The reference librarian's new approach to coach information literacy skills for children: a new approach in reference and information services in the City of Cape Town

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Abstract:

Reference librarians in the City Of Cape Town have been experiencing difficulty in assisting children to use information resources especially with homework projects. The main route cause of the problem was that children did not have the skills to use information resources and to convert the information to address the information need. The educational system in the country does not teach children to use information and also schools do not have a school library, which can assist the children in doing their homework projects. The latter created the results that children is turning to the reference librarian in the public library to assist them with their homework projects.
A working group was tasked to develop an information literacy programme to address the problem for both the Reference Librarian and the child. The paper will focus on the research conducted by the working group to establish the design principals to develop an information literacy programme for children. The paper will also reflect on the pilot test conducted to evaluate the programme and the roll-out of the information literacy programme to all 104 libraries in the City where Reference Librarians will coach children to use both printed and digital resources.

Keywords: reference librarian, information literacy, information literacy programme, information resources, information literacy skills

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper report on the Information Literacy Programme is designed and developed by the Department Library and Information Services in the City of Cape Town to assist reference librarians in coaching children to use reference resources more effectively.

The reference librarian in the public library sector in South Africa is faced with an influx of children who are depending on the public library for their information needs due to lack of School Libraries in the South African education system. A further challenge for the reference library and the City of Cape Town is the lack of information-handling ability of the children who rely on the reference librarian to assist with the search and handling of information needs as these skills are not directly taught at school. The lack of information literacy skills amongst children and the absence of school libraries places additional constraints on the limited number of reference librarians and resources in public libraries.

The Department Library and Information Services in the City of Cape Town has identified the need to coach the children who are relying on the public library for their information needs and assistance in using reference resources. The need for an Information Literacy Programme was identified as the best solution to deal with the challenges to coach children how to use information effectively and to alleviate the pressure on the reference librarians in the public library.

The Department Library and Information Services in the City of Cape Town constituted a working group to research the feasibility and to design an Information Literacy Programme in order to address the problem as mentioned earlier.

This paper will focus on the research conducted by the working group and the design of the Information Literacy Programme for the Department Library and Information Services in the City of Cape Town. The paper also focuses briefly on the pilot test of the Information Literacy Programme and the way forward in rolling out the programme across the City of Cape Town.

2. BACKGROUND

Since the advent of true democracy in 1994, the education environment in South Africa has been divided and many people have not had access to or the privilege of equal and quality education. The latter also occurred in the library sector whereby where most of the schools did not have school libraries and many communities had no public library. This resulted into in low levels of reading and information skills which the new South Africa had to deal with.

Since 1994 the government has introduced one national educational system with the main focus on Outcome Based Education. Although the effective handling of information was seen as one of the eight critical outcomes of the Outcome Based Education system, many schools limited the teaching of information skills due to insufficient resources and lack of school libraries.

However the establishment of more school libraries did not happen and only 7% of schools have functional school libraries with a librarian. During the same period the government built more public libraries throughout the country which increased the access to information resources.

The developments as described resulted into in an influx of learners into public libraries, and reference librarians had to deal with school children who needed to use information but did not know where to find it, how to access the correct information and how to report on the selected information, which are known as information skills.

The reference librarians in the public libraries located in the City of Cape Town reported their concerns and constraints with the increasing numbers of schoolchildren who rely on the reference librarian to assist them step by step with how to use information.

The City of Cape Town provides a public library service to a population of 3740026 with 104 fully-fledged public libraries. The total number of schools located within the boundaries of the City is 1196, meaning that each public library must provide information services to a minimum of 11 schools.

The reality is that the public libraries in the City of Cape Town cannot accommodate the demand for information services and therefore decided to develop an Information Literacy Programme that will assist both the reference librarian and the children to use information effectively.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 WHY THE PUBLIC LIBRARY?

In order to develop the Information Literacy Programme the question was asked why the public library should teach children how to use information rather than the school. The working group conducted a literature search to answer the question at hand, and established a few documents that gave significant direction in understanding the important role public libraries play in teaching users how to use information effectively.

UNESCO Manifesto
Providing information is a core function of library and information services, and according to the *UNESCO Manifesto* (1994:1) the public library is a "living force for education, culture and information…." Statements No. 11 and 12 clearly indicate that the public library should
- facilitate the development of information and computer literacy skills.
- support and participate in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups. It should initiate such activities, if necessary.

The feasibility of the *UNESCO Manifesto* is supported by the *Public Library Services IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development* (IFLA, 2001). The guidelines set out in this document assist public libraries to facilitate the development of communities through education, information, recreation and cultural support. Section 1.3.1 of the document recommends that public libraries should provide materials and programmes that will support formal and informal education. In relation to the educational role of the public library, the document also indicates - in Section 3.4.2 - that "children should be taught skills that ensure the effective use of information…" (IFLA, 2001: 26).

