

Teaching Information Skills in Schools:

a report for the Eduserv Foundation Information Literacy Initiative

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This report outlines the conclusions of a project run by Netskills relating to teaching information skills in schools, involving the delivery of two workshops, the development of a selection of teaching activities and the release of a package of teaching materials. The project was delivered between November 2007 and December 2008 and builds on a previous project delivered in 2006¹. Eduserv also funded a related project on plagiarism awareness in schools which was also delivered by Netskills during this time.

The 2006 project "Information Skills for Teachers" aimed to explore teachers' information skills and involved a survey relating to teachers' use of information, follow-up interviews and two pilot workshops. This project found that teachers often lacked awareness of the importance of information literacy and this, combined with pressures of time, led to focus on subject and results rather than transferable skills and the process of learning. Recommendations from this project included:

- providing further awareness-raising for teachers of issues relating to information literacy
- equipping teachers to embed information literacy into their lessons by providing training and resources for use in teaching

¹ Information Skills for Teachers: *a report for the Eduserv Foundation Information Literacy Programme, 2006* <http://www.netskills.ac.uk/content/projects/eduserv-info-lit/NetskillsEduservInfoLit.pdf>

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This project aimed to address the above recommendations by producing a package of materials which could be used in cascade training sessions to raise awareness of information literacy and encourage embedding of information literacy within the curriculum. Difficulties in releasing teaching staff to attend external training sessions led to the recommendation to produce cascade training materials that could be used in staff training sessions. The materials would be targeted at teachers and librarians, however it was anticipated that librarians would be the likely staff members to deliver any in-house training sessions, due to their enthusiasm and willingness to become involved in teaching information skills in schools, as identified in the previous projects.

The project also aimed to deliver a set of teaching activities which could be used by teachers or librarians within lessons. The need for short, easy to use activities for inclusion in lessons was identified in the 2006 project.

The package of cascade materials and teaching activities would be piloted and tested through two workshops. The materials would then be made available via the Information Literacy web site².

1.3 Outputs

The main outputs from this project are:

- A package of teaching materials to be made freely available to schools
- Activities for use in lessons
- Two pilot workshops
- This report outlining conclusions and recommendations

2 The Workshops

2.1 Workshop Content and Materials Development

The workshop was initially aimed at librarians as well as teachers, however once development of the workshop content began, it soon became apparent that these two audiences would be likely to have different needs and require different approaches.

Almost all workshop bookings were from library staff, due to the increasing role and interest of library staff in teaching information skills. As a result the workshop content was designed primarily for the needs of library staff, but materials would include resources that library staff could use in cascade sessions with teachers.

The content of the workshop was based around needs identified in a survey carried out by Netskills in 2006 related to library staff and teaching skills. Although the survey covered all library sectors, there were 70 responses from school librarians and these were analysed to identify appropriate areas to cover. The survey asked what skills and/or knowledge respondents felt helped them most in their teaching role. The most frequent response was knowledge of learning theory and learning styles.

The emphasis of the workshop was on providing practical guidance on delivering information skills teaching, while addressing strategic issues. These two areas needed

² <http://www.informationliteracy.co.uk/>

to be balanced carefully as it is easy to allow strategic issues to dominate, focussing on problems rather than solutions.

The workshop content covered:

- Discussions on strengths and weaknesses of current information literacy activities
- Information literacy and the curriculum
- Importance of learning styles
- Defining appropriate aims and learning outcomes
- Bloom's taxonomy and information literacy
- Information literacy models for use in schools
- Evaluating and designing activities
- Strategies for success

The first workshop included a hands-on session evaluating existing resources, however feedback suggested more time was desired to practise creating activities. As a result, a session on designing WebQuests was delivered in the second workshop. A WebQuest³ is a structured web-based activity (although it does not have to be exclusively web-based) which allowed participants to practise choosing appropriate learning outcomes and structuring activities to meet those outcomes. It also allowed participants to create an activity which they could actually use following the event.

2.2 Workshop Scheduling & Publicity

Teaching Information Skills in Secondary Schools ran at two venues: Newcastle and Edinburgh. The workshops were run from 10am to 4pm. A variety of publicity methods were used for this project, including:

- Dedicated section of Netskills' web site created to publicise the workshops
- Letters sent to every secondary school in each region
- Use of relevant email lists

Library discussion groups and lists were used as the main publicity vehicles, aiming both to target library staff themselves and to encourage dissemination details within their schools. Both workshops booked up very quickly and had waiting lists.

3 Workshop Attendance and Audience

Although 24 places were initially made available, extra places were opened up and a total of 26 bookings were taken, with only one person failing to attend, a extremely low drop-out rate for a free workshop.

The breakdown of attendees by job role is given below:

Learning support	1
Library	23
Staff development	1
Teaching	1

³ More information on WebQuests can be found at: <http://www.webquest.org/>

The workshops were predominantly attended by library staff, reflecting their interest in the subject and the choice of library lists as publicity vehicles. As with the 2006 workshops, most of the participants were from the state sector. A small proportion was from sixth form or further education colleges involved in teaching under 18's.

