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The Integration of Information Literacy into Jamaica's Secondary School Curriculum

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Introduction

Information literacy for all citizens is not an option but a need. This is implied in the Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy document of 2005, which states that "it is a basic human right in a digital world." With the emergence of faster and more powerful advances in information and computer technology at the latter part of the 20th century, floodgates of information have been opened up. In order to cope with this "information explosion," citizens need the skills to effectively wade through such a flood to retrieve the right information to fit their needs.

Schools have been given the chief responsibility, by government, to educate their citizens. It is therefore crucial for education systems and institutions to recognize the increasing challenges, and seek to adequately prepare citizens with not just a knowledge base, but citizens who are IT literate. This requires the definite paradigm shift in the teaching/ learning process. Such a shift should be one that implements overall changes. This includes restructuring the curriculum for students to utilize more of

the many and varied information resources that are presently available. This will facilitate the process of information literacy.

This preliminary study therefore intends to take a brief look at the integration of information literacy in the Jamaican Secondary School Curriculum, the issues, the attempt at implementation, and a few challenges. The focus will be on the Reform of Secondary Education (ROSE), which will be partially analyzed against the standard required competencies at this level. All stakeholders in tertiary-level education have a vested interest in the success of ROSE as a vital link in the chain of nation building and leadership training.

Information Literacy: Concept and Definition

The introduction of the concept, "information literacy" is said to have originated with Paul Zurkowski in 1974. It resulted from his conviction that "People trained in the application of information resources to do their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information-solutions to their problems" (cited in Spitzer 22). Others followed with similar conviction indicating that new sets of skills are required in order to locate and use information for effective and efficient problem solving and decision-making.

The development and propagation of the concept has benefited extensively from the Alexandria Proclamation of 2005. This significant document, which was issued by UNESCO in conjunction with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL), states that "Information Literacy and Life-long learning are the beacons of the

Information society, illuminating the courses of development, prosperity and freedom." (www.ifla.org.)

A number of explanations and definitions have been proffered, reflecting varying perspectives. However they all have similar components with additional points that complement each other. Some, like Doyle in a Delphi study, highlight the attributes of the information literate person, while other approaches posit the behavioural approach or the rules for assessing the acquired skills. The American Library Association (1989) defines being information literate as having a set of abilities to recognize when information is needed to locate, evaluate, effectively use, and communicate such information.

The Association of College and Research Libraries in its Higher Education (ACRL) Competency Standards defines the acquisition of such skills as "an intellectual framework of understanding, finding, evaluating, and using information – activities which may be accomplished in part by fluency with information technology, in part by sound investigative methods, but most important, through critical discernment and reasoning." A careful examination of this now indispensable literacy will reveal that it is actually a combination of literacy components or levels such as visual, media, computer, network and basic literacy skills. It is seen to be a broader concept that includes the traditional library and research skills, computer skills, and more (Shelly-Robinson 2006). Individuals through the integration of library literacy, computer and technological literacy, ethics, critical thinking and communication skills acquire the Information literacy abilities. It is understanding the process of "learning how to learn" (Stripling and Spitzer 1998).

Why the need for Information Literacy?

A number of factors have contributed to the emergence, adaptation and embracing of the concept of information literacy, and which have made it an essential part of life in the 21st century.

- *The phenomenal increase in information world wide*

It is reported that the sum of all human knowledge will double every 73 days by 2020. Each year, close to one million new books are published internationally. Combined with these are the publishing of newspapers in excess of 25 million magazines and trade periodicals, 38 thousand scholarly journals, in addition to 10.75 billion unique pages of office documents. What is even more overwhelming is the explosive rise in new electronic information, created and stored on hard disks, videos, Compact Disks (CDs), Digital Versatile Disks (DVD), etc. (Burkhardt, MacDonald and Rathemacher 2005).

- *Societal and economic changes*

The rapid technological changes have given rise to a society that is now heavily dependent on fast and accurate information to execute personal and job related transactions. We now live in what is referred to as the "Information Society." The previous industrial economy has now been replaced by an information based economy where information is the driving force of industries in the global marketplace. The citizens of such a society are affected by the explosive growth of knowledge in all spheres of life including the economic, social and political. This has implications for the global perspective, as individuals need to be empowered to promote "social inclusion of all nations."

- *Quality assurance dilemma*

With increase Internet access, individuals now have gushing at them information from a multitude of sources on just about any topic. This presents a dilemma. It is the dilemma of choosing from a myriad of data in both print and electronic formats, and deciding on what is authentic and valuable for the existing information need. Unlike the print media which are subjected to the rigors of peer reviews, evaluations, revisions, recommendations, editing et cetera, some material on the Internet offer no assurance or guarantee of quality (Association of College and Research Libraries 2002). This factor points to the need of the user to critically evaluate the worth of accessed information.

