PEDAGOGY OF INFORMATION LITERACY IN A LIBRARY STUDIES BA PROGRAMME

© Judit ZSÁK
(University of Pécs)

zsak@feek.pte.hu

In many Western countries information literacy, the ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use the needed information is becoming a more and more important part of the public education, and it has been already a part of university-level education. As regards their applications in the Hungarian educational practice, the teaching of and the training in the pedagogy of information literacy have been newly integrated into the curriculum of information professionals, namely librarians. In 2007 the students majoring in librarian studies in Pécs were the first who have had the possibility of this specialization. This can be regarded as a new result in the field of Hungarian higher education, even if there already have been gained good results in the field of critical thinking trainings of the different teacher training programmes (see the handbooks of Ildikó Bárdossy et al.), which unveiled similar problems and tried to find new methods as it is done in the librarian education of the University of Pécs. The main difference is that the base of Bárdossy's and her colleagues' work was an RWCT research and after that a critical thinking development course was taken, meanwhile the librarians' specialization we offer is based on a long-term and complex curriculum with many particular subjects. The present paper will focus on the first experiences, challenges and dilemmas of the Pécs programme, and discuss the adaptability of American Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.

Keywords: information literacy, pedagogy of information literacy, library studies

Information literacy is undoubtedly one of the basic competences of people living in the contemporary environment of fast technological changes and information society. Due to overproduction of the information and the great exertion of this rich and complex information environment requires, people are facing many kinds of information resources, quite often even in unfiltered formats. This phenomenon raises questions about the validity of the demanded information, and implicates a strong need for having efficient searching and evaluating strategies in almost every place wherever information is available (libraries, Internet, media, community resources). From this viewpoint information literacy is an extremely important competence not only during one's elementary, secondary and academic studies, but also in one's professional activities and personal life. According to this –with László Z. Karvalics' (2003) words – „The importance of the

mass acquisition of information literacy is a similarly basic phenomenon today as alphabetization was at the beginning of the industrial society."

The term of information literacy itself is an internationally and widely used term according to its Anglo-American definition. The association of American public, college and research libraries defined and characterised the information literate person as follows (ALA, 1989):

Information literate is the person

1. who realized the special need of relevant information solving new problems
2. who is able to choose relevant resources and has efficient searching strategies, and with the help these strategies is able to access the needed information effectively and efficiently
3. who is experienced to use diverse resources as traditional and electronical documents or special online databases
4. who has critical thinking for selection, evaluation and interpretation of the founded information
5. who can incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base , and creatively combines the relevant information paying attention also for the ethical and legal use of information (citations, authors rights).

Nowadays the training for information literacy is becoming a central question and a basic requirement of the public education, furthermore it also has its standards in the university-level education. From the 80's on there are more and more pedagogical initiatives, national models and standards of the development of subject-specialized and general thinking skills. The competences of information literacy and critical thinking are integral parts of these thinking skills and are indispensable for a successful and productive life.

Information literacy surveys, guidelines and trainings initiated by American library-, pedagogy- and andragogy experts are dominating from the very beginnings uptill now, but it is questionable whether the pedagogical principles based on American conditions are adaptable in Europe or not. It's worth mentioning the positive example of the American RWCT (reading and writing for critical thinking) project imported from the US to 20 Eastern and Central European countries. In the 90's Hungarian pedagogy successfully adapted the RWCT method integrating it even into the teacher's training programmes. The RWCT method unambiguously enriched the continental pedagogy with its competency- and student-centred, cooperative pedagogical strategies for interactive and reflective learning. The two volumes of pedagogical handbook and the collections of exercises published by Ildikó Bárdossy's research group in Pécs (since 1998) represent one of the Hungarian „best practices" in this field (Bárdossy et al., 2002, 2007). The other representative Hungarian initiative is Attila Nagy's pilot project (1997-2000) in which information literacy education was introduced as a cross-curricular goal for learners of age 6-18 (Nagy, 2001). The compulsory library literacy education required by the National basic curriculum should be regarded as the third frame of Hungarian practice in pedagogy of information literacy , but unfortunately this subject is effaced, undervalued or simply skipped in schools. It is symptomatic that the major part of the Hungarian pedagogues does not consider school librarians as equal as colleagues in pedagogical work.

