

Co-Designing a Programme Level Approach to Information and Digital Literacy: Initial Reflections from Our Participatory Action Research Project

Vicky Grant

University of Sheffield, UK, v.grant@sheffield.ac.uk

Catherine A. Bazela

University of Sheffield, UK, c.bazela@sheffield.ac.uk

Alison V. Little

University of Sheffield, UK, a.little@sheffield.ac.uk

Vicky Grant, Catherine A. Bazela, and Alison V. Little, "Co-Designing a Programme Level Approach to Information and Digital Literacy: Initial Reflections from Our Participatory Action Research Project." *Proceedings of the IATUL Conferences*. Paper 7.
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2019/bp/7>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

CO-DESIGNING A PROGRAMME LEVEL APPROACH TO INFORMATION AND DIGITAL LITERACY: INITIAL REFLECTIONS FROM OUR PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Grant, Vicky

University of Sheffield, UK
v.grant@sheffield.ac.uk

Bazela, Catherine A

University of Sheffield, UK
c.bazela@sheffield.ac.uk

Little, Alison V

University of Sheffield, UK
a.little@sheffield.ac.uk

Abstract

Information and digital literacy (IDL) is a core graduate attribute at the University of Sheffield and is defined as follows: "Information and digital literacy (IDL) enables engaged learning. It blends information literacies with digital capabilities transcending technological skills and tools to identify with learning, living and working in a fluid digital world. IDL enables learners to discover and absorb information in a critically engaged manner, innovate in active pursuits of creative scholarship, demonstrate integrity by acknowledging the work of others and make a contribution for others to share" [University of Sheffield Library, 2019].

This paper will present initial reflections from an innovative participatory action research project established at the University, to bring a team of student associates together with a team of faculty liaison librarians to co-build and co-embed a programme level approach (PLA) to IDL. PLA takes a holistic rather than modular approach to learning and teaching, allowing students to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will make them confident and assured graduates. The University has set an ambitious five-year strategic vision to ensure every course has a programme level approach by the year 2021 [University of Sheffield, 2016].

US based librarians Susan Gardner Archambault & Jennifer Masunaga [2015] maintain that libraries can contribute to such ambitious programme level approaches by taking the initiative and by working with academic and administrative staff to map information (and digital) literacy into the curriculum. Our work aims to build on this by also including the student voice in our mapping work, taking a participatory action research approach [Heron & Reason, 2008] to engage, include and embrace the student experience. The success and impact of this work will be assessed through staff and student reflections and we will draw on these to present success to date, at the IATUL 2019 annual conference.

Keywords

Information and Digital Literacy. University Libraries. Programme Level Approach. Participatory Action Research.

Introduction

Building on the work presented at IATUL 2017 [Grant, Little, & Horn, 2017] the University of Sheffield Library continues to make successful progress in integrating information and digital literacy (IDL) into the mainstream of student skills development. This paper will present reflections on a current project, which is utilising a participatory action research approach to work alongside students and academic colleagues to embed IDL into the curriculum as part of the University's strategic vision to take a holistic approach to learning and teaching through a programme level, rather than modular approach.

Background

What is information and digital literacy (IDL)?

Information and digital literacy is a core graduate attribute at the University of Sheffield and is defined as follows:

“Information and digital literacy (IDL) enables engaged learning. It blends information literacies with digital capabilities transcending technological skills and tools to identify with learning, living and working in a fluid digital world. IDL enables learners to discover and absorb information in a critically engaged manner, innovate in active pursuits of creative scholarship, demonstrate integrity by acknowledging the work of others and make a contribution for others to share.”

[University of Sheffield Library, 2019]

The six broad literacies presented in the model (Discovering, Understanding, Questioning, Referencing, Creating, and Communicating) interconnect to develop information and digital literacy to equip students with the life skills which are transferrable to the demands of an increasingly complex digital world. Our IDL skills offer is developed in the University by the Library Learning Services Unit (LLSU), with the Faculty Engagement Team (FET) taking responsibility for discipline-specific messages and embedding IDL in the curriculum. The sessions delivered by FET take place at the beginning of the year as an introduction, and as part of scheduled teaching within programmes. This is complemented by online tutorials and workshops, including a highly successful and popular 'Digital Skills for Dissertations' masterclass.

Programme level approach

Many UK higher education (HE) institutions are undertaking transformation of their learning and teaching activities to revise how programmes and assessments run together in order to create a programme that places emphasis on student learning outcomes [Jessop & Tomas, 2017]. This change has, in part, been driven by a requirement to respond to the teaching excellence framework (TEF) which, combined with the introduction of higher tuition fees, has led to a culture of audit within the sector, placing emphasis on giving the consumer 'value for money' [Fung, 2017]. Metrics from the National Student Survey, data collected by Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Destination for Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE) [Office for Students, 2019] feed into the TEF score and determine the outcome of a Gold, Silver or Bronze award for the HE provider.

