

Communication and Informational Literacy by Kirk Widra M.Ed.

Introduction

The following paper is an analysis of the often-misunderstood definitions and purposes of technological, communication, and informational literacy.

Analysis

Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association, 1989). With the advancement and proliferation of technology, information literacy is of ever increasing importance to everyone as we are continually faced with a vast array of diversity concerning choices whether it be in our academic, work, or personal lives. The "information age", as it has been dubbed, offers an unprecedented availability of information, "through libraries, community resources, special interest organizations, media, and the Internet--and increasingly, information comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions about its authenticity, validity, and reliability" (Association of College Research Libraries, 2010).

Here in lies the problem however, with this sheer volume of information available it presents many significant challenges for those groups within society who do not have the skills or framework from which to critically analyze the various viewpoints presented. In fact it may serve to be yet another divisive tool that further separates a society already divided along educational, and by extension, socioeconomic lines. There is a clear need to educate citizens in the ability to interpret and synthesize information effectively. As suggested by Bloom's Taxonomy, to function fully in the emerging global community students must be able to:

- Recall and acquired useful knowledge
- Understand the significance and context of that knowledge
- Apply that to the needs of the situation
- Analyze the effectiveness of the application and the tools used
- Evaluate and present information for articulation to others
- Creatively apply that knowledge to other spheres

This is an important issue, in the mad rush to claim competency in meeting standards in today's world communication and informational literacy are all too often confused with technological literacy. Although information technology skills are interwoven and support information literacy, they are not the same. Technology is merely an advanced medium of choice to explore information; it is not the sole resource available and it does not interpret information in of itself. This is an important factor in assessing the evolving state of communication and information literacy. Technology in many ways has fundamentally altered the way we communicate and view the world. As such special care must be taken by educators to teach students to not only make the distinction between process and tools but between purposeful arranging of knowledge to frame perception and the understanding of reality. Such learning environments create a culture of informational literate citizens are able to cut through the clutter, participate in expressing their opinions based on educated perspectives, and to add to the dialogue that enriches the democratic ethos.

References

American Library Association. Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. Final Report. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1989.)

Association of College Research Libraries, (2010). Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher

Education. Retrieved March 10, 2010 from
<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm#f1>

***Reflections on issues of Communication and Informational Literacy**

The preceding paper was provided to demonstrate awareness of issues regarding communication and information literacy and to further highlight their often misunderstood relationship to technological literacy. The paper demonstrates knowledge of an important issue in education today regarding the emerging definitions of literacy in the 21st century. Implementing technology into schools at the K-12 level is an important need with obvious implications not only to NCLB benchmarks but also to student's lives. However, there are virtually no standardized tests currently at the state level designed to measure what K-12 students know about technology. Since implementing a statewide curriculum dedicated solely to the use of technology is an unrealistic expectation, schools must focus on integrating technology into all areas of instruction across the spectrum of the educational community. Currently however few curricula or instructional materials at the K-12 integrate nontechnology subjects with technology-related content (The National Academy of Sciences, 2009). Technology standards for NCLB are traditionally pursued in isolation within science and mathematics and no attempt is made to connect to other areas such as history and language arts. Though the potential for deeper connections to technology are possible across the spectrum of schools, the use of technology is not widely reflected in the curricula, instructional materials, and assessments. The bottom line is that the framework that underlies state curriculums for most school subjects simply do not make proper connections to technological content, yet they are expected to attain benchmarks in the use of technology nonetheless.

Unfortunately, this highlights the core issue, the literacy of educators themselves. Teachers and students alike need to be led to the knowledge that technology is a tool and is not meant to supplant the process of teaching and learning, it is meant to compliment it. Teachers and students alike are often led to the conclusion that information they are gathering and assembling through the use of technology is enough to demonstrate learning. Though this may create a cursory level of knowledge it does not foster understanding and the ability to abstract what has been learned to other areas of study.

The "digital divide", as it is often referred to, is becoming a defining element of our society and culture. Educational leaders must take the lead on bridging the gap between knowledge and understanding. The most important advantage of technology, and the use of it, is really how it can personalize the experience of learning. Technology has allowed us to see an unprecedented amount of information from multiple vantage points. It really has made the world smaller and somehow larger all at the same time. It is the duty of educators to remind students of this fact and to also remind them this is merely a tool and that ultimately it comes down to their ability to critically examine and use that information to add to the discussion, not to simply cut and paste someone else's ideas or personal truth over their own.

Reference

The National Academy of Sciences Online. (2009). Strengthening the Presence of Technology in Formal and Informal Education. Retrieved on October 28, 2009 from <http://www.nae.edu/nae/techlithome.nsf/weblinks/KGRG-55ZQBD?OpenDocument>

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