
Copyright:
This is a preprint of a chapter accepted for publication by Facet Publishing. This extract has been taken from the author’s original manuscript and has not been edited. The definitive version of this piece may be found in J. Secker and E. Coonan, Rethinking information literacy: a practical framework for teaching, 2013, Facet Publishing, which can be purchased from www.facetpublishing.co.uk. The author agrees not to update the preprint or replace it with the published version of the chapter.

Date deposited: 2nd July 2013

Version of file: Author final

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License

Moira Bent, Faculty Liaison Librarian & National Teaching Fellow, Newcastle University.

Introduction
This case study describes a project designed to provide opportunities for teaching staff to embed information literacy concepts into the curriculum in Newcastle University, UK and in Newcastle University in Singapore (NUIS). Developed from an existing methodology to appreciate information literacy within the context of academic literacies, the work builds on and extends several previous and concurrent initiatives.

Institutional context
Newcastle University, a Russell Group University located in the NE of England, has 21,000 students, of whom 6,000 are postgraduates, 4,000 are international and a growing number are learning at a distance from the main campus. In common with many other universities, examples of best practice in developing information literacy within the context of academic literacies can be found alongside much less developed practice (M. Bent and Stockdale, 2009). Information literacy is recognised at a strategic level in the University: as digital literacy in the strategic plan, within the Graduate Skills framework and more explicitly in the e-portfolio system which will be deployed across the institution in 2012. The e-portfolio will enable students to reflect on their learning and identify areas, including information literacy, in which they need to develop. However, whilst information literacy is included in the portfolio, the interpretation does focus mainly on skills aspects, as is to be expected. Module Outline Forms also encourage teaching staff to indicate whether information literacy is introduced, practised or assessed in their module. In practice this is very much a paper exercise, although it does provide a mechanism for starting discussions about the place of information literacy in the curriculum. Promoting and developing information and digital literacies is also a strategic priority for the Library service.

Pedagogical concepts
In much of the traditional educational literature, the term academic literacy refers purely to the development of students’ reading and writing skills: how to write an essay or report or how to reference, for example. However, more recently this view that literacy relates to the acquisition of specific transferable skills has been challenged (M Lea and Street, 1998; Wingate, 2006), with academic literacy described as a social and cultural practice which varies depending on context (Mary R. Lea, 2004). This perspective of academic literacy as a “complex, socially situated set of meaning making practices” (Gourlay, 2009 p182) allows us to align it with the new SCONUL definition of information literacy “Information literate people will demonstrate an awareness of how they gather, use synthesise, manage and create information and data in an ethical manner and will have the information skills to do so effectively” (SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy, 2011), situating information literacy comfortably within the context of academic literacies.
There are clear parallels and overlaps in the concepts and terminology which are enormously helpful when initiating conversations between librarians and educationalists and we could enter a debate about which is the broader term. Is information literacy just one of a range of academic literacies, or, as academic literacies deal with making meaning from information, should we view information literacy as the broader concept? In reality, the distinction is merely semantic, the value lying in the recognition that information literacy is not a simple transferable skill in which students can be “trained”, but a much more integral part of the learning process which needs to be embedded in students’ wider learning experiences.

In the context of academic literacies, information literacy can be thought of as a learning habit or disposition (Claxton and Carr, 2004) which facilitates interaction with information throughout an individual’s learning life. Thinking dispositions, such as a tendency to explore alternative views, the tendency to wonder and probe, to seek connections and explanations and to be reflective correlate well with this approach and allow us to position information literacy within a broader educational context (Perkins et al., 1993). It is also helpful to distinguish between learning styles, attitudes and habits. “Learning styles, which are a reflection of an individual’s personality and are usually an unconscious trait, are difficult to influence or change. They can be thought of as the way in which a learner receives, sorts, interacts and processes information. Learning attitudes are frequently a conscious trait and often depend on motivations. A person’s attitude to their learning, their views on the value of learning and why they are learning is also often influenced by factors beyond the classroom. In contrast, a learning habit describes the way in which a person has learned to learn.” (M. Bent and Stockdale, 2009) Information literacy development targets students’ learning habits, encouraging them to approach their use of information in a more coherent way.