These drivers have undoubtedly given momentum to changes in curriculum design in UK higher education, but there is evidence that institutions were already engaging in conversations about new approaches to learning and teaching as modularised programmes were starting to feel fragmented and not well placed to develop student learning over time. Indeed, it is argued that a modularised approach can lead to repetition of information and a feeling of isolation from the overall programme of study [Hughes 2013; Jessop & Tomas, 2017]. Many UK universities have therefore started to take a more holistic approach to curriculum design, setting ambitious plans through strategic learning and teaching initiatives to create greater cohesion in the programme and a more holistic approach to the student journey. The University of Bath [2019] has undertaken a 'Curriculum Transformation' which is working to redesign all undergraduate and postgraduate courses to allow for a more efficient learning and teaching process by reducing workloads on both staff and students. Brunel University [n.d.] is undertaking an 'Integrated

Programme Assessment' which looks to 'reduce assessment load for staff and students' by separating assessment from study and using more formative assessment rather than summative assessment to ensure knowledge and understanding of the materials is occurring throughout the programme. The University of York [c.2018] is implementing 'The York Pedagogy', which once more looks at the design of learning and teaching in terms of programme design and assessment.

The University of Sheffield's programme level approach (PLA) to learning and teaching

Alongside these similar initiatives elsewhere in the UK, the University of Sheffield is undertaking strategic change to move to a programme level approach to learning and teaching by changing "the way the University designs, develops, delivers and reflects upon its academic offer" [University of Sheffield, 2019d]. Drawing on the work of Fung's Connected Curriculum Framework [2017], whereby "each programme of study needs to be designed in such a way that students experience a connected sequence of learning activities that empower them, step by step, to apply the skills and dispositions needed to undertake investigations" [p.6]. The PLA at the University of Sheffield takes a holistic rather than a modular approach to learning and teaching, allowing students to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will make them confident and assured graduates. The University has set an ambitious five-year strategic vision to ensure every course has a programme level approach by the year 2021 [University of Sheffield, 2016]. Modularisation might still occur on the programme, but the convenors will need to ensure that the overall programme is coherent for the student. [University of Sheffield, 2019a]

The PLA at the University of Sheffield consists of five pledges:

- Take a team approach
- Articulate our programmes
- Engage the Student Voice
- Provide quality assessment and feedback
- Prepare our students

[University of Sheffield, 2019d]

These pledges aim to allow those studying to see a clear path through their qualification at all levels of study and provide clear learning outcomes from the outset. Students were asked to provide feedback based on their experiences and will be positioned to make recommendations and influence the programme. Furthermore, the University maintains that students will be able to identify how their learning has instilled essential transferrable skills for employment, and life after university [University of Sheffield, 2019d]. The University has created guidance for departments to support the process of undertaking a PLA review within their department, which acts as a tool kit for communicating information or starting conversation regarding the change [University of Sheffield 2019c]. Case studies have been produced from those departments who have undertaken PLA within their department as a way to share practice and communicate the ways in which PLA can be implemented [University of Sheffield, 2019a]. With the strategic vision for every course to have a programme level approach by 2021, most if not all departments are now actively engaged in change and it is timely for the University Library to be proactive in incorporating our content and skills offer as part of the change.

Participatory action research

According to Healy, Flint & Harrington [2014, p.8] the Higher Education Academy has recognised the need for student engagement within curriculum design and learning and teaching activities as it "is positively linked with learning gain and achievement" leading to "the possibility for a genuinely transformative learning experience for all involved". To ensure that the student voice was also central to the work of the University Library we decided to adopt a participatory action research approach as our research methodology. Participatory action research aims to generate change, by improving a given situation by working to co-design and co-implement changes alongside those who will benefit. In the case of our project this is the students. Participatory action research doesn't aim to do things to people, but rather to work collaboratively to jointly decide how to make a difference. Action research moves through cycles of planning, acting and reflecting, it is iterative and intuitive and is largely based on qualitative

approaches, assessed through researcher and participant reflections [Bradbury, 2015]. Initial reflections from the participatory action research project established by the University of Sheffield Library, to bring a team of student associates together with a team of faculty liaison librarians, to co-build and co-embed a programme level approach to information and digital literacy will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

Mapping information and digital literacy at the University of Sheffield through a participatory action research approach