Furthermore the prior mentioned document advises public libraries to provide children with activities that are related to the understanding, and use of, information resources. In Section 3.6 the document further recommends that public libraries should assist library users to develop skills to use the library's resources effectively. Both documents create a platform for public libraries to support the educational needs of children.

The following South African documents support the *UNESCO Manifesto*:

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP): 1994

The RDP policy framework - as drawn up by the African National Congress (ANC)-led alliance (1994:1) - focuses on the "building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future...." This policy framework recognises information and libraries as important aspects of the reconstruction and development of communities in South Africa (African National Congress, 1994:1).

The White paper on Arts, Culture, Science and Technology: 1995

The report identifies the public library as the type of library that is best known to the public as the organisation that provides for the "educational, informational, recreational and cultural needs" (1995:6) of the community. The report supports the key services of the public library ~~and~~ indicating that "…information is a strategic resource" (1995:14) that is imperative for the development of previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa.

Report of the Inter-ministerial Working Group on the Library and Information Services (LIS) Function: 1996

Section 4.4 of the report elaborates on the goals of public libraries in South Africa. According to this section, public libraries should ensure

- equitable and effective public access to information.
- free access to basic information.
- access to information that is essential to support life-long learning and empowerment.

Specialist in the field (Hart 1998:36 and Zaaiman 1987; 16) concluded that the public library has accepted the educational role of becoming an information literacy-training provider. Public libraries support education through basic literacy, cultural awareness, formal learning support, information literacy and life-long learning (Danley, 2003:98).

3.2 WHAT IS INFORMATION LITERACY?

The second question the working group had to answer was what information literacy is as this concept was seen as one of the key designing principals of the Information Literacy Programme. The working group also conducted a literature review to answer the question at hand.

Information Literacy is an international concept and has existed since the 1970's. Various Information Literacy Models have been developed and practised to teach and equip people with the skills to use information successfully. The most known and used models are the BIG 6, The Australian School Library Association Information Literacy Skills, K-12 Information Literacy Model. The working group conducted a comparison research of the most known models, and some new models by known South Africans in the field of Information Literacy.

3.2.1 INTERNATIONAL MODELS

BIG 6 Model
The Model was developed by Eisenberg and Berkowitz (2001) and was used in K-12 schools as well as in higher education. The BIG 6 Model consists of 6 stages providing a systematic process that finds, uses, applies and evaluates information. Each stage provides guidance to the user to work through an information problem.

Australian School Library Association (ASLA) Information Literacy Skills Model (ASLAILM)
The ASLA in collaboration with the Australian Library and Information Association developed a six stage model as highlighted by Crase (1999) where each step is interrelated with the previous and next one.

K-12
The K-12 Model is aimed at learners who must fulfil an information need (Langhorne, 1998). The K-12 Model consists of 5 steps leading from the one to the next.

3.2.2 SOUTH AFRICAN MODELS AND APPROACHES

Where no formal Information Literacy Programme exists, then research and literature guide the pathway for informal models and approaches. The working group considered the following as important models and approaches in the research project.

LIASA ILG for Gr. R-12 Model
The *LIASA School Libraries and Youth Services Interest Group* (SLYSIG) compiled the LIASA *Information Literacy Guidelines Grade R-12* revised document in 2003. The guidelines - given in this document - aim to facilitate the implementation of information literacy education in schools. They illustrate the importance of information skills in the process of outcomes-based education (LIASA, 2003:3). The components of the model are divided into 6 stages - each with several activities that guide children in using information to improve their school work.

Typology of Information Skills Model
Behrens, Olën and Machet (1999:17) compiled an 8-step model for information literacy development. The typology of the 8-step model follows a chronological order and is divided into three stages - each consisting of a number of steps that include activities in the form of questions to guide the user through the information seeking process (Table 5).

Information Literacy Programme for Upper Elementary Children
In a Master's Degree research conducted by Van der Walt in 2005 he compiled a 10 step model for 12 year old learners in South Africa. The 10 steps build on each other, leading the learner to use information effectively in school work and to use the resources in the public library effectively.

