

INFORMATION LITERACY IN BELGIUM. AN OVERVIEW BY THE *EDUDOC GROUP*

PAUL THIRION* – BERNARD POCHET**

Introduction

When we were invited to describe the situation on information literacy (hereafter, IL) in Belgium, it appeared to us that numerous aspects had to be treated. The present document will include a rapid analysis of the Belgian situation and a description of the *EduDOC Group*. During this description we will trace ten years of activity and present several IL projects, in particular, a recent one concerning distance learning that is currently under development.

The situation concerning Belgian libraries

The Belgian library situation reflects the economic and political situation of the country, quite different in the North (i.e., in Flanders) and in the South (i.e., in Wallonia). Belgium is a federal state and many government competences (teaching, culture...) have been delegated to regional and community governments. In the area of libraries, there is a national librarians' association, the Association Belge de Documentation (ABD), mainly represented and active in the South (French-speaking part) of the country, and the National Conference of the Head Librarians of the Universities, sponsored by the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS). This latter association is not involved in library instruction but supports various federal projects, such as the Belgian Collective Catalogue of monographs (CCB) and the national collective catalogue of the serials (Antilope).

* Faculty of Psychology and Education Science of the University of Liège – Belgium

** Gembloux Agricultural University – Belgium

In Flanders there is the Mededelingenblad van Vlaamse Vereniging voor Bibliotheek -, Archief - en Documentatiewezen (VVBAD), a very active association which includes the public, scientific, school, academic and private libraries. The VVBAD is financed by the Flemish government and became the federator of all libraries in Flanders. It is a member of the principal international library associations. It currently has 1.200 members and a permanent secretarial staff. It regularly organises seminars, conferences and training programmes and publishes monographs, directories and different journals ("INFORMATION", "Bib-SCOOP", etc.). It does not currently have an IL project.

In the French-speaking community (Brussels and Wallonia), the situation is profoundly different. Rather than a single umbrella organisation for all the libraries, several organisations coexist in addition to the ABD. Among them, the Association Belge des Bibliothécaires d'Expression Française (ABBEF), the Association professionnelle des Bibliothécaires Documentalistes (APBD) which concentrate their activities on public libraries, the Fédération interdiocésaine des Bibliothécaires et Bibliothèques catholiques (FIBBC) which concentrates on the Catholic sector (i.e., Catholic library schools and Catholic public libraries) and Prodoc-edu, an association of high school librarians created by members of the *EduDOC Group*. Prodoc-edu's primary focus revolves around issues involving the role of the library in the teaching institution.

In contrast to other countries, only the public libraries depend on a single global authority, the government of the French-speaking Community. The university libraries and all school libraries depend directly on their own institution. One of the consequences of this is that there is no global and strategic framework in which IL could be developed. In the domain of IL, the creation of the *EduDOC Group* was thus needed to put together ideas and initiatives from many people working in different institutions. It should, however, be stressed that for university libraries the *Conseil Interuniversitaire Francophone* (CIUF) whose main role is to federate the nine French-speaking universities, set up in December 1988 a standing committee of head librarians. In October 1997, in collaboration with North of France libraries and the *EduDOC Group*, this committee organised a French-speaking workshop on information literacy (AFFD - see results below). To date, this has been the only initiative of this committee in explicit support of information literacy.

Survey about IL in Belgium

During the first quarter of 1995, the “User Training Group of ABD” (which became the *EduDOC Group* in 1998) carried out a large survey about the IL situation in Belgium. This followed an initial, less detailed survey done in 1991 (Pochet, 1991) that focused mainly on technical aspects of access to information. The 1995 study was carried out to obtain a better picture of the IL situation in Belgium, its place in academic curricula, and to identify isolated IL initiatives or programmes. The results (Pochet & Thirion, 1998a) were presented at the ABCDEF Conference in October 1995 at Laval University (Quebec).