- *Educational factors*

These factors are of much significance as they impact on present and future learning. The necessity to respond to the changing needs of our changing world has resulted in school reforms and educational changes. In order to keep abreast of such changes, various curricula are regularly revised. There is now "an inquiry approach to learning . . . the shift to more student-centred resource-based learning, with emphasis on critical thinking skills, and the encouragement of independent learning in the form of projects" (Idiodi 2005). These approaches to learning necessitate a wide range of information handling skills which are not acquired randomly.

In addition, the increase of information has, in many cases, will soon render recently acquired knowledge obsolete. Therefore, workers face the challenge of constant re-education in order to remain effective in their jobs and be relevant in their response to the overall information challenges. This is referred to as life-long learning. It is noted that along with information literacy being

pivotal to the pursuit of lifelong learning it is central to achieving personal empowerment, as well as economic development (Idiodi 2005). This is endorsed by others who posit that lifelong learning is a necessary prerequisite for living well in the 21st century (Breivik and Senn 20).

Information Literacy Models
There are various models. The more widely ones are:

- The *Stripling and Pitts Research Process Model* guides students through the process of creating a research paper. It boasts ten steps which begin with choosing the topic and end with creating and presenting the final draft.

- *Pathways to Knowledge Information Skills Model.*
  This is a result of team work between Follett Software Co., Marjorie Pappas and Ann Tepe in 1995. This "elaborate" model is complete with recommended strategies, forms of expression, and methods of teaching and learning embedded in it. Included in the stages of this model is appreciation, pre-search, search, interpretation, communication and evaluation.
- *Information Search Process* was developed in 1989 by Carol Kuhlthau, a library professor. This model shows how users approach the research process and how the confidence of users increase at each stage. The stages include initiation, selection exploration, formulation, collection, presentation, and assessment.

The BIG6 model

This model was developed by Mike Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz and is one that has gained much popularity. Various media have shown it to be the one most widely taught to students as a guide for their research paper. As is implied, this approach to teaching information skills has six steps. The steps employed are, Task definition, Information seeking strategies, Location and access, Use of information, Synthesis and Evaluation.

Since 1997, much research has been done in the area of literacy instruction; this has resulted in the evolution of a number of standards and guidelines. These are used to assess the level of information competencies of individuals and groups. The most influential of all is that of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). It states that

> an information literate person has the ability to determine the information that is needed, access it effectively and efficiently, evaluate information and its sources critically, organize and incorporate selected information into his/her knowledge base, use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose, and understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information ethically and legally (Arp and Woodword 125).

The benefits of Information Literacy in teaching are far reaching. Teaching Information literacy encourages resource-based learning. It is a transformational process in which the learner stimulated to find information, seek to understand, evaluate and use information in its various forms. The teacher now plays the important role as facilitator, not burdened with being the 'expert' repository of

information gleaned from text books. Students are now involved in "active learning" as they take responsibility for their own education.

Teachers in seeking to create an environment to foster information literacy are kept busy examining subject areas to extract themes to be explored, as well as considering not just process but also the content. They will increase venturing outside their class rooms for materials that will enrich the learning environment. As a result teachers are challenged to engage in more collaborative activities that will "enrich their own professional development and their students' learning experiences." (Hancock 1993)

The Concept of Integrating Information Literacy into the curriculum

Fundamental to the idea of integration of curriculum is an appreciation of what a curriculum is. The term curriculum can be defined as a plan for action or a written document that includes strategies for achieving desired goals or ends (Ornstein and Hunkins 1993). It is seen as a plan for achieving intended learning outcomes, and the results of instruction (Unruh and Unruh 1984). A curriculum usually contains a statement of aims and specific objectives, indicating some selection and organization of content, certain patterns of learning and teaching and includes a programme of evaluation of the outcomes. (Bailey and Yussuf-Khalil 1998)

There are four elements that are highlighted. These are aims and objectives, selection of learning experiences to attain the objective, organizing learning experiences, and evaluation (Tyler 1962).

Integration is said to be "a philosophy of teaching in which content is drawn from several subject areas to focus on a particular topic or theme."(McBrien and Brandt, 1997, 55). The concept of integrating Information literacy in a curriculum then means the planning and organizing of the curriculum or instructional

programme so the components or principles of the information literacy process are related to the different subjects as they are being taught. It should be planned so that it matches the developmental needs of the learners and helps to connect their learning in ways that are meaningful to their current and past experiences.

