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The Future of Globalizing Information Literacy

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Abstract

Information literacy rose to national consciousness in the United States with President Barack Obama's Proclamation designating October 1, 2009 as National Information Literacy Month. In this proclamation, President Obama states that "rather than merely possessing data, we must also learn the skills necessary to acquire, collate and evaluate information for any situation."

With respect to the "call to action" by respective leaders in the political and educational fields today who are addressing the inclusion of information literacy within our existing educational curricula, this paper will present various viewpoints to promote more awareness of this current global need. This worldwide access to information has prompted many scholars to consider that literacy be defined as "the way an individual must retain the basic knowledge and skills to access information in order to compete in the global economy and to exercise one's rights and responsibilities of citizenry." Undeniably, the use of computerized technology, cell phones, and other social networking tools readily available to search for information, and to evaluate such information for a specific purpose is an essential tool in this 21st century age of informational exchange.

The pertinent issue for English language educators is to define the mountain of information available to students from a holistic approach and to formulate information literacy learning rubrics for L2 learners. This paper will further define the ongoing dialogue that

is formulating the inclusion of information literacy as an adjunct to existing curricula, and to present guidelines and steps in defining information literacy for second language learners.

Key Words: Holistic learning, information literacy, CBI (Content-Based Instruction), SLA (Second Language Acquisition), ESL (English as a Second Language), EFL (English as a Foreign Language). CBE (Competency-Based Education).

Introducing the Definition of Information Literacy

In the last quarter of the 20th century in Japan, the trend toward language education in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) takes on a more communicative approach where most learning is based on dialogue form. Curriculum guidelines in Japan are structured to provide students in developing their communicative competency. Minoru Wada, a university professor and a senior advisor to Mombusho explains as follows:

> The Mombusho Guidelines, or course of study, is one of the most important legal precepts in the Japanese educational system. In 1989, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture revised the course of study for primary as well as secondary schools on the basis of proposals made in a 1987 report by the Council on the School Curriculum, an advisory group to the Minister of Education, Science, and Culture. The basic goal of the revision was to prepare students to cope with rapidly occurring changes toward a more global society. The report urged Japanese teachers to place much more emphasis on the development of communicative competence in English.

Thus, the intent of the Japanese educational system's goal is to make viable changes for a more global consciousness. There is a reliance of experienced instructors who will be able to scaffold or to provide

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students with the necessary tools in negotiating the meaning from CBI (Content-based Instruction) and/or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) courses. In predicting the outcome of the next decade, most educators are carefully planning the implementation of these educational policy demands within their university curriculum by standardizing a level of communicative competency among their students.

In comparing American educational goals with Japan's systematized efforts for internationalization, these may include traditional literacy, computer literacy, library skills and critical thinking skills as related to information literacy. The most recent U.S. Presidential Committee views on information literacy can be defined as a distinct set of techniques and skills in order to utilize a wide of range of infomation tools, and in molding informational solutions to various social, economical, and political issues in global society. In response to the growing consciousness for more information literacy, the American Library Association's (ALA) Presidential Committee on Information Literacy's Final report states as follows: "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to learn, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (1989).

Another working definition of information literacy by Jeremy Shapiro and Shelley Hughes advocate for a more holistic educational approach and drawing upon the Enlightenment ideals like those articulated by philosophers Condorcet. The viewpoint that Shapiro and Hughes held is that "information literacy is essential to the future of democracy, and that citizens are to be intelligent shapers of the information society rather than merely pawns." Specifically, they both emphasize that "from a humanistic culture, information should be a part of a meaningful existence rather than a routine of production and consumption."

As a starting point in formulating the dialogue for the inclusion of

information literacy in existing curricula, Shapiro's and Hughes' perception involve integrating a "more broader, critical conception of a more humanistic sort" as well as a holistic approach to information literacy. The prototype for a working curriculum was suggested to include the following educational pursuits:

- Tool Literacy is the ability to understand and use the practical and conceptual tools of current information technology relevant to education and the areas of work and professional life that the individual expects to inhabit.
- Resource Literacy is the ability to understand the form, format, location and access methods of information resources, especially daily expanding networked information resources.
- Research Literacy is the ability to understand and use the IT-based tools relevant to the work of today's researcher and scholar.
- Publishing Literacy is the ability to format and publish research and ideas electronically, in textual and multimedia forms as well the ability to introduce them into the electronic public realm and the electronic community of scholars.
- Emerging Technology Literacy is the ability to continuously adapt to and in understanding, evaluating and making use of the continually emerging innovations in information technology so as not to be a prisoner of prior tools and resources, and to make intelligent decisions about the adoption of new ones.
- Critical Literacy is the ability to evaluate critically the intellectual, human and social strengths and weaknesses, potentials and limits, benefits and costs of information technologies.