A statistical analysis of the 218 answers collected shows that in university and school libraries (the situation was quite different for public libraries) computerisation level and library size were significantly correlated to an institution’s chance of having an IL programme. Thus, people attending a library of limited size, not computerised and out of a teaching institution, had statistically little chance to have access to an IL programme.

In addition, we observed a significant dichotomy between technical aspects and intellectual aspects of the IL programmes. Unfortunately, technical aspects were largely favoured over the more intellectual aspects, particularly in large libraries. In essence, learners were instructed about which buttons to push, rather than on how and why to use one tool rather than another, on how to organise concepts, on how to correctly integrate into their knowledge and make efficient use of information, once it was located, etc.

We detected, however, a number of IL initiatives with more methodological content, even if they were exceptions. This led us to consider that the main focus of the effort of our group should henceforth be to advocate the methodological components of IL.

The integration of IL in students’ curricula and partnership between librarians and teachers appeared to be very infrequent and, in our view, largely insufficient. Lastly, whereas computer-assisted learning was already a tool widely recognised and used elsewhere, we noted that at the time only one library in our sample claimed to make use of this tool.

We concluded that Belgium offered interesting IL initiatives but much progress remained to be made, especially in small libraries.

Recent information has led us to believe that since the time this original survey was issued, the situation has improved in Belgian libraries. For example, since 2001, an introductory course in “information retrieval” (15 hours) is now required for all future

school teachers (primary schools and the first three years of secondary school). Another positive sign is the inclusion by some universities of Information Literacy courses in the new definition of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System). We have also observed, mainly in universities, that various new IL teaching initiatives are being carried out. However those initiatives consist, for the most part, of very short courses (1 to 3 hours). Some of these courses more closely resemble "information sessions" rather than true training courses with methodological concerns. To confirm those impressions, a new investigation with the same methodological rigour will be necessary.

The EduDOC Group

This Group, which was called until 1997 "Groupe formation des usagers de l'ABD" (training user group), is a working group founded in 1989 at the University of Liège by several members of the Belgian Association of Documentation (ABD).

From the outset, the objectives of the group have been to reflect on and to observe the IL situation in Belgium and abroad and to serve as an advocate for IL programmes for librarians, teachers and decisions-makers. The group has developed its activities in multiple directions. It organises 4 to 5 meetings each year along with a number of larger conferences (Groupe Formation des Utilisateurs, 1992; 1994; 1996; 1997) Since 1995, the Group has developed a Web site (<<http://www.bib.fsagx.ac.be/edudoc/index.htm>>) and an Email discussion group on the internet (<<http://www.lists.ulg.ac.be/mailman/listinfo/edudoc>>). Of the 600 members, more than half are French speaking, 80 Belgians and approximately fifty Canadians as well as a number of Swiss, American, Portuguese, Luxemburg, Rumanian, Danish, Finnish or Swedish members. As described above, the Group has carried out a broad Belgian survey in 1995. It took part in international work and conferences, including the ABCDEF congress (University Laval, Quebec, 1995 – Pochet & Thirion, 1998b), Annual Workshop on Instruction in Library Use (Montreal in 1997 and 1999), French-speaking Workshops (Pochet & Thirion, 1998a) on IL (Gembloux, Belgium, 1997), the conference on "The training of IST in higher education" (Paris, 1999); "Inforum" ABD (Brussels, 2001); "The first and the second FORMIST¹ Meetings" (Villeurbanne, France, 2001 and 2002).

¹ FORMIST – FORMation en Information Scientifique et Technique. See: <<http://formist.enssib.fr/Formist/>>.

Recently, the group organised meetings on the ECTS and its strategic impact on information literacy; a presentation of IPINFO, an Intranet gateway dedicated to project management in the training of students in scientific information retrieval and use, and a round table discussion on the place of information literacy in the training of future librarian-documentalists.

The Group is involved in many projects relating to the promotion of IL and the development of innovative tools and models.