**Information Literacy development at Newcastle**

With these concepts in mind, the overall approach at Newcastle has always been to move away from stand alone skills teaching or online skills modules and focus on embedding information literacy development within a subject context whenever possible. Newcastle University Library has a long history of delivering information literacy skills workshops to students as well as instigating a variety of information literacy projects and initiatives. Whilst some workshops focus on specific skills, there is a growing recognition that a common understanding of information literacy by academic staff is central to integrating information literacy into the curriculum. If information literacy is perceived purely as a set of skills then the emphasis can be confined to training; however if information literacy is accepted as an academic literacy and an attitude to or habit of learning, then an educative approach is needed (Town, 2003). Education in information literacy engages the students in reflective practice, critical reading and thinking and argument construction, learning specific information skills together with an awareness of the wider information world, its place in their discipline and its relevance in their learning. In order to achieve this transition successfully, information literacy needs to be taught by academic staff as part of the discipline and not perceived by the students as a dispensable add-on.

This is not an easy aim to achieve and there are many issues involved. Librarians have embraced the teaching of information literacy as one of our raisons d’etre; it takes up a, perhaps disproportionate, amount of our time and many of us enjoy the interaction with students. If we accept that it is the
role of Faculty to develop students’ information literacy, what then is the role of library staff? In addition, whilst we are clearly equipped to deliver skills training, engaging in debate with students about the less tangible aspects of information literacy is a different, much more challenging, proposition. This approach is also dependent on academic staff engaging with the agenda and making space in their teaching to facilitate information literacy development on an ongoing basis, embedded within the curriculum, rather than, as can often be the case, sending their students for a “library workshop”.

It became clear several years ago at Newcastle, however, that both in order to manage our teaching workload and to effect a successful transition to a more integrated approach to information literacy, different tactics were needed and the key was to engage the academic community and encourage teachers to take ownership of information literacy development.

The Newcastle Information Literacy Project
In 2006 the Newcastle Information Literacy project aimed to develop a community of practice across the University, bringing together staff from all disciplines and levels who evinced an interest in information literacy development. Networking meetings facilitated discussions and led ultimately to the development of the Information Literacy Toolkit (Moira Bent and Brettell, 2006). The project team developed a programme structure based on the original SCONUL Seven Pillars model (SCONUL, 1999) which enabled teaching staff, both academic and library, to develop threads of information literacy activities within their teaching. The toolkit, which consists of a collection of teaching resources (powerpoint slides, handouts, examples of practice, links to online resources) was created as a resource to support the educators. One of the original ideas behind the toolkit was to keep it fresh with contributions from teachers; as they used and adapted the resources it was hoped they would redeposit their updated version in the toolkit. In practice, however, the deposit process was overly complex and whilst we know the resources in it are consulted, it proved impossible to keep the Toolkit up to date or to monitor actual use of the materials.

Certificate of Advanced Studies in Academic Practice (CASAP) and Newcastle Teaching Award.
The Certificate of Advanced Studies in Academic Practice (CASAP) offers experienced academics the opportunity for accreditation of personal and professional development in their academic practice. It is HEA accredited and consists of 2 modules and associated coursework. Module 1, the Newcastle Teaching Award (NTA) is compulsory for newly appointed teachers with fewer than five years' teaching experience.