Identification of Informational Resources

In comparison to our past educational access to general information, the amount of knowledge and information was limited to our availability to printed resources at the library. In fact, earlier

educational goals for students were to have them recall facts and data via rote memorization, and this later became more important for work-related matters. In the early 1980's, most office settings have changed the processing of information based on technological advances, and this was due to the fact that workers have an easier access to the Internet. Essentially, the availability of home computers, laptops and other electronic devices for fast-breaking informational downloads provides immediate access for daily decision-making purposes such as news reports and/or earthquake warnings. While it is not merely the accessing and processing information that is vital for our daily usages, but rather the demand for the proper response to any piece of information. In essence, it is a person's ability to critically evaluate such organized information, and to judge its reliability and relevance to a particular informational search. Today, it can be noted that data, facts, information and intelligence, and knowledge can be organized in these physical formats:

FORMAT	DESCRIPTION
Printed	Materials referenced and collected from print resources (hardback and paperback books, periodicals, print-on-demand, (POD documents, manuscripts, correspondence, loose leaf materials, notes, brochures, etc.
Digital	Digital materials are information materials that are stored in an electronic format on a hard drive, CD-ROM, or remote server. Examples of digital materials are: e-books, e-journals, e-course materials, e-databases, websites, e-print e-archives, or e-classes. These materials are accessed with a computer via the Internet. While not all materials

listed in the library's catalog are digital, many are, and the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalog) provides the access to those materials.

Audio/Video	Materials collected using video (television, video recordings), audio, (radio, audio recordings) tools presented in recorded tapes, CDs, audio-cassettes, reel to reel tapes, record albums, DVDs, videocassettes, audio books, etc.
Multimedia	Materials created by the use of several different media to convey information (text, audio, graphics, animation, video, and interactivity). Multimedia also refers to computer media. A PowerPoint presentation using slides, video, and interactive links is an example of a multimedia format. DVDs, videocassettes, audio books, etc.
Microform	Microform: materials that have been photographed and their images developed in reduced size onto 35 mm or 16 mm film rolls or 4" x 6" fiche cards which are viewed on machines equipped with magnifying lenses.
Humans	Information collected from face-to-face or telephone communication, daily conversations or other personal communication (such as letters and e-mails).

While this particular list is not exhaustive, this does provide a relative snapshot of what is available in terms of information access to the average individual. In addressing the proponents who are influencing educators to be more inclusive in their approach to teach information literacy for the 21st century, the issues relate to the dimensions of elevating the student's proficiency in English. For example, there are various approaches in teaching L2 students the spoken and written proficiencies within academic and social language usages as well as new considerations to incorporate information literacy to the curriculum matrix and learning rubrics of L2 learners.

Survey Results: Context for Literacy Instruction

In 1991, the United States Congress created a set of educational targets for the nation which includes goals for Literacy and Lifelong Learning. Goal 6 is stated: "By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship." Based on the results of 1500 adult learner responses, the survey conducted by members of the Equipped for the Future Initiative uncovered four themes that have been voiced, and thus, the context for literacy had emerged in this way as summarized next:

- *Access*: information about jobs and other resources in order for adults to orient themselves to the world around them.
- *Voice*: to be able to express ideas and opinions with the confidence they will be heard and taken into account.
- *Independent Action*: to be able to solve problems and make decisions on one's own, acting independently, without having to rely on others.
- *Bridge to the Future*: learning how to learn so adults can keep up with the world as it changes (Stein 1997, p. 7)

Modes of Learning for ESL Courses in the U.S.A.

In recognizing the results of this 1991 survey, the conundrum revolves around instructional teaching and the issues relating to ESL literacy education in America as well as other countries. At the most rudimentary levels, the components for teaching language structures stem primarily from grammar translation to contemporary textbooks organized by verb tenses and language forms. Thus, prompting students to master language structures as part of the curriculum requirements for graduation.

Wrigley and Guth (2000) had cautioned educators that there is equal cause for concern when programs become so "eclectic" or "specialized" that they have no philosophical coherence and unifying vision. In truth, we cannot overlook the fact that an overriding principle promotes the ideal goals that maintain the flow of program requirements within a curriculum. In view of these far-reaching insights for the future of information literacy though, part of analysis needs to evaluate several educational approaches in orientation for ESL literacy instruction that are currently applied for students learning English in the United States.