The examples mentioned before are apparently good signs of the methodological foundation of information literacy pedagogy in Hungarian public education however it is not an integrated part of the higher education

in Hungary. Though there are surveys (e.g. Boyer Survey, 2001) and models also for information literacy competency standards for higher education (e.g. ALA ACRL, 2000), their application has had no tradition in Hungary yet.

In my opinion, everyone who teaches in undergraduate academic programmes experienced that the quality of the students' information literacy, their reading and writing skills are declining – a huge part of the students has very poor information literacy, their reading and writing skills do not correlate with the knowledge demanded for upper level studies, and they usually don't know and don't use diverse scientific databases and scientifically relevant resources. I suppose that many teachers themselves have exactly the same problem; and however we have no survey data about Hungarian teachers' information literacy competencies I believe, for this very reason they are not able to teach information literacy.

It is very well known from the PISA surveys that the information literacy problems are rooted in secondary schools, and from a certain viewpoint even in elementary schools. Students from those countries ,which has already had introduced different problem solving-, exploratory- and competency-based education methods instead of the academic knowledge mediation, achived good results. This phenomenon, among others, changed the traditional approach of relevant knowledge and literacy, and started to revaluate the function of schools. The paradigmatic change in the contemporary pedagogy means that schools have to teach how to adapt the acquired knowledge relying on the competencies related to information literacy e.g. library literacy, digital literacy, Internet literacy, media literacy, communication competences, reading and writing competencies, to mention just the most important ones in order to prepare the students for a lifelong learning how to adapt the rapid economical and social changes.

From the foregoing it's clear that information literacy is an integral part of the knowledge and learning process offered in the public education, and there's a special need for its integration in all of the undergraduate curricula, especially in the curriculum of information professionals. The development of library studies is one of the best examples of this need.

In 2007 the librarian students in Pécs were the first who have had the possibility for information literacy specialization. This can be taken as a new result in the field of the Hungarian higher education in as so far it has been the first initiative of independent information literacy studies based on a long-term and complex curriculum.

The overall objective of the information and library studies BA programme in Pécs is the training of library professionals with up-to-date knowledge in the field of library and information sciences. These librarians as information experts after successfully finishing her/his studies are able to work for different types of libraries, information institutes and companies. The mission of the Institute of Library Sciences is to educate professionals, who can manage the collection, cataloguing, storage and dissemination of different information resources; and organize the library and reference work. They should be prepared to operate information services and apply computerized information systems.

The core curriculum gives the basis of the information and library studies BA programme, and there are two special programmes/ways of specialization built upon it.

Special elective programs:

1. *Programme of Media, Press and Publication.* The students accomplishing this special programme will be able to work in the field of journalism, media and publication. The programme is focusing on practice

and helps the students to become familiar with the work of printed, audio-visual, electronic and digital media, the dimensions and conflicts of the publicity, the situation of media policy, and furthermore they are also given an insight into the newest market mechanisms of book publishing.

2. *Pedagogy of Information Literacy*. The students accomplishing this special programme will have a high level theoretical and practical knowledge of how to create, locate and use information. Based on this knowledge they will be able to teach these subjects in institutions of public- and higher education, and to manage modern school libraries. The programme prepares them also for master and doctoral education.

The attainable qualification is Bachelor of Library and Information Science (with the indication of the special specialization). The qualified person can apply for a Master programme. The whole BA programme lasts 6 semesters and the field of specialization must be elected in the second semester. In the present paper I would like to focus on the first experiences, challenges and dilemmas of the Pécs information literacy specialization.

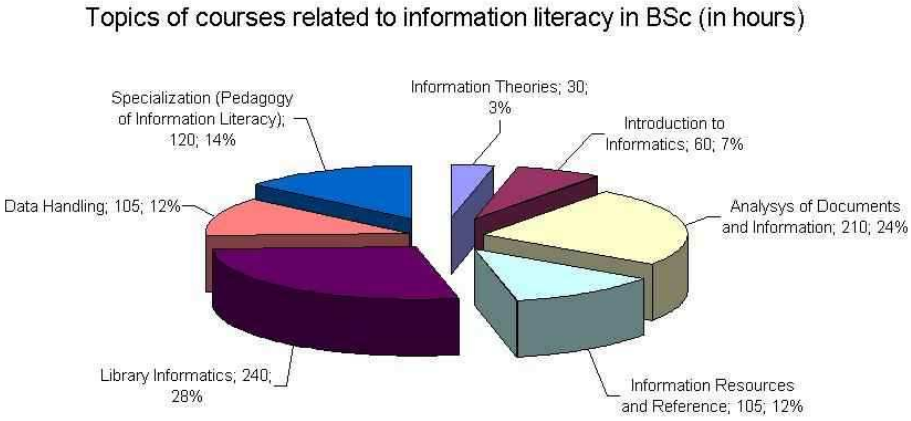
The starting point of the specialization was the idea that the acquisition of information literacy demands special professionals with high-level information literacy who upon finishing the programme will be able to teach this kind of competencies in public and higher education.