After more than ten years of activity, observation and reflection, we have shifted ever more attention to a number of specific aspects of IL: the necessary integration of the library in the teaching process, the imperative collaboration between librarians and teachers, the initial and final steps of the information retrieval process (the awakening of the need for information, the analysis and translation of it in a structured and relational form, the criticism of information, the transformation of this information into knowledge – in short, the methodology of information access), the value of problem-based learning to support the information access, impact studies about IL programmes, IL teacher training for librarians or teachers, etc. These are the major directions of our efforts for the future (Pochet & Thirion, 1999; Pochet, 1999).

Let us now talk about certain projects and achievements involving the IL integration process in Belgium.

French-speaking workshop on information literacy (AFFD – Ateliers Francophones sur la Formation Documentaire)

In 1997, under the auspices of the Conseil Interuniversitaire Francophone (CIUF) and with the help of the Sous-Direction des Bibliothèques au Ministère de l'Éducation nationale in France, the Groupe de Réflexion sur l'Enseignement des Méthodologies de l'Information (GREMI) in France and the Groupe de Formation des Utilisateurs de l'ABD (now known as the *EduDOC Group*), organised a 3-day French-speaking workshop on information literacy in Gembloux (Belgium).

It brought together 10 French and Belgian librarians concerned with information literacy, each representing their institutions and wishing to share their experiences, to discuss common goals, and to develop a standard framework of IL courses. This workshop has served as the basis of on-going in-depth studies of IL both in France and in French-speaking Belgium. The conclusions of this workshop

are interesting in a number of different ways. In particular, they emphasise the means and strategies to be implemented to promote and generalise IL.

About the goals

First, we advocate the need for defining a real teaching project that concerns all the partners: librarians, teachers and students. Two specific moments of the curriculum were favoured to introduce an IL programme. In the first grade we suggested a basic introduction to IL and again when the student begins specialisation in his or her chosen discipline. At these two times, it appeared to us that, in spite of certain differences in our respective approaches to IL, a number of common goals could be formulated and we listed them.

Tools and means

We noted the lack of didactic means and the importance of setting up a system of pooling of such means and tools. This involves not only searching for specific teaching devices that have already been developed, but also involves the joint development of these means. FORMIST in France was set up for this purpose, and SOFIE (see below) intends to reach the same goals.

Another conclusion of these workshops was to consider that significant interactions between librarians and teachers are important in setting up new IL programmes. The *EduDOC* discussion list is one way to facilitate this interaction, but other forums of exchange also need to be set up.

Recognition strategies

The participants in the AFFD also considered that it was essential to develop an active strategy for greater recognition of the importance of IL initiatives amongst teachers and decision-makers. Teachers must be made aware of the teaching activities of librarians. Librarians have to play a role in creating greater awareness of the fundamental role of libraries and documentation in the learning process, thereby emphasising the essential role of good information literacy competence in academic success.

Five strategic directions were thus defined:

- the necessity of a statistical and qualitative evaluation of the impact of IL programmes;

- a marketing policy within the institution;
- a local action with two or three selected teachers;
- a legitimating process of IL in each institution;
- and official recognition of IL programmes through a political or institutional decisions.

Lastly, it was clear that these conclusions entailed three main modifications of current practices:

- students have to change their habits (greater integration of external documentation and library use in their learning);
- teachers have to consider the library as a genuine training tool, using it as an integral part of their courses;
- librarians have to become more aware of their teacher role.

This final conclusion implies the necessity of a real training programme for IL instructors. Certain recent developments, both in France (ENSSIB – Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de l'Information et des Bibliothèques,...) and in Belgium, seem to be good steps in this direction, but there is still a great deal that remains to be done in this area.

CeRFIST

The CeRFIST (Centre de Recherche et de Formation à l'Information Scientifique et Technique) was another development of the AFFD. The project initiated by the *EduDOC Group* is based on the French URFIST (Unités Régionales de Formation à l'Information Scientifique et Technique) model. Unfortunately, a lack of financial resources has meant that it has not yet been able to be implemented.