Gardener, Archambault and Masunaga [2015] maintain that libraries can contribute to ambitious programme level approaches to learning and teaching, by taking the initiative and by working with academic and administrative staff to map information (and digital) literacy into the curriculum. Our work aims to build on this by also including the student voice in our mapping work, taking a participatory action research approach to engage, include and embrace the student experience. One of the main aims of PLA is to integrate graduate attributes into academic programmes, to prepare students for their future lives and careers by developing transferable skills [University of Sheffield, 2019a]. One of our graduate attributes is for students to be “equipped with appropriate information and digital literacy skills” as part of their programme [University of Sheffield, 2019b]. The University Library has worked with partners from the University to create an information and digital literacy model and framework, to support and articulate this strand of the Sheffield Graduate Attributes. As programmes are evaluated and redesigned as part of the PLA the University Library has taken the opportunity to be proactive and to map the IDL offer into the curriculum as part of the University-wide change process.

In November 2018 the LLSU and the FET undertook a teachmeet to investigate ways in which the library could enable our colleagues in academic departments to integrate IDL into their teaching, assessment and feedback. This laid the foundation for the participatory action research project whereby each Liaison Librarian, along with a Library Student Associate and a Project Officer, would look to map and embed IDL into the curriculum.

In January 2019 recruitment for Library Student Associates (LSA) took place. Liaison Librarians made contact with Departmental Library Coordinators and/or Programme Level Approach leads, to discuss whether the project would be feasible with their current PLA work. The response from this initial contact was positive, with departments circulating the recruitment adverts and offering to meet with Liaison Librarians and the LSAs to discuss progress and outcomes. This allowed for successful recruitment for the mapping of IDL into an academic programme from each Faculty, namely:

- BSc Computer Science
- BMedSci Health and Human Sciences
- BA International Relations and Politics
- BA Korean Studies with Japanese
- BA Modern Languages and Culture
- BSc Physics and Astronomy

Work on the projects began in February 2019, and we invited students and colleagues to begin work initially on an active learning project. This brought staff and students together to share knowledge on IDL. Workshops were organised for all participants to learn more about reflective writing, and action research methodology. During this time projects teams looked at mapping IDL into the curriculum. Buchanan, Kavanagh Webb, Harris Houk, and Tinglestead [2015] note that curriculum mapping does not normally take place in the library, as “they [librarians] do not have ownership of the curriculum as academic programmes do” [p.96], and that if the library is to map they will need to look at the existing curriculum.

Carrying out an analysis of the curriculum with regards to IDL support allows Liaison Librarians to discover what is being taught, and what support can be offered to departments [VanScoy & Oakleaf, 2008]. In order to carry out the mapping, LSAs were provided with information on the current IDL offer which includes online tutorials, webinars, workshops and masterclasses They also had the opportunity to make suggestions on how the offer might be developed and where it

would most effectively be situated in the curriculum. This has been beneficial to academic departments as it has allowed programme leads to articulate to students how each specific part of the programme will develop the graduate attribute of IDL. Undertaking curriculum mapping has allowed the project groups to look for gaps in the current model and laid foundations for what could be offered in the future. Due to the collaborative nature of the research approach, ethical approval was applied for once LSAs were appointed and actively involved in the project. Ethics approval moved the project from action learning to action research. This allowed for secure storage and dissemination of staff and student reflections to take place and will allow for future projects to review what has gone before.

When looking at the PLA with departments as part of the project, it became apparent that departments were at different points on their PLA journey. This led to some team members looking at the current curriculum, whilst others already had PLA plans to work with. The outcomes of the project will be presented as a series of case studies. The aim of these is to inspire other programme leads to work in partnership with students and librarians to build on our findings and to implement IDL into their own programmes, with the ultimate aim of integrating IDL into every programme in the University. The case studies will highlight work carried out over the ten week period of the project, alongside outcomes from meeting with departments and reflections from staff and students involved. These will all form part of a portfolio showcasing the University Library offer in terms of IDL and PLA.

Reflections

Student reflections have indicated that the resources created by the University Library are very useful and of a high quality. However, most students did not know that these resources existed before coming to work on the project or where they would find them. Library learning resources are nested under the IDL webpages of the University Library and it was felt that curriculum mapping had revealed gaps where an IDL intervention could be offered in the academic programme. In some cases a subject specific IDL intervention could be offered - this was particularly noted within science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

It was discovered that some departments are facing challenges with integrating IDL into their curriculum when they offer a wide range of optional modules. It was identified by the LSAs that the second year of their studies would be an ideal place to embed IDL but it became apparent that the programme structure of the second year still retains features of optionality. Consequently, an IDL session from the Librarian would not catch all students. One discussed solution was to introduce academic staff to IDL in their induction sessions, to enable them to embed online IDL tutorials in all optional modules, giving consistency within choice.

