture between Imperial College London and the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMC), Library Service. The project aimed to develop an online tutorial using the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Moodle that would enhance the information literacy skills of enquiry desk staff that work in the public library service and to provide them with the skill to transfer IL into the work place. Thus empowering the general public to become independent searchers with the skills to find and evaluate information effectively. BMC has thirty five libraries. Fifteen library staff, with varying qualifications, from across the libraries took part in the pilot. The online tutorial was delivered over fifteen weeks after a face-to-face induction day.

The programme was evaluated using the Museum, Libraries and Archive Councils (MLA) 'Inspiring for all' (MLA 2004a) evaluation framework.

Figure 1: Generic Learning Outcomes (MLA 2004b)

There was no formal accreditation for the POP-i programme so the concept of a Generic Learning Outcome was used to assess where learners saw themselves before the learning, and then at the end of the programme for learners again to assess themselves in terms of how they had developed in five areas: Knowledge & Understanding; Skills; Attitudes & Values; Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity; Activity, Behaviour & Progression.

Feedback from those who participated in the pilot was very positive. Before the introduction of POP-i, the BMC Library Service did not offer a great deal of opportunity for staff development. The course was therefore enthusiastically received. In addition the participants felt that the course was targeted specifically at them, both in terms of their role within the Library and the resources it was teaching them about. The participants stated that the course taught them how to search more effectively for electronic information, while reminding them of good practice in undertaking the reference interview. The course therefore helped them develop skills that would support the needs of the reader when answering enquiries. Participants appreciated the quizzes and the opportunity to discuss the course with colleagues via the discussion forums. POP-i is currently running again at Bradford under the name of Brolli.

The evaluation of POP-i seems similar to that of Frontline. Frontline (e-skills 2006) is an online staff training course aimed at public libraries. It focuses on reader development, including book displays. The evaluation discovered that 87% of the trainees felt that completing the online course was both helpful and enjoyable. Trainees stated that e-learning was better than both books and classrooms and that the integration of "investigate and explore" activities as part of the course encouraged ongoing informal learning.

LolliPop grew out of POP-i. It is an online tutorial that aims to enhance the IL skills of enquiry desk staff that work in HE libraries. A pilot was run at the University of Bedfordshire and Loughborough University in the summer of 2007. The tutorial was adapted so that it used terminology applicable to HE and the resources available from both libraries. As with POP-i the course was delivered online after a face-to-face induction day. Similar to the induction

day with POP-i the day included sections on the purpose of the course, self–reflection, use of discussion forums and the opportunity to use the online tutorial as well as meet all the other participants. Twenty seven members of staff took part (twenty from Bedford and seven from Loughborough) plus there were several mentors from both institutions. All participants worked on the enquiry desks on a regular basis and as with POP-i they were of differing grades.

The pilot of LolliPop was evaluated through two focus groups and a questionnaire. A small percentage of participants did not complete the course. Although the majority of participants felt they had learnt something from the tutorial, especially in relation to web 2.0, feedback was far less positive than that received for POP-i. Feedback included:

- some units were too long and too detailed
- it was quite hard to differentiate between the units
- navigation was not always clear
- disappointment that it was not tailored specifically to each institution
- the tutorial was too passive in nature – too much reading and not enough problem solving
- it did not regularly cater for a range of learning styles, such as aural and kinaesthetic learners
- there was a general dislike of the units being time released
- participants wanted more guidance from the mentors and more interaction with their mentor group
- many of the participants struggled to find time at work to complete the tutorial
- many of the participants were reluctant to take part in the discussion forums, they put this down to not knowing all the participants very well.

 In addition it was noted by the mentors that participants failed to truly reflect on their own learning in their personal learning journal. They often fell into the trap of describing rather than analytically reflecting on both the process and their learning.

Evaluation of the programme has led to the development of an evidence based LolliPop which will be piloted in November with the University of Worcester, Worcester Technical College, University of Bedfordshire and Bradford College. This will then give organisations the choice of an evidenced based programme or a more traditional static programme. From discussions with prospective users there appears to be a need for both types of courses.

LolliPop has also been adapted and successfully piloted for use by West Cheshire College and is being adapted for use by:

- Newcastle University
- Roehampton University
- The National History Museum
- The Army Library and Information Services
- Stockport College
- Darlington College
- Newcastle Public Library

Both POP-i and LolliPop are available under the Creative Commons Licence and showcases[1] are available to view on the web. A guest username and password is available from the site.