4 Workshop Feedback

Online feedback was collected after each workshop. A summary of the 19 feedback forms returned is below:

Overall average score: **4.33** (on a scale of 1 – poor to 5 – excellent)
Rating for presentations: **4.53**
Rating for hands-on sessions: **4.06**

Generally participants were happy with the workshop content, with the main criticism from a few attendees that more practical ideas and examples of lesson plans should be included. The second run of the workshop which included WebQuests proved to be popular. A couple of participants felt that there was too much focus on pedagogy, however this was not generally felt to be the case.

General comments included:

- "This course was outstanding in all respects."
- "Best training course I've been on for a long time."
- "Overall I found the content valuable and encouraging in terms of getting to grips with IL in the context of the school library. Thank you!"
- "Possibly a little more practical tips"
- "The background info on pedagogy of learning is useful - but needed more ideas for lesson plans."

One participant mentioned the lack of teachers on the course, stating "I have yet to ever attend a course on libraries where teachers came along too".

5 Development of Teaching Activities

Following the first pilot workshop in Newcastle, Pauline Roberts, a librarian at Longbenton Community College, was contracted to co-develop the teaching activities. Three ideas for activities were developed and these ideas were discussed and approved at the second pilot workshop.

The activities cover:

- *Choosing the appropriate Office program for the information you have*
Although pupils are assumed to have good IT skills, they may still struggle to choose the appropriate tool for the information they want to present. Although there is a strong link to IT skills this task focuses on the use of information and appropriate presentation.
- *The difference between fact finding and research*
Pupils at younger ages are frequently set tasks that involve simple retrieval and reproduction of information, such as fact finding activities. As they get older they are required to carry out more research activities, involving more evaluation skills.

Pupils may struggle to bridge the gap from fact-finding activities to research skills and this task aims to provide guidance.

- *Plagiarism, in particular focussing on the concept of 'ownership' of information*
Plagiarism is a particular concern within schools, with reference often being made to a 'cut and paste' mentality. Pupils often do not realise that information can 'belong' to someone else and this task aims to help pupils explore this idea, linking in with avoiding plagiarism.

6 Issues

The workshop started with a discussion of key issues affecting the delivery of information literacy within schools. The activity was structured around a SWOT analysis, asking groups to think about their current information literacy activities within schools and consider their **Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities and Threats**. The discussion aimed to uncover good practice as well as highlight areas for improvement and opportunities for development.

Issues arising from this discussion and are outlined below. It must be noted that many of the issues discussed focus on the role of libraries in developing information literacy within schools.

Strengths

- *Overview of curriculum and 'whole child'*
Library staff felt they had great strengths in having an overview of the curriculum, seeing how transferable skills could be developed. They also saw each child in different contexts and could develop a different relationship with the child compared to teachers, perhaps enabling them to view the 'whole child'. They often have an awareness of the pupils strengths and weaknesses
- *Library resources & environment*
The 'different' environment offered by the library – often less 'scary' and linked to the outside world is helpful. The resources provided are of a huge variety and differentiated.
- *Expertise / skills of librarians*
Librarians felt confident in their professional skills and expertise. Higher levels of ICT skills are available but library staff also offer an overview, they are able to step back and view the bigger picture. Many librarians have well developed communication skills and have developed good relationships with teaching staff.
- *Attitudes of teaching staff*
The positive attitude of many, but not all, teachers and senior staff in particular, means that information literacy skills are recognised along with the value of the library and library resources.

Weaknesses / Threats

- *Status of librarian/library*

The library is not generally part of a department and can consist of a lone worker. The staff may be low status, not being teaching staff – the 'invisible librarian'. Teaching staff often lack an understanding of the role of the librarian. Budget cuts can disproportionately affect library budgets. It may be that the development of ICT means that the library is no longer needed.

- *Assumptions*

It is often wrongly assumed that:

- students have high level of information and IT skills
- the internet and Google can replace library and information skills – a 'cut and paste' mentality
- teachers information skills are adequate
- the internet is a better source of information than books (although it is acknowledged that books can go out of date if the collection is not maintained)
- cross-curricular skills will be addressed adequately within lessons – they often end up being no-one's responsibility.

- *Lack of strategy / recognition of skills*

There is often a lack of support from senior managers possibly because Information skills are not part of assessment criteria or the wider curriculum. As a result pupils are frequently 'spoon fed' information and don't develop their own research skills. There is often no overall information skills strategy within a school.

- *Curriculum issues*

Lack of time within a very full curriculum is the most important factor here, along with an education system that is results based and does not provide assessment criteria for information skills. The lack of teaching background of librarians (for example little experience in the design of lesson plans) prevents them from helping with integration into the curriculum.

Opportunities

- *Curriculum / qualification changes*

The Curriculum for Excellence⁴ provides an opportunity to integrate information skills in the curriculum in Scotland. Similarly the development of the Key Stage 3 curriculum as part of the Secondary National Strategy could incorporate information skills. The Functional Skills standards⁵ currently being piloted by the QCA also provide opportunities, particularly in English and ICT.