For several years library staff contributed information literacy elements to the programme, resulting in several information literacy course works and subsequent information literacy champions amongst the new teaching staff. A variety of different mechanisms for embedding information literacy into the teaching curriculum resulted, initiated by academic staff and often wholly owned and taught by them. In fact, library staff are not always aware that such integration is happening, as it is so embedded within the discipline. Sadly, time constraints for the course curtailed the information literacy elements somewhat in recent years but they were revived in 2009 as part of a special CASAP Intensive programme for Nigerian lecturers. This programme, entitled “Information for Learning”, proved successful and has formed the basis for subsequent projects.
Information for Learning

The Information for learning programme is designed to situate information literacy within the context of academic literacies, using terminology which is familiar to academic staff. It is run over two days and comprises a blend of practical information skills for staff underpinned by more discursive elements of information literacy. A sample programme is shown here:

CASAP Intensive: Aims of the sessions
During the Information for Learning programme we will:

- Discuss our understanding of “good academic conduct”
- Think about how to integrate Information for Learning into our teaching
- Use the 7 Pillars of Information Literacy model to develop curriculum content
- Discuss critical reading in relation to developing information literacy
- Investigate the drivers which influence students to plagiarise
- Generate practical ways to minimise the likelihood of plagiarism occurring
- Consider the Researcher Development Statement and its relevance to good academic conduct
- Consider issues of culture and academic assumptions
- Find out how we can better support students to develop their writing skills

CASAP Intensive: Outcomes of the programme
After the Information for Learning programme participants should:

- Have a clear understanding of the principles of good academic conduct
- Have identified some key issues in supporting good academic conduct amongst students
- Understand the relevance of Information for Learning in their teaching
- Understand the importance of students developing the full range of information literacy skills to support learning beyond lectures
- Have considered how information literacy development can be embedded into the curriculum
- Know about some resources they can use to help integrate Information for Learning into their teaching
- Have thought about culture and academic assumptions
- Have identified ways to support students in writing

Activities in the programme include discussions about the meaning of terms such as “information” and “good academic conduct” and participants are encouraged to discuss whether the various information literacy models are relevant to their teaching. Debates on issues such as plagiarism can become very animated and serve to demonstrate the relevance of an integrated information literacy
approach across the curriculum. The sessions are supported by the resources in the Information Literacy toolkit, and participants are also directed to JORUM (2012) and other quality information literacy resources. Feedback from participants has been positive:

“the information for learning was the most interesting part of the course”

“I hadn’t heard of information literacy before. Now I need to think about what I can do to change my teaching”

“the links to resources are really useful and I enjoyed arguing with the rest of the class”

Closing the gap
Although the original CASAP materials were designed for staff based in Newcastle, the Information for Learning programme highlighted issues inherent in delivering the programme to staff from different countries and cultures. Not only do we need to consider that students have experienced a different learning culture, teaching staff are also accustomed to different teaching methods and this may reflect in the way they respond to information literacy concepts. Newcastle University is currently developing a presence overseas, with students and staff currently based in Singapore and Malaysia and other initiatives under discussion. A base parameter for all overseas initiatives is that staff and students should have parity of experience with their Newcastle based peers, a clear challenge in terms of information literacy development and the Information for Learning resources. With these issues in mind, we were successful in receiving a University Innovation Fund award for 2011/12 to work specifically with colleagues based in Singapore.

The Newcastle University in Singapore (NUIS) Information Literacy Project
At the time of writing, this project is still underway. Snappily entitled “Supporting and Embedding Information Literacy Development Opportunities into Teaching and Learning Practices between Overseas Partners” it comprises several practical strands. In its collaborative design and delivery it provides capacity-building opportunities for staff to embed information literacy concepts and an internationalised approach into their teaching practice. This will help both Newcastle-based staff, who are preparing teaching materials, and Singapore-based staff, who are delivering them, to better understand how information literacy can be developed within the curriculum. In providing a practical resource to help academic staff develop information literate students, the project addresses the need to articulate the value of research-informed teaching to students by helping them to understand what research is and how it is done, as well as how to identify high quality information. In this way, the project values diversity and embodies Newcastle University’s vision to be ‘globally ambitious and regionally rooted’ (Newcastle University, 2009); exploiting the local knowledge and expertise of staff and students in Newcastle and Singapore to provide a common and constant learning experience.