Alongside benefits to the PLA work in the University, our LSAs found that working on the project developed their own IDL skills, which they recognised to be beneficial for their own learning, for example:

“I will take forward a lot from this project. In terms of my degree, the work done on IDL resources has expanded my knowledge greatly and will help me in terms of researching for my dissertation.”

The project overall has allowed the LSAs a chance to gain insight and influence into how the University Library liaises with their academic departments, to better contribute IDL to student learning.

Conclusion and anticipation

Initial reflections from our participatory action research projects have allowed us to gain insight into the student opinion on IDL for the six subject areas. Furthermore, the process of working collaboratively has allowed us to make decisions and influence change together. The six pilot departments were all at different stages of implementing PLA to their programmes and yet all afforded the Library with the opportunity to increase the visibility of IDL within the programmes selected and laid the foundations of assistance the Library can provide to departments as they undertake the PLA. As we anticipate next steps for the project we are setting the groundwork for

a series of case studies to showcase the IDL PLA journey undertaken through the project. We will continue to work with the pilot departments. Due to the iterative nature of this work, the Library will continue to utilise the PAR cycle of plan, act and reflect, to work with departments to embed IDL in their programmes. We will also build on the reflections and information gathered to initiate further projects from the University Library and to ensure that every student experiences information and digital literacy teaching as part of their learning journey.

References

Bradbury, H. (2015). Introduction: how to situate and define action research. In H. Bradbury (Ed.) *The SAGE handbook of action research* (3rd ed). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473921290>

Brunel University. (n.d.). About integrated programme assessment. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from: <https://teachinghub.bath.ac.uk/curriculum-transformation/curriculum-transformation-process/curriculum-transformation-phase-1/curriculum-transformation-phase-1-checks-and-sign-offs/>

Buchanan, H., Kavanagh Webb, K., Harris Houk, A., & Tinglestead, C. (2015). Curriculum mapping in academic libraries. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 21(1), 94-111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2014.1001413>

Fung, D. (2017). *A connected curriculum for higher education*. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1qnw8nf>

Gardner Archambault, S. & Masunaga, J. (2015). Curriculum mapping as a strategic planning tool. *Journal of library administration*, 55(6), 503-519, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1054770>

Grant, V., Little, A.V., & Horn, A. (2017). Developing a vision, strategy and offer for Information and Digital Literacy (IDL): A case study of the University of Sheffield, UK. Proceedings of the IATUL Conference: 2017 IATUL Proceedings (paper 6). Retrieved from: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/iatul/2017/infolit/6/>

Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. [HEA] (2014). Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. Available at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher>

Heron, J. & Reason, P. (2008). Extending epistemology within a co-operative inquiry. In Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. *The SAGE handbook of action research* (2nd ed., pp. 366-380). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934>

Hughes, C. (2013). A case study of assessment of graduate learning outcomes at programme, course and task level. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher education*, 38(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2012.658020>

Jessop, T., & Tomas, C. (2017). The implications of programme assessment patterns for student learning. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42(6). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1217501>

Office for Students. (2019). TEF data. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/tef-data/>

University of Bath, Centre for Learning and Teaching. (2019). Curriculum Transformation. Retrieved May 14, 2019 from <https://teachinghub.bath.ac.uk/curriculum-transformation/>

University of Sheffield. (2016). Learning and teaching strategy 2016-2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/staff/learning-teaching/our-approach/strategy2016-21>

University of Sheffield. (2019a). Case studies. Retrieved from:
<https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/pla-at-tuos/resources> [Closed website, accessible only to University of Sheffield Staff]

University of Sheffield. (2019b). The Sheffield Graduate. Retrieved from:
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/sheffieldgraduate/studentattributes>

University of Sheffield. (2019c). Resources. Retrieved from:
<https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/pla-at-tuos/resources> [Closed website, accessible only to University of Sheffield Staff]

University of Sheffield. (2019d). What is PLA? Retrieved from:
<https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/pla-at-tuos/what-is-pla> [Closed website, accessible only to University of Sheffield Staff]

University of Sheffield Library. (2019). Framework for information and digital literacy. Retrieved from: http://www.librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/idl_framework/index.html

University of York. (c.2018). The York pedagogy. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from:
<https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/themes/theyorkpedagogy/>

VanScoy, A., & Oakleaf, M.J. (2008). Evidence vs. anecdote: Using syllabi to plan curriculum integrated information literacy instruction. *College & Research Libraries*, 69(6), 566-575.
Retrieved from
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=llf&AN=502959109&site=ehost-live>