Other topics identified by workshop participants as suitable for information skills development include:

- Personal, Social and Health Education
- Vocational courses
- English and humanities at KS3
- Learning to learn courses

⁴ Curriculum for Excellence, Learning & Teaching Scotland

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/>

⁵ An Introduction to Functional Skills, QCA http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_6062.aspx

The development of information skills is very suitable for a cross-curricular approach.

- *Promotion*
Many library staff are keen to take part in training and departmental meetings that promote information skills. They are keen to promote the library within the school. The promotion of information skills work by library staff can also help with the teaching staff workload.
- *Work with resources*
Making the most of quality resources and promoting their benefits is a useful approach, for example new licence agreements with JISC to provide resources for schools⁶.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations

This project, while small-scale, demonstrates information literacy and skills are not well recognised in the schools sector with the exception of library staff. The poor engagement of teaching staff is a major factor and the development of pupil's information skills will continue to be a problem without better teacher involvement. There is a strong need for information literacy to be handled in a more strategic way in many schools.

Opportunities exist, however, to improve the situation. The new Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, as well as the Functional Skills, which are core elements of the curriculum being developed in England, provide the chance for information literacy to be incorporated into the schools curriculum.

The role of the school library is crucial. Library staff have a strong grasp of the issues and are keen to develop their role in addressing these. They can play a role in directly developing pupil skills and in engaging with staff to raise the profile of information skills in schools.

The workshop feedback showed how much the workshops were appreciated and many participants felt that they would be able to use the lessons learned in their schools. They were keen to use the materials that will be released following completion of the project and hosted on the Information Literacy web site⁷. A range of channels will be used to publicise the materials, including school library networks, mailing lists and online directories of teaching resources. The enthusiasm for the materials indicates that they will provide a useful resource to facilitate further dissemination.

This project confirmed many of the findings of the 2006 pilot project and found that many of the key issues remained the same. As a result, the recommendations from the pilot are still valid (below). The role of school library staff was brought to the fore in this project particularly in teaching appropriate skills.

⁶ JISC Collections for Schools - online subscription resources, <http://www.jcs.nen.gov.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.informationliteracy.co.uk/>

- Awareness-raising, especially at senior management level, involving key stakeholders such as the Local Education Authorities.
- Ensuring that teaching staff receive appropriate training and awareness-raising to ensure their own information skills are adequate, exploring the possibilities of embedded information literacy into teacher training courses.
- Making available a tailored version of the i-Skills self-evaluation⁸ for more wide-scale trialling.
- Enabling teachers to embed information literacy into their teaching by providing training and resources for use in teaching.
- Involving school library staff in teaching the appropriate skills.
- Providing evidence of the links between information literacy and improved learning and exam results.
- Developing guidance for schools on implementing information literacy strategies.
- Developing regional and national networks to enable schools to share best practice and guidance.
- Developing links between universities and schools to identify concerns, discuss expectation levels and share good ideas.

Additionally, this project recommends the following:

- Ensuring new opportunities within the curriculum, such as the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland and Functional Skills in England, are exploited in order to embed information literacy.
- Developing a mapping of specific opportunities within the curriculum to embed information literacy activities.
- Continuing to support library staff in the development of their teaching and advocacy skills in order to support embedding of information literacy within schools.
- Finding a specific mechanism to target head teachers, as they are the critical decision makers and influencers over individual school policies and strategies.
- Producing guidance for Head Teachers emphasising *why* it is important to address these issues.

New opportunities within the curriculum provide great opportunities for embedding information literacy within schools. To maximise these opportunities a top-down approach, through Head Teachers developing policy within schools, and a bottom-up approach, through school library staff, providing resources and help in developing skills, will be needed. The resources developed as part of this project will be very useful in assisting schools in raising awareness of the need to address information literacy more strategically.

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⁸ A toolkit for teachers to evaluate and develop their own information skills, trialled in a previous project <http://www.netskills.ac.uk/content/projects/eduserv-info-lit/NetskillsEduservInfoSkills.pdf>

8 Appendix: Workshop Description

Teaching Information Skills in Secondary Schools

The need to equip the 'Google generation' with effective information literacy skills was highlighted recently in a report by JISC and the British Library. This workshop aims to address this issue at school level by exploring effective methods of embedding information literacy within the curriculum and providing practical guidance in developing pupil's information literacy.

Topics:

- Information literacy and the teaching challenge
- Effective delivery of information skills teaching
- Case studies and examples of good practice
- Embedding information skills into the curriculum
- Staff development within schools

Who is it for?

This workshop is aimed at teachers and librarians who are interested in exploring the best ways to deliver information skills in schools. The workshop is particularly relevant to those responsible for staff development or training, as materials from this workshop will be made available as a cascade training pack.

Participants should be teachers or librarians interested in developing their skills in delivering information literacy teaching. Participants need no special technical skills, but for the hands-on sessions they will find it helpful to have had some experience of using a web browser.

By the end of the workshop participants will have:

- Discussed practical tips and hints on incorporating information literacy into lessons
- Explored a range of existing examples and case studies of information skills delivery
- Used and adapted sample teaching activities
- Received guidance on using the cascade training materials