

## Preface

Information literacy has been at the core of both Mark Hepworth's and Geoff Walton's research for over 15 years. This interest stemmed from working with groups of people either as researchers in information literacy and people's information behaviour, or as information service providers and capacity builders. This experience has focused their attention on both people's need for information and also their ability to acquire and process information. This book is aimed at both academics who are interested in exploring the various facets of information literacy and librarians or other professionals, such as teachers or extension workers and capacity builders whose role it is to help others develop their information literacy.

Our information literacy research has stemmed from an academic desire to understand this phenomena, that is 'what is it?', 'what influences a person information literacy?', 'does it mean different things in different contexts?' and so on. The second driver was the need to find practical ways of developing people's information literacy, that is drawing on academic insight to help develop effective interventions that would build information literacy. Both Mark and Geoff teach information literacy to undergraduates and post-graduates as well as outside the educational environment, including the workplace and the community. This combination of research and practice is, in a sense, a necessity because information literacy and the teaching of information literacy is a relatively new phenomena and we are all still learning about the nature of information literacy and also about the ways to enable people to develop these capabilities. This book therefore reflects the embedded nature of information literacy, the significance of experience and the need to concretise the abstract often nebulous, and primarily unconscious conceptions and processes associated with information literacy.

Knowledge and understanding of information literacy is still evolving, as are the methods and techniques to build information capabilities. One thing we are clear about is that information literacy is far more complex than it was conceived 15 years ago, where the focus was on discreet skills associated

with using libraries and library resources. The latter is, of course, important but we now appreciate how information literacy can be tackled from various perspectives, for example, the focus may be the individual and their capabilities and their information experience, or alternatively information literacies may be related to being part of a group of people, such as a team or organisation or community group where certain behaviours and attitudes maybe particularly important, such as the sharing of information. Furthermore information literacy can be approached from different perspectives, such as, cultural, cognitive, behavioural or focusing on the information landscape and people's knowledge of and interaction with information artefacts, people and other ways of becoming informed.

To help get an overview of conceptions of information literacy today and an appreciation of its complexity we wanted to encourage contributions from authors who are recognised as making a significant contribution to the field. These included people who, over the last few years, have contributed books, journals articles, maintained Web-based resources on IL, and are regular contributors to conferences such as the Librarians Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) conference.

The authors were asked to contribute a chapter based on their research and/or current practice that would help readers to get a taste of recent approaches to developing people's information literacy and also an international perspective on information literacy from authors around the world. In particular authors were encouraged who also appreciated the richness and complexity of information literacy, its socially embedded nature and the importance of context. The latter stemmed from a belief that, although at a high level, categories of information literacy phenomena are common and generalisable, such as broad processes like 'acquiring information' or 'processing information' or 'critically evaluating information', there are others that are more important in specific contexts, such as 'dealing with information securely' or may involve radically different types of information and interaction.

When we first thought about this volume we agreed that it has to travel beyond higher education and the 'northern' perspective and to incorporate both practitioner narratives as well as theoretical. We felt that it needed to embrace the workplace, the community and involve authors who have carried out research in both the developing world and emerging economies. Capacity or capability building was another issue we wanted to address to demonstrate how information literacy is not just a set of skills but is actually a set of cognitive heuristics that can be applied to any task or context.

We are delighted to say that the authors we recruited from all four continents have done a fine job in reporting and critiquing their work. The chapters contained are naturally diverse and wide ranging covering different

locations, such as Australia, Brazil, Hong Kong, Thailand, Tanzania, Malaysia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States and specific contexts such as enabling Alaska's indigenous Inuit population to develop legal information literacy. We are not aware of any previous work done on faith and information literacy and this is an example of groundbreaking work that we were delighted to include. Naturally, we also wanted a strong theoretical foundation and that has been provided in the first three chapters although theoretical assumptions are either evident or explicit in other chapters. Our opening chapter also presents an argument for bringing together the domains of information literacy and information behaviour and indicates how they are complementary and both would benefit from each other's work.

We would therefore like to thank the contributors, who sacrificed the time to write their chapters and enabled the reader to share the experience of active researchers and teachers and trainers information literacy from around the world. Several authors were brave enough to do this even though English was not their first language. It has been a privilege to be able to see information literacy through fresh eyes, either due to authors unpicking specific aspects of information literacy or showing its significance in different contexts, as well practical ideas for how to effectively foster information literacy among others and implement interventions.

We would also like to thank the editorial team at Emerald for their patience and help with the production of this book.

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