Essentially, it should be noted that most programs in force aim to help students learn facts, concepts, and/or procedural knowledge through guided and sequential practice. For most ESL learners though, the mastery in learning involves the focus on linguistic structures, reading comprehension, vocabulary and its content-based meaning, and other competencies involving a certain level of critical evaluation of information.

Reviewing ESL Approaches in the United States

As most ESL instructors know, the language skills that are most often featured in language programs in varying degrees stress the four basic proficiency levels: listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to the "What Works" study by Pelavin Research Center

and American Institutes for Research in 1999, the findings constitute an ESL *Acquisition Model,* and may include vocabulary, pronunciation, language functions, and strategies to engage in oral communication with native speakers. In contrast, an *ESL Literacy Model* as found in this same study focused on reading and writing skills development. What this essentially focused on was the student's ability to engage in reading from printed formats, strategies to build-up reading fluency, and for students to obtain goals in decoding, and becoming more familiar with writing styles. These were the distinctions found in this particular study, but what was interesting to note was that fluency was primarily the way students practiced letter and word recognition, recognizing sound/symbol relationships, and in understanding blended sounds. Activities revolved around choral reading and using print that is often used in our daily lives in order to invoke a student's sense of familiarity.

Content-Based Approach for ESL Literacy

In terms of ESL literacy, the content-based approach relies on teaching the language that is woven into the content-specific subject matter such as global warming as well as sociological or cultural theories. While this approach was initially developed for refugee children such as those who came from Vietnam, Cambodian and/or from other Southeast Asian countries, the literacy program in the United States had incorporated specific vocabulary and language functions for a given job or profession within their curricula. For example, family literacy programs often provided language or an orientation to the structure of schools in the United States. Citizenship classes may provide English language vocabulary such as the *Wh--*construction needed to understand a "100 questions" format. Even the alphabet was taught in U.S. history classes by utilizing "F is for Flag" usages in order to cover the content-specific information presented in these citizenship classes. (Weinstein, 1999)

What is Competency-based Education?

Competency-based education (CBE) emerged in the late 1970's and this approach shifted away from grammar-based curriculum with newly-arrived refugees who needed survivor English for immediate application in their new lives in America. What was defined as "competency" learning for this approach was an instructional objective described in task-based terms. For example, a student was able to "end with a verb phrase describing a demonstrable skill" (Weinstein, 1999). Such information processing skill would be determined by the instructor as "being able to find information in a bus schedule" for their own transportation needs. During the period of intense refugee resettlement, this approach was aimed at helping learners use public transportation, shop, and/or to interact with a doctor. In contrast to the language programs that emphasized phonetics and other language usages, this type of learning did not involve any grammar usages, but the purpose was for refugees to use the English language in order to accomplish a nonlinguistic purpose (Crandall and Peyton, 1993). Competencies for early literacy might include examples such as "can recognize letters of the alphabet" or "can write upper and lower case English letters."

In a general comparative between the content-based approach for academic purposes and the rigors of competency development, the application is wholly-based on language application after the coursework. Thus, the major distinctions between linguistically-motivated programs and the nonlinguistic learning opportunities applicable for daily social interactions is the function of the learning modes.

Creating "Meaning" for Students from a Constructivism Approach

A constructivist orientation to teaching and learning is one in which it is assumed that knowledge is not only transmitted to learners from teachers or books, but also that both meaning and knowledge

can be created collectively and jointly through the interaction between the instructor and the students in a classroom environment. How does one do this type of teaching? There are multitudes of approaches, methods and techniques, but for the purposes of this paper, the *Participatory,* or *"Freirian" Approach* for adult literacy programs can provides us with a focused research reference in evaluation of information literacy at its basic core. The basic tenant for this approach is that education and knowledge have value insofar as they help people recognize and liberate themselves from the social conditions that oppress them. Paolo Freire was a Brazilian educator who helped initiate, develop and implement national literacy campaigns in a number of developing countries. His classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (1972) outlines an approach to teaching literacy in which researchers study the conditions in a community and identify generative words to describe situations familiar to learners. Then, literacy teachers develop materials using these generative words to help learners decode the syllables as well as deconstruct their social conditions.