CeRFIST will have the role of supporting all IL activities, mainly in higher and university education and will focus on 3 main directions:

- teacher training
- development of training assistance
- installation of IL impact measurements.

Teacher training

Dedicated to teachers, librarians and information specialists CeRFIST will propose training modules with, for example, the following contents:

- elements of didactic applied to IL;
- development of an IL programme model;
- discovery and use of various training tools;
- setting up of particular training tools (Internet, video, multi-media, etc.);
- techniques of evaluation.

The development of training assistance

It is indeed not possible to propose IL without training and teaching tools (slides, demonstrations, exercises,...), nor to propose self-learning without suitable means to carry this out. Consequently, CeRFIST will propose:

- the constitution of a cooperative bank of existing resources (in collaboration with other similarly motivated organisations such as FORMIST);
- developing specific tools in collaboration with content specialists;
- helping teachers in the development of new IL tools;
- assisting teachers in the definition of goals, synopsis construction, installation and evaluation of IL facilities.

The installation of IL impact measurements

In order to multiply IL activities and to highlight their importance, CeRFIST will also have to take part in measuring the effectiveness of IL programmes:

- in the students' education;
- in the continuing education of graduates;
- in the professional life of graduates.

CeRFIST will attempt to coordinate the evaluation plans of IL programmes in higher education and at the university.

SOFIE

The SOFIE project was developed in response to an invitation of Belgian federal scientific policy. Unfortunately, for the same reasons as CeRFIST, this project is not yet operational. It aims to promote and support IL training within the user community of Belnet (Belgian national research network for education, research

and public services). It intends to focus on the problem of effective access to scientific information resources available on Internet and involves both tertiary and secondary resources (indexes, search engines, analytical databases, catalogues, etc.), as well as the primary information documents (scientific literature, such as electronic serials, e-prints and various other electronic information: encyclopaedias, dictionaries, factual data bases, Web pages, etc.).

The applicative project is to be carried out under the direction of a supervision committee composed of members of the *EduDOC Group* and representatives of the various partner institutions.

The project consists of selecting and indexing the resources for on-line information literacy, evaluating and describing them, identifying gaps and creating links (with evaluations and comments) among these resources. The project also includes the creation of a teaching tool for the critical analysis of information (from the inventory of existing teaching instruments to the gradual development of a new original training module).

The SOFIE project is based on an Internet gateway and includes an evaluation programme of the gateway, the training prototypes and the audience.

This project aims to train the end-user and teacher. Its purpose is to increase the documentary competence of students by autonomous training and to provide teachers and information specialists with teaching tools, as well as a means of exchanging ideas.

RéCoDA

RéCoDA (Réseau Coopératif pour une Documentation Accessible) is a co-operative network of libraries (high-schools and university in the French-speaking Community of Belgium) and users (students, teachers and librarians) created in April 1991 (Pochet, 1995).

The centre of this network, located in Gembloux, merges computerised catalogues of all member libraries. This common catalogue is accessible via the Internet and the possibility of interlibrary loans has been set up for any member schools (secondary, high-schools or university), regardless of the size of their library. This accessibility of documents makes RéCoDA, in effect, a virtual library for member users.

Goals

The principal aims are:

- to improve the use of the existing libraries by opening them to the users of other schools;
- to allow the use of teaching means related to acquisition of information both for teachers and students;
- to promote via practice a co-operative spirit in the use of information.

In 1991 the RéCoDA network was a modern and original tool giving students and teachers a source of alive and structured information (Pochet, 2000). For the past five years, RéCoDA has advocated greater autonomy in information retrieval and in information access (question formulation, search strategies, use of information, etc.).

RéCoDA has also set up a Web site (<<http://recoda.fsagx.ac.be/>>), an information letter (10 issues), 3 teacher-training sessions for 30 teachers and 15 meetings.