The students electing this specialization start it in the third semester and obtain 42 credits from the following courses:

- Contents of information literacy
- Critical thinking and evaluation of information systems
- Press and media studies
- Information retrieval
- Economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information
- Didactics
- Project works in public education and school libraries
- School library trainings

Competencies attained during these two or more semesters long courses mostly are important parts of the information and library studies BA programme according to the new certification model of library- and information sciences in Western countries. The most important aim of the specialization is to offer an in-depth and specialized information literacy for librarian students and to establish the pedagogical methods to be applyed when teaching information literacy.

Figure 1. University of Pécs, Institute of Library and Information Science, A. M. Sipos, 2008



In the future students will have the possibility to continue their information literacy studies also on MA level at the specialization of disciplinary , research & development information manager. In my opinion it is worth thinking about other possibilities as well, for example about the possible connections between the pedagogy of information literacy, teacher training and andragogy, and to open the specialization also for other students, not just for librarians.

The European Council of Information Associations published (1999, 2004) the common guide of LIS Euroguide which established the competency standards for the European system of certification for information-documentation professionals (library science, documentation, archival science, knowledge management). The LIS Euroguide differentiates the groups of fields which influence the key competencies of information-documentation professionals: the literacy of information retrieval, the analysis and evaluation are at the highest level in the hierarchy before information technology, communication and management competencies. It is crucial to integrate all of these competencies into the contemporary library studies.

As I have already mentioned before, the second challenge for library studies programmes derives from the general problem that students entering the universities have an extremely poor information literacy and similarly poor thinking-, reading- and writing skills. In these conditions it is a very hard work to teach them diverse disciplines and research-based learning since they are lacking even basic skills. I suppose that every university teacher faces this problem not only us, teachers of the Pedagogy of information literacy specialization in Pécs.

The traditional academic knowledge-centred and theory-oriented university studies can also scale up students' lacking competencies. The major part of the university subjects do not involve undergraduates in the practical research process and they do not apply student-centred education focusing on research-based learning. That's why students have poor skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis. In my opinion, this problem raises questions according to the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* of ALA ACRL (2000) which declared that developing lifelong learners is central to the mission of higher education institutions. By ensuring that individuals have the intellectual abilities of reasoning and

critical thinking, and by helping them construct a framework for learning how to learn, colleges and universities provide the foundation for continued growth throughout their careers, as well as in their roles as informed citizens and members of communities. Information literacy is a key component of, and contributor to, lifelong learning. Information literacy competency extends learning beyond formal classroom settings and provides practice with self-directed investigations as individuals move into internships, first professional positions, and increasing responsibilities in all arenas of life. Because information literacy augments students' competency with evaluating, managing, and using information."

The tipical problems of the students at the specialization of the Pedagogy of information literacy are rooted in the aforementioned educational context. The most frequent problems of the students are the followings:

1. The information literacy of the major part of the students is beneath the average. They don't use special databases and search engines just the Google as the world's biggest shopping mall for finding information on the Web. If student have to gather information their first and mostly the only trial is the so called „googling" which is a general problem of the globalizing information societies' citizens (Zsák-Béres, 2007). Average users suppose that „everything is on the Internet" and they treat all information found on the Internet as relevant information. Sad to say, googling has become the best and most trusted searching way for many people. Students have the same problems when they use the first unfiltered 10-20 Google hits working on their presentations, home works or exams without selecting and evaluating the information found. Undoubtedly it is the simpler and faster way of searching information to type a key word or phrase into Google. Case closed. Because Google said so.