Even if most instructors do not have the luxury of relying on social scientists to research a specific community of English learners, the primary tenets of participatory education can be found in Auerbach's, *Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy* (1992). The following ascribe to Freire's tenets and most educators agree on the following instructional patterns:

- Use of generative words and themes drawn from learner's experiences.
- The notion of teachers as facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge.
- Use of "problem-posing," a technique in which learners look at pictures or objects to discuss their situation and explore solutions to problems encoded in these situations. (See Auerbach 1992).

The Whole Language or Holistic Methods in U.S. Classrooms Provides an Unifying Approach for L2 Leaners

The movement born in U.S. classrooms grow from a perspective on language learning and teaching as a social exchange. Learning is based on interactions with other speakers, readers, and writers. This whole-language approach provides students the opportunity to read and write for and with each other, and to evaluate group-related projects together. In this regard, phonics and other bottoms-up methods produce chunks of information for students that are integrated into a larger communicative approach. To illustrate this, the LEA (Language Experience Approach) is a technique related to the whole language tradition, and enables adult literacy learners to engage in print from the outset by drawing on stories that they dictate to a teacher or more able classmates, either in the native language or in English. These stories become the basis for a language or literacy lesson (Ediger, A and C. Pavlik, 2000).

An extension of these techniques lie in the principles found in a model called LLC or *Learners' Lives as Curriculum* (Weinstein 1999), and this involves learner text used as catalysts for discussing themes of interest or concerns for learners. Examples of text include any of the following: language experience, dictation, poem, story, fairytale, or interview. In this approach, the learner can identify themselves with these characters within a story, and the student can respond to them while learning a language specific skill.

To illustrate, a story can be utilized about a person who bought a new home in Virginia, and discovered that the houses are far apart from each other. Another aspect to this story could be from the perspective of a man who is perceived to be African-American and that people are afraid of him, but in actuality, the person is Ethiopian, and not born in America at all. This may prompt a cross-cultural discussion about houses in Ethiopia and/or how people are perceived in America based on their skin color, rather than their national

origins. Such discussions can further be elevated into more serious levels of academic pursuits in analyzing sociological theories based on racial/ethnic studies and diversity issues.

Students are greatly encouraged to create their own projects of research and to collectively construct knowledge through story-telling for real readers or listeners outside the classroom environment. Locating bilingual books may aid in re-producing by simulating a given social circumstance such as photos describing a Mien Hill tribe village in Laos, and how Laotians immigrated to the Unites States and in locating cultural barriers in English. Another project-based learning activity is for learners to investigate a question, a problem, plan an event, or develop a product (Moss and Van Duzer 1998). Leaners not only receive knowledge from a teacher or a book, but also, they collectively share and create knowledge. Among the potential benefits are effective advocacy, support for problem-solving, and intergenerational transmission of culture. In addition, materials created by learners themselves are often more powerful and compelling for future learners than anything the most dedicated materials writer can dream up in a classroom textbook.

In this LLC approach, thematic units include four main components accordingly to Weinstein's research:

- Narratives with a contextualized focus on themes and "hot topics" of interest to learners.
- Language skills, structures, and competencies.
- Opportunities to document current language use and monitor progress towards learner-select goals.
- Opportunities to build a classroom community in which learners get acquainted to solve problems together, and engage in authentic projects (Weinstein 1999).

Setting Goals, Monitoring Classroom Progress

In any language or literacy program, there are several "stakeholders", which require how things are going in terms of a realized outcome. Learners want to know how well they are doing vis-á-vis other students, and if they are moving toward their learning goals. Teachers want to know which methods work and which do not work at all. It is now common knowledge that language learners are not all the same. This creates the situation where the instructor must decide how to "best" utilize classroom time for learners with different levels of proficiencies. Program staff need information in order to place learners in the appropriate levels or classes, decide course offerings, plan the curriculum, and generally find if they are meeting their program goals, and if graduating student are finding jobs soon after finishing their respective degrees. Taxpayers as well as policymakers want to know if the money spent on these educational programs were successful enough to continue and replicate in terms of future educational guidelines. The learner community involve family and/or workplace, and they want to know if the consideration for their time in these studies are paying off, and if so, in what way. (Van Duzer and Berdan 2000).

Assessing success is not always an easy answer, and this is, in part, due to the enormity of information available for different stakeholders, and due to the fact that there is no apparent, coherent, comparable system in place. As part of any curriculum, the most important aspect is to create a performance-based system which aligns the students, program and policymaker goals within one framework. With a growing emphasis on accountability in the United States, this is one of the key factors in the next decade for consideration.