With time, it appeared that several fundamental goals of RéCoDA and *EduDOC* were similar (e.g., the desire of establishing a partnership between librarians, the wish to emphasise the access to information by students and to improve the quality of this access,...). As a result, we considered it was desirable to bring these two bodies closer together.

DéFIST

DéFIST (Développement d'une Formation à l'Information Scientifique et Technique = Development of scientific and technical information training programmes) is a research programme whose aim is to create a Web-based adaptive distance learning information literacy system. This project is supported by a public funding from the French-speaking community of 60 K€ for 1 year and is based on the collaboration between 2 universities – FUSAGx (Faculté Universitaire des Sciences Agronomiques de Gembloux) and ULg (Université de Liège).

The purpose is to develop an interactive tool specifically intended for IL. Many other Web sites exist in this field. Some have remarkable pedagogical qualities (e.g. Infosphère, Cerise, Diliweb, Praxiste,...). However, it appeared to the promoters these tools did not provide enough flexibility with respect to their current needs. DéFIST intends to propose a more flexible system suitable for short

2-hour courses for early higher education to a thorough training programme (30 hours) for advanced students.

DéFIST is also the result of considerable debate and reflection within the *EduDOC Group*, whose upshot was the awakening of the need and the interest (in efficiency but also in improving the didactics) in “mutualised” local IL initiatives.

The project is based on a methodological approach and considerable modularity. It will consist of 8 modules, 3 levels (beginner, advanced, specialised) and, initially, 3 speciality areas (psychology, agronomy, general). All training components are closely tied to operational objectives and specific tests aimed at evaluating the initial and final competence of the learner. The first task of the teacher is to define a learner group with specific characteristics (average competence, scientific domain,...). Then different specific goals are selected from those proposed by the system according to precise specifications and local needs. Afterwards, the system generates a specific personalised “learning itinerary” for its students with specific goals, self tests, communication tools (teacher, tutor),... Local information and links will then be added by the teacher who will dispose of largely personalised teaching support tools.

The system is also adaptive to learner’ competence and wishes. The learner has the possibility of bypassing various teaching components in which he demonstrates his competence, he can organise his learning itinerary according to his time and personal needs and desires, and can look further into certain concepts not selected by his teacher, etc.

The system is largely constructed on bottom-up methodology and attempts to develop competence instead of simply fostering the acquisition of knowledge.

At the present time, DéFIST is in the initial phases of development (beginning September 2002). The main framework and the overarching pedagogical strategies have been defined and the initial content of the programme is being developed. A broad phase of evaluation of this development will be set-up in the upcoming months.

Some words to conclude

Unfortunately libraries are far from the centre of concern in Belgium. They are too often regarded as “centres of costs” rather than playing a key role in education and training. The same applies to the teaching of IL. Initiatives develop but the main problem

remains their low visibility and their widely dispersed character. Even if mentalities do evolve, too many teachers and political decision makers are still not convinced of the real need for IL teaching. They remain convinced that with the Internet, the search for information suddenly has become simple and accessible to all without any need for organised learning. They fail to take into account the pressing need for a better *conceptual* understanding of information, the *relations* among concepts that structure that information and the ability to criticise that information. And this requires far more than a search engine with a few key words. Some recent developments allow us to remain optimistic, but there remains a considerable distance to travel.

For us, we think that it is necessary to encourage far greater collaborative efforts and to globalise our efforts with other institutions and individuals in Belgium and abroad, mainly with regard to the instruction of teachers, the collective creation of teaching tools and, finally, the development of the means of measuring the impact of IL.

From an ethical as well as didactic point of view, it is simply inconceivable, for our students, citizens of tomorrow in the information society not to have the tools allowing them to be effective and autonomous users of the information that they will need throughout their life. *EduDOC* as well as *FORMIST* in France or other similar groups throughout Europe have a considerable role to play in the IL challenge that lies ahead.

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