The context
From September 2011 four Newcastle University degree programmes involving 350 students and 23 staff are running across two sites in Singapore, mirroring programmes running locally in Newcastle. There is a need for equality of opportunity for the development of information literacy skills across
all sites, with materials available to support teaching and learning for staff and students respectively. Information literacy development opportunities have not previously been fully and systematically embedded into the curriculum, resulting in a number of students struggling to undertake independent research and staff not feeling equipped to support them. An exciting and innovative aspect of the project is the way in which it makes connections at different levels across different boundaries. For example, it is hoped that addressing ‘Information for Learning’ issues with academic staff in both Newcastle and Singapore will highlight the alternative pedagogies which may exist between the different cultures and encourage consistency of delivery, giving staff support to embed the expectation of high quality independent learning and research skills into their teaching.

**The project**

Much of the content we are using for the NUIS project already exists, either in the Information for Learning programme or in the form of teaching resources developed for students. The challenge is how to repurpose the information to make it accessible to staff (and students) in both locations and more specifically to investigate whether the more discursive elements of the Information for Learning programme can be translated into an online environment. A previous Innovation Award had resulted in the development of a Moodle online module of information literacy skills for students. Initially designed as a taster course for potential Masters students, the materials attracted a lot of interest amongst teaching staff in Newcastle and have been adopted and tailored for several different disciplines. The Moodle online platform was chosen as it was aimed at prospective students who did not have access to the University’s VLE, Blackboard. For the NUIS project however, it was felt that Blackboard was the most appropriate online environment and two Blackboard online communities have been developed.

**The NUIS Information for Learning Community**

This pilot online Blackboard community is designed to be used initially by academic staff working in Singapore. The Singaporean staff includes teachers who have worked in Newcastle University, those who have worked in other universities and staff who have worked predominantly in SE Asia. Concerns have been raised by the NUIS Dean that staff have very differing approaches to some information literacy concepts; areas relating to reflective writing, critical thinking, copyright, plagiarism and expectation of their students ability to read around the subject have been specifically highlighted.

The Community aims to be a flexible workspace, into which staff can dip in and out and in which they can engage in discussion and debate with their peers. In its present iteration it is not linked to any guided learning programme and does not have to be worked through linearly, though this is recommended.

In order to make the community interesting and interactive, the Library project team worked closely with staff from the University’s VLE support team, gaining valuable expertise in the use of a range of different software tools. Pedagogical advice was offered by the leader of the CASAP programme and academic staff were also part of the project team.

A parallel initiative at Newcastle, the UNITE project on e-learning and internationalisation, enabled us to elicit feedback and make adjustments to the NUIS Communities before they went “live”.
Members of the UNITE network are people from across the university who have completed successful projects, are working in internationalisation and/or e-learning or are currently starting on projects, so a mix of experienced and less experienced teachers. Meetings are designed to help participants discuss pedagogical issues relating to internationalisation and e-learning, so the opportunity to focus a meeting on the NUIS project was a useful chance to test whether the kinds of materials and deliverables we were working on would work in a multicultural environment. We were able to discuss, for example, ideas for cascading pedagogical concepts relating to information literacy to academic staff in different cultures and explore how the academic staff might respond to being asked to work through the kinds of materials we planned to adapt from the face to face to online environment. Pedagogical approaches to using e-learning materials were also addressed, as well as technical ideas from staff who have been using reusable learning objects in their own situations.