The following information is a general assessment within a given curriculum. General assessments consider standardized testing and the advantages and disadvantages have been listed below for

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comparison purposes. The advantages are as follows:

- Have construct validity and scoring reliability.
- Are cost effective and relatively easy to administer.
- Are accepted by funders for program accountability.
- Allow for comparisons of learner progress within and across programs.

The disadvantages are as follows:
- Don't reflect what has been taught, or capture what has been learned.
- Don't capture changes in language use and literacy practices beyond the classroom.
- Don't discriminate well at the lower end of the literacy achievement.
- May be inappropriately used for "gatekeepers" purposes, especially in the workplace (Wrigley and Guth 2000, p. 135).

Finding Focus with the Whole Language and/or Holistic Approach and Information Literacy

With respect to the whole language or holistic approach to language learning in classroom learning, the National Forum proposes an educational schemata that information literacy should clarify and understand the requirements of a problem or task for which information is sought. From this point of analysis, the rudiments for this type of teaching require the organization of the teaching steps for students to follow.

While the instructor may decide on the topic of discussion or in posing a social problem either on a community or global scope, the follow-through for students is to help them locate information in various sources such as books, encyclopedias, maps, almanacs, etc. These sources may be electronic, print, social bookmarking tools, and

other physical formats. Next, the instructor instructs the students to examine these resources and determine its usefulness in solving the problem at stake for a class project. This standard involves the student's ability to critically assess the information. After reviewing the sources of information, the students are allowed to organize and process the necessary information and to find the solutions sought in a given problem scenario. Examples of these basic steps are as follows:

1. Discriminating between fact and opinion.
2. Basing comparisons on similar characteristics.
3. Noticing various interpretations of data.
4. Finding more information if needed.
5. Organizing ideas and information logically.

After these basic steps are realized, then it is time for presenting this information in the form of report and/or from a group PowerPoint presentation. Oftentimes, the use of PowerPoint offers a student the chance to interact and create a cohesive, organized arrangement of information in a logical format. Finally, the evaluation of the content of such information is the final step in this information literacy strategy proposed by Eisenberg, M (2004) in his powerpoint presentation entitled, "The Whole Enchilada."

Standards for Information Literacy

The above-mentioned style of instruction may be a simplistic overview of what can be done in formulating information literacy into coursework. In view of this, another conception used primarily in the library and informational studies field provides categories of standards in comparison.

In the publication, "Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning" (AASL and AECT, 1998), three categories, nine standards,

and twenty-nine indicators are used to describe the information literate student. The categories and their standards have been presented here as follows:

CATEGORY 1: Information Literacy
Standards

1. The student who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively.
2. The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.
3. The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.

CATEGORY 2: Independent Learning
Standards

1. The student who is an independent learner is information literate and pursues information related to personal interests.
2. The student who is an independent learner is information literate and appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information.
3. The student who is an independent learner is information literate and strives for information seeking and knowledge generation.

CATEGORY 3: Social Responsibility
Standards

1. The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and recognizes the importance of information in a democratic society.
2. The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices

ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.

3. The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and participates effectively in groups to pursue and generate information.

Effect on Current Education Standards

The rapidly evolving information landscape means that education methods and practices must evolve as well, and be adapted and integrated within a given curriculum. Learning and the ability to seek out and identify technological innovations are needed to keep pace with our changing tide of our information centric societies. The key is to harness these resources and place them in a timely manner so that students may be empowered to be more effective workers and/or contributors to society as a whole after graduation and beyond as participants in society.

As we learn new techniques, follow new trends, and react to changing pressures, the instructor must realize what has initially moved us to be teachers in the first place. We need to stay true to our purpose in keeping with these technological changes in society. In short, as educators, we must articulate and pursue a vision on several levels. This vision-making commitment starts with asking the pertinent question: What is the purpose of this lesson today? In the instance of searching for this immediate answer, the instructor can easily be distracted by the challenges of meeting the ever-changing scope of educational standards. What is essential here is to maintain that underlying long-term "vision" and in accomplishing what is accountable in meeting learner's needs within the classroom setting.

Our Global Future : Accountability

In line with our own vision, the greater goal is to create a community of teachers that lend support to the kind of learning that

ultimately makes good citizenry a realized end in our global communities. Most important to note is that our future is at stake in an ever-changing tide of uncertainties and unpredictable turn of events. As instructors, the contributions made in shaping information literate university students into responsible and contributing members of society may yield a greater benefit for the betterment of humanity as a whole.

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