2. Librarian students learn very much about WWW possibilities of special databases and catalogues during their courses but they don't have efficient searching strategies: their main problem is the efficient finding of the needed information. They are not familiar with techniques for

- selecting effective approaches for accessing the information needed from the investigative method or information retrieval system
- differentiate search tools according to what certain information requires (multiple and refined search)
- access more precise information using varieties of free word searching (abbreviation with substitute characters, combination and synonyms of key words, logical operators, tesaurus etc.)
- narrowing down search results (filter by domain, occurence, date, language, file format etc.)

These lacking skills can be considered as general symptoms because a survey made among the students of the Faculty of Technical Engineering produced very similar findings (Krauszné, 2006).

1. Students usually can't evaluate information without professional knowledge. For example when they find many materials of a certain academic topic they can't choose the relevant ones from them because they don't use helping techniques e.g journal repertories, abstracts of articles, book reviews.

2. Students many times can't evaluate and interpret information because their reading comprehension is poor (Reisz, 2008). According to the experiences of my Hungarian language literacy course many students can't summarize the main ideas to be extracted from the information gathered, they don't understand the essence of scientifical articles and the language of

old or contemporary literary texts, and can't interpret the meaning of metaphorical or ironic texts.

3. Students don't have routine in self-directed learning. They are mostly socialized in a public education lacking competency-based and project methods which could help them in problem solving and critical thinking. In this meaning many students have just low-level thinking skills and they do not recognize that existing information can be combined with original thought, experimentation and analysis to produce new information. They can't pose scientifically relevant questions and they are not able to interpret and present their findings.

The teaching of information searching strategies would not be started at the university but it would be an important task for school library exercises and teachers of public education. Teachers have a decisive role in developing students' information literacy also at the universities. Information literacy training teach students to distinguish the relevant information. Once students know the basics of Google search, they might want to try advanced search strategies seeking information on WWW or with other search engines (vizsla24, altavizsla, heuréka, hudir, yahoo etc.) which offer numerous options for making searches more precise and getting more useful results.

For improving students search skills theirindependent exploration is so important than teachers' guidance. On one hand students have to be introduced to the practical knowledge of their future professions through interactive seminars and works of projects, surveys, presentations, workshops. To improve students'writing abilities and oral communication skills is also a very high priority. With the help of these kind of exercises students would become well-trained in the research techniques (measurement, evaluation, questionnaire). On the other hand students have to be led along their searching and researching process with direct professional instructions of their teachers and tutors. It is sad to say that many times this basic conditions are not given even in doctoral schools.
Summarizing I would say that the pedagogy of information literacy is one of the main success criteria of the mass acquisition of information literacy. This process needs the parallel improvement of students' and teachers' information literacy as in the public education as in the higher education.

References

BÁRDOSSY, Ildikó et al. (2002, 2007): A kritikai gondolkodás fejlesztése – az interaktív és reflektív tanulás lehetőségei I-II [Development of critical thinking – possibilities of interactive and reflective learning] Pécs;Budapest: University of Pécs
Boyer Survey. Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University. Reinventing Undergraduate Education.New York: Boyer Commission, 2001. http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf ; Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Chicago: ALA ACRL, 2000, http://ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracy competency.cfm [03-09-2007]
Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Chicago: ALA ACRL, 2000, http://ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracy competency.cfm [03-09-2007]
KARVALICS, Z., László (2003): Információ, társadalom, történelem. Válogatott írások. Typotex, Budapest. http://www.neumann-haz.hu/muvek/typotex/z_karvalics/z_karvalics.pdf [25-06-2008]
KRAUSZNÉ PRINCZ, Mária (2006): Információkeresés a weben és tanítása. Ph. D. Thesis. University of Debrecen, Debrecen.

http://dspace.lib.unideb.hu:8080/dspace/bitstream/2437/5447/5/Tezisek%2BPrincz M.pdf [30-06-2008]
LIS Euroguide, http://www.certidoc.net/en/all.php [14-05-2008]
NAGY, Attila (2001): Olvasásfejlesztés, könyvtárhasználat - kritikus gondolkodás Széchényi National Library; Osiris, Budapest.
Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final report.Washington: ALA, 1989, http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/ presidential.cfm [06-09-2007]
REISZ, Terézia (2008): The Socio-cultural background of the reading comprehension of university students. In. *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education*, Vol. 3 No 1, p. 9-22.
ZSÁK, Judit & BÉRES, Csaba Zoltán (2007): Information gathering and researching practices in the Nazareth College population. Differences & similarities between a US college and a Hungarian university. ALI Summer University, Nazareth College, Rochester. Manuscript, 5 p.