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Table 6

Stages	Steps
1. Defining the problem	• Read the information problem • Analyse the information problem
2. Information source identification	• Identify possible sources • Identify the place where sources are located
3. Information resources retrieval	• Use the information retrieval system
4. Retrieve the information from the Source	• Retrieve the information from the source
5. Analyse the retrieved information	• Read and compare the different information retrieved • Extract and record information applicable
6. Synthesize	• Evaluate the retrieved information
7. Organise the information	• Create a new information product
8. Present the information	• Present the product according to the prescribed format
9. Evaluate of the final product	• Evaluate steps conducted
10. Acknowledge the sources used	• Apply correct bibliographical methods

3.2.3 CITY OF CAPE TOWN MODEL

The City of Cape Town Model was collated and developed from the models in 6.2. Each model consists of steps or levels that pave the way to using information effectively. Each model was studied, evaluated and compared with the others to compile the City of Cape Town model consisting of 8 steps. The 8 stages in have been used as the framework to design the Information Literacy Programme. Each stage has been compiled with an outcome, output and activity.

3.3 WHO IS THE TARGET GROUP?

The third question the working group had to answer was: who will be the best target group to be the recipients of the Information Literacy Programme?

The working group identified the Grade 6 child and the reference librarians as the target group. The characteristics of the child had to be investigated in order to establish the specific dynamics of the user group to establish the concepts for the design of the Information Literacy Programme.

3.3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GRADE 6 CHILD

The ability to understand and apply information literacy skills requires specific skills and abilities. It is important to know the characteristics (profile) of the primary school child in order to expose the correct age group to the Information Literacy Programme. In the research dissertation conducted by van der Walt (2005) - the ideal age is ten to twelve. This is confirmed by Norton (1995:17) who describes Upper Elementary Children as children between the ages of ten and twelve. They have the ability to apply logical rules, reasoning and formal operations to abstract problems. Based on the above description, one can conclude that primary school children have certain unique characteristics that make them amenable to learning the information literacy activities.

3.3.2 REFERENCE LIBRARIANS

All reference librarians need to be trained in order to assist and present the Information Literacy Programme. The training will provide the opportunity to equip all front line staff with the IL skills which will enhance the staff's ability to deal with day-to-day information needs on all levels for all types of users. The staff will be trained by a group of staff who will receive train-the-trainer training.

3.4 WHAT IS THE DESIGN FRAMEWORK FOR THE INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAMME?

The fourth question the working group had to answer was what the designing framework is in order to design the Information Literacy Programme.

Designing an instruction programme to teach a specific user group a specific set of skills, requires a sound design framework. In the case of the research project the aim is to design an Information Literacy Programme that will be used to teach Grade 6 children how to use information effectively.

The working group studied the ADDIE design model as the ideal method to design an instruction programme of this nature. The ADDIE model is widely used to design training programmes according to Kruse (2002). ADDIE is an acronym for Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate (Molenda, 2003).

The building blocks in the design of the INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAMME were:

- 8 – information literacy skills – City of Cape Town Model
- Characteristics of the ten to twelve year old child
- Workbook - Comic

4. OUTCOME OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS / INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAMME

The information literacy programme was designed in the format of a comic for the grade 6 children. the comic is the interactive version of a workbook and is described by henning (1997:163) as a type of instruction manual and is effective in teaching information literacy skills.

The unique characteristics of the child were taken into account and it was clear that the Grade 6 child's interest and attention span are captured when the working book is fun, colourful, interactive, relevant to current reading and of visual interest. From the research conducted on the child and especially the Grade 6 child, it was discovered that the use of comics is an ideal format to capture the attention of the child in learning without the formal learning concepts. The latter ensures that the Grade 6 child will experience the Information Literacy Programme as a fun game and not as a lesson or schooling.

4.1 The Comic

The story line of the comic ***The Curse of the Ravenous Brain Eating Zombie Librarian*** was written by one of the members in the working group Rudi Wicomb. The crux of the story line is that the children is are captured in the library by the Zombi Librarian and in order to outrun the Zombi Librarian the children with the help of the Reference Librarian needs need to unlock the 8 information literacy clues (8 steps) to overpower the Zombi Librarian.

The comic is developed as a game with challenges, rewards with 8 levels and is based on the typical electronic games children in this age group enjoy.
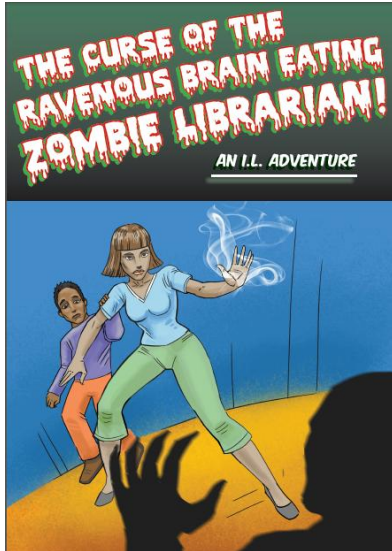
ONE DAY, AS MRS WILKES GRADE 6 CLASS ENTERED THE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR A TALK ON THEIR FAVOURITE BOOKS, THE LIGHTS FLICKERED AND WENT OUT.