With support from the HEA and CILIP ILG a project was initiated to create an online programme, which would help librarians develop their teaching skills and pedagogic knowledge. The programme is called SirlearnaLot and builds on the work of EduLib (Hunter 1997). EduLib was a JISC funded project under the eLib programme (Hunter 2006). It aimed to enhance librarians teaching skills and produced both a print guide and a series of workshops that were disseminated throughout HE institutions. SirLearnaLot will be available through the Creative Commons Licence and the CILIP ILG is investigating the possibility of running the course for librarians who work in small institutions.

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[1] POP-I & LolliPop showcase http://www.lobelollipop.com/login/index.php

The ILG are also investigating the possibility of the module being accredited by the HEA.

At the time of writing SirLearnaLot is not complete and has not been evaluated. But experiences from POP-i and LolliPop are heavily influencing its development. A more in-depth section on reflection has been included, more navigation options across the whole module have been added, units are colour coded and there has been an attempt to include a greater variety of learning materials, activities and media.

Key points in the evaluation of POP-i and LolliPop are:

(a) There is a greater expectation from some learners for courses to be targeted at specific roles or individuals. An Issue highlighted in the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) annual survey on learning and development, concerned courses not being targeted enough to a particular organisation or individual. Places for People (CIPD 2008) provided generic online learning material for Microsoft Office for their staff but feedback indicated that staff felt the package was too general and not targeted enough for their needs. Similar feedback was presented during the LolliPop pilot even though the programme had specific areas devoted to resources within each institution. In contrast the feed back from POP-i was positive about the way the programme was individualised to Bradford Library service.

(b) Staff undertaking e-learning can feel that it is difficult for them to work on the course at their desk. This was true for the participants of POP-I and the participants at Loughborough undertaking LolliPop. Participants also struggled to set time aside to complete the course. Penny Simmonds (Anonymous 2008) feels this is not unusual in libraries. She argues that "staff take time out of work for training, other in a different room within their organisation, or at external premises, but very few feel that they can undertake online learning for an hour or two at their desk." Participants from the University of Bedfordshire were given two hours a week CPD time, which

in most participants case, was sufficient for them to complete each section and therefore eliminated time issues.

(c) Staff may need additional motivation to complete an online course. The CIPD survey (2008) discovered that 55% of their respondents believed that only 25% of employees complete a whole online course. In addition 65% of respondents felt that e-learning was "more effective when used with other forms of learning". The non-completion rate suggested above is significantly higher than that experienced by POP-I and LolliPop, but the project teams recognise that work needs to take place to ensure a high completion rate. Lessons can be learnt from the Frontline case study (e-skills 2006). The evaluation of Frontline found that the combination of completing a work based activity, recording what they did and interacting with supervisors were the three most significant factors helping them to complete the course.

(d) Staff in different sectors may prefer different approaches to e-learning. The PL sector liked the more traditional static approach to e-learning with quizzes and discussion forums providing the opportunity for activity. The HE sector participants suggested that more emphasis on learning through projects was required, which as mentioned earlier has resulted in the new evidence based LolliPop. Taylor (2008) argues e-learning will be move training away from page turning to a social learning experience. The participants in Pop-i particularly liked the discussion forums, unlike those undertaking LolliPop. This may simply be because staff in PLs, unlike staff in HE do not have individual emails. Therefore the forums within POP-i opened a communication tool that allowed discussion in a way that was completely new to PLs. 92% of respondents to the CIPD survey (2008) felt that e-learning required a "new attitude to learning on the part of learners". The participants of POP-I seemed to take this on board and enjoyed the social learning side of the course.

(e) E-learning can benefit those that work in either large or distributed work environments. The CIPD survey (2008) argues that public authorities (82%) and large companies are more likely to utilise e-learning. Although this may

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the case, the POP-i experience illustrates that for some PL services e-learning is a relatively new approach and therefore the participants are happy with less sophisticated learning objects. Whereas many HE employees may have higher expectations due to the familiarisation of e-learning and VLEs.

The pilots of LolliPop and POP-i have provided valuable information on the way different library sectors respond to e learning, but the evaluation is useless if programme designers do not respond and learn from the pilots. The projects suggest that success and whether library staff like to learn online depends on several factors:

- the library sector
- the previous experience of e learning
- number of employees
- learning style.

So where there is little access to regular training due to lack of finance and time, online learning appears to be well thought of. Where there is ample training, e-learning needs to be of a very high quality, timely and seen as very relevant to the job.

Meeting the challenges of staff development through e learning will continue to be a key issue for librarianship, but if successful it will provide many with an opportunity to take part in courses which would have been impossible for them to access due to lack of resources and demographics. It is therefore essential that the library sector continues to develop courses such as POP-i, LolliPop and SirLearnaLot, and that they are made freely available and accessible to all. In addition we should pool our experience and knowledge to ensure the development of high quality and relevant programmes for all sectors.

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