Integration has been discussed and implemented in different ways throughout the years, as educators seek to make learning meaningful and effective. The idea of integration in regard to schools and their curriculum is one that has been around since the 1800s. Back then, it was focused on the school's role in promoting social unity, or "social integration." By the latter part of the 1800s, German educator Johann Herbart is credited for having developed the idea about correlation of subjects which was soon referred to as 'integration of studies.' A new meaning for "integration" had emerged by the 1920s. It was this meaning of "integration," explored in a 1927 dissertation by Meredith Smith, that helped shaped a crucial question: *Are certain curriculum organizations or approaches more likely than others to assist young people with the processes of personal and social integration?* One response suggested that the process of integration would be facilitated by a child-centered curriculum that drew its direction and organization from the child's interest, experiences and "development." One example of this was the "activity curriculum" in which children were encouraged to draw their own conclusions from activities that involved observation, hands-on experimentation, et cetera. The "experience curriculum" was another response, where activities of real-life situations are cooperatively planned by teachers and students, which process affords the learning of concepts and skills.

Educators, who already had an interest in correlations across subject areas, projected the idea of the "integrated curriculum." This response suggested that students were more likely to learn subject matter if it was organized in more generalized concepts that cut across the boundaries of separate subjects.

It is recommended by most that the programme of information literacy should not be designed and delivered in isolation. Rather, it must be designed collaboratively with stake-holders and delivered either in the library or classrooms so the independent learning skills are taught through the various curriculum topics. To be successful, information literacy skills instruction must be integrated with the curriculum and reinforced both inside and outside the educational setting (Spitzer, Eisenberg and Lowe 1998; Breivik and Senn 2000).

For effectiveness, this will necessitate planned and active collaboration of principals, school administrators, teachers, along with school librarians and students. (Hancock 1993).

The Jamaican Secondary School curriculum

As an attempt is made to examine the Secondary school curriculum in Jamaica, an overview of the status of such schools in the Jamaican context will be helpful. Secondary schools in Jamaica refer to schools with children between the ages of 12 to17. Students attend these schools after six years of Primary education.

The UNESCO 1983 Report on the development of Secondary Schools in Jamaica, records that there are multiple forms of Secondary School systems in the country. There are the Traditional High Schools, the Comprehensive High, Technical High, All-age schools, Agricultural Schools, Vocational schools and the New Secondary schools. Each caters for different groupings and therefore has different entrance requirements, different curricula and offers

different chances of employability and training to learners up to grade eleven.

The traditional schools have been a part of the Jamaican educational landscape for over 200 years. These were started either by the church of from some bequest or Trust. The curricula of these schools are usually oriented towards academic subjects. However, over time there has been the introduction of some practical and vocational subjects. It has been noted that traditional High schools tend to have well structured academic curriculum, better facilities, more academically inclined students and more future prospects for grade eleven leavers.

The 1983 UNESCO report on the status of secondary education in Jamaica also identified major issues to be resolved. It was recommended that there be a restructuring and rationalization of secondary education, centered on the provision of a common core curriculum for all students in Grades seven to nine. This became a great matter of concern to the government. As a result the Reform of Secondary Education (ROSE) programme was embarked on. This was initiated by the then Minister of education, The Honorable Burchell Whiteman, who said: "For some time there have been three major concerns about secondary education in all schools. These concerns are – the quality of the programmes offered, access to these programmes and the inequities in the system . . ." (Government of JA. / World Bank Reform of Secondary Education 1998).

This programme reflects the fact that the planners were definitely moving away from the traditional mode of teaching to the investigative approach where student are encouraged to interact, discuss and do projects. However, it is limited in its scope as the curriculum's offering ended at grade nine. This left the remaining

tenth to twelfth grade to design their curriculum as the schools see fit.

The American Library Association (1980) emphatically stated that for the society to become information literate such a society must accept that information management skills is as fundamentally important as reading and writing and so these skills should become an essential part in the education of all people. This is in agreement with recommendations UNESCO made earlier (1980) in reference to the education of the library user within the education system.

Kuhlthau posits that the broader view of information education goes beyond location of materials to the interpretation and use of information. It centres on thinking about ideas in information resources rather than merely locating sources in an organized collection. The emphasis is on seeking to shape a topic rather than answering a specific question.

Integrating Information Literacy into the Curriculum in Jamaica: prospects and challenges

Despite the progress over the years in regard to the planning of curricula for the local secondary schools, there are still formidable challenges to overcome. There is still work to be done in terms of identifying, analyzing and formulating the best strategies in order to effectively deal with these challenges. The ROSE programme, which was an attempt to remedy this age old problem, actually fell short. This is one factor that has prevented a whole sale acceptance of this student centred curriculum.

And it would appear that certain policies that would help with standardization still remain at the draft stage for an inordinately length of time. One example of this is the very crucial ICT policy

which was drafted in 1998 (www.moe.gov.jm). The rapid changes and demands of the CSME and globalization will render aspects of such a policy obsolete before it enters through the parliamentary doors. Revision is therefore inevitable—and there remains that proverbial light at the end of tunnel.

Conclusion

In this survey we have taken a panoramic view of the integration of information literacy in the Jamaican Secondary School Curriculum. A few of the issues involved were highlighted, along with efforts to implement an island-wide programme. The main focus was on the Reform of Secondary Education (ROSE), which was evaluated in light of international and local standards.

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