SUDDENLY THE ONCE FRIENDLY AND HAPPY LIBRARY BECAME A DARK AND MALEVOLENT PLACE AS SHRIEKS PIERCED THE AIR AND THE STENCH OF ROTTING BOOKS FILLED THE ROOM.

THROUGH THE SUDDEN FOG, A FIGURE LURCHED TOWARDS THE FRIGHTENED CHILDREN. IT WALKED IN COMPLETE SILENCE WITH STEADY AND RESOLUTE STEPS TOWARDS THE STUNNED KIDS. MRS WILKES SAW THE CREATURE AND SCREAMED.

WITH HIDEOUS EYES AND TORN, STRETCHED SKIN OVER AN OPEN WOUND, THE ZOMBIE LURCHED TOWARDS THE KIDS READY TO TEAR THEM LIMB FROM LIMB.

'THE CURSE OF THE ZOMBIE LIBRARIAN' THEY CALLED IT. WHEN A LIBRARIAN STOPS READING, A MALEVOLENT CURSE CREATED IN THE TIME OF THE GREAT LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA IS ACTIVATED, CURSING THAT LIBRARIAN WITH UNDEATH AND AN UNNATURAL CRAVING FOR BRAINS.

BUT THE LIBRARIAN ELDERS IN THEIR INFINITE WISDOM CREATED THE KEYS - MAGIC SYMBOLS OF POWER THAT COME INTO EXISTENCE WHENEVER A CURSED ZOMBIE LIBRARIAN WALKS. THE ELDERS WERE CLEVER, THEY KNEW IT WOULD TAKE TREMENDOUS POWER TO STOP A NEWLY RISEN ZOMBIE LIBRARIAN AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS POWER. IT WOULD TAKE THE COMBINED POWER OF THE KEYS, CHILDREN AND A GOOD LIBRARIAN TO REMOVE THE CURSE.

SO THEY MADE IT THAT THE KEYS COULD ONLY BE WON THROUGH FIERCE CHALLENGES THAT WOULD UNLOCK THE SECRET OF HPA.

WITH ALL THE KEYS, CHILDREN AND GOOD LIBRARIANS COULD STOP THE CURSE AND MAYBE SAVE THE ZOMBIE LIBRARIAN.
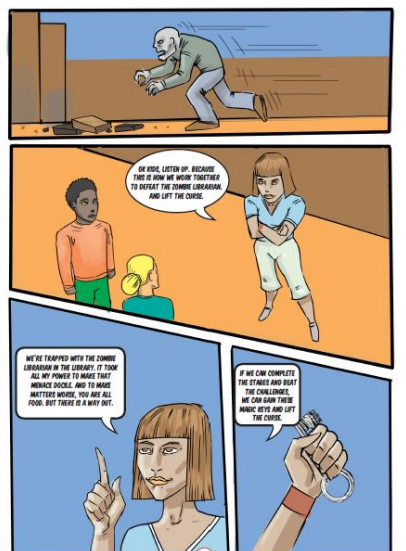
4.2 The Manual to the Comic

The manual provides the reference librarian with the guidelines in presenting the Information Literacy Programme. The manual provides the background to the programme with clear guidelines on information literacy. The manual also explain the game, story line, equipment needed and the creating of the environment for the children.

The comic and manual is explained to the reference librarians by means of a workshop that consists of a 2 day training session. The 2 day training session includes the orientation of information literacy and the actual playing of the game (comic) in order for the reference librarian to present the Information Literacy Programme in their respective public libraries.

5. THE PILOT PROJECT

The Information Literacy Programme was piloted in 5 public libraries located in the City of Cape Town. The 5 schools that participated with the 5 public libraries were selected from low performing schools to well established and high performing schools. Each pilot group provided feedback and recommendations at a 2 day workshop where the Information Literacy Programme was finalised and completed.

6. WAY FORWARD

The way forward for the city of cape town is to train all 600 reference librarians the concept of information literacy and how to prepare and present the information literacy programme. The department library and information services aims to roll out the information literacy programme in 2016 in each of the 104 public libraries.

7. CONCLUSION

The new approach in reference and information services in the city of cape town, to coach information literacy skills to children, has taken the field of reference librarianship to a new level. The role of the reference librarian is now the one of an information literacy teacher who needs to ensure that users can find, access and reflect on using information successfully.

The development of the information literacy programme by means of a comic is a first in south africa and is an example of how reference librarians can adapt to changing circumstances to provide a more interactive and guiding role in reference services.

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