The NUIS Community was introduced to staff in Singapore in March 2012 and, at the time of writing, is being tested. One of the main issues surfacing in the pilot is that of initial engagement of staff with the materials, as there is no compulsion for them to participate, hence little formal evaluation has taken place so far. However, informal verbal feedback from the introductory sessions, as well as from the UNITE workshop, indicates that interest is focused on the concepts and ideas expressed in the Information for Learning and Information Literacy modules, with debate focusing on how the SCONUL 7 pillars model relates to SE Asian teaching and learning styles. Fewer participants so far have engaged in the online interactive discussions than was hoped, especially in relation to expressing opinions on good academic conduct and issues such as plagiarism. This chimes with our original concerns that some elements of the face to face programme would not translate well into an online environment. Teaching staff may be reluctant to admit lack of knowledge to their peers in writing, whereas in a face to face debate it is easier to talk through differences in opinion and reach a common understanding. One very successful element of the face to face programme is the discussion relating to whether or not participants have ever, in their whole academic career, knowingly or unknowingly plagiarised. As differences surface, it is easy to make the point that if teachers can’t agree, how difficult must it be for students? Reinforcement of this kind is much less effective in a more sanitised, non-synchronous, online discussion, even with the benefit of anonymity.

In addition to the original Information for Learning programme, the NUIS Community introduces participants to the Cambridge New Curriculum, inviting them to reflect on how they might use some of the suggested activities. I am hopeful that this very practical tool will facilitate the adoption of information literacy elements into the NUIS curricula.
Fig 1: Introducing the NUIS Information for Learning Community

Fig 2: Information for Learning
The Information for Learning Community is partnered by a second community, NUIS: Research skills for students. This skills focused community has been developed from the Moodle taster module.
created for an earlier project and mentioned previously. Although the community can be used as a stand-alone skills module by students, this is not its main purpose, our intention is for teaching staff to be able to copy elements from it into their own Blackboard modules and tailor them to the discipline context. In this way, it is hoped that the Blackboard community will eventually replace the Information Literacy Toolkit as a source of information literacy elements which can be easily integrated into the curriculum.

Fig 5: NUIS Research skills for students

In order to pilot the content and design of this community, it was also introduced to both staff and students in Singapore in March 2012. Staff are evaluating it as part of the Information for Learning programme, while students have been asked to try out some of the activities in preparation for a
summer immersion programme in Newcastle at the end of their first year. Although it is too early to draw firm conclusions, observation of the use of the community by students to date indicates a focus on evaluating and referencing information. Academic staff were asked to critically evaluate the content and suggest gaps and amendments and a clear steer has already been given to add more material on critical evaluation, both in terms of reading information and self criticism of their own writing. A need for more detailed information on writing essays, reports and projects has also been identified, demonstrating that some staff view these academic literacies as part of becoming more information literate. Informal staff feedback from the pilot as well as the UNITE workshop, indicates there is value in making the student resources more widely available to staff within the VLE.

Conclusions
Much of the work described above reflects my belief that information literacy needs to be perceived by teaching staff within the context of their understanding of academic literacies. With this end in mind, activities, resources and projects are always designed in such a way that academic staff can take ownership of the manner in which their students develop their information literacy attributes.

My thinking has also been influenced by the work of Meyer and Land on threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (Meyer and Land, 2003). They describe a threshold concept as representing a transformed way of understanding, interpreting or viewing something, without which a learner cannot progress. Crossing the threshold can be sudden, or may take place over a time period and can involve uncomfortable, counter-intuitive or in other words “troublesome” knowledge. Making the shift in perception of information literacy being a purely skills and competencies based concept, to one in which it is understood as a more complex blend of attributes, approaches and understanding fits well with the idea of recognising threshold concepts in the development of information literate people. One of my hopes for the Information for learning programme is that it will bring some teaching staff to their own threshold in terms of appreciating the value of information literacy as an academic literacy.

Taking a pragmatic approach, however, it is already clear that the Information for Learning module will only have the desired impact if all the academic staff in the community engage with the materials. It has been suggested that the most effective approach may be to link the online materials to a face to face workshop, perhaps facilitated by those local teaching staff who have already experienced the CASAP programme and are information literacy “champions”. As an alternative, we will also be working with the director of the CASAP programme to embed the Information for Learning materials into a new, online CASAP programme for wider dissemination.

References.


JORUM (2012) JORUM Repository of Learning and Teaching materials. Available at: [www.jorum.ac.uk](http://www.jorum.ac.uk).


