“SAME, SAME, BUT DIFFERENT”: HIGHER EDUCATION TAFE LIBRARIES AND STUDENT INFORMATION LITERACY TRAINING.

ABSTRACT

In 2012, 12 TAFE institutes in Australia were accredited to deliver their own Higher Education (HE) qualifications. In Victoria, five TAFE institutes are part of this mixed sector. Their small but significant number of HE students is expected to grow in line with both Federal and State government agendas of increasing access to higher qualifications. TAFE institutes are traditionally associated with the delivery of lower AQF level courses. With a more competitive educational market and a push from institutes for greater HE accreditation of HE delivery, TAFE institutes, and especially the services that support their strategies, are re-aligning their educational strategy away from a traditional vocational orientation towards an applied HE focus.

Libraries are key stakeholders in teaching and learning. A fundamental service of libraries is the provision of information literacy (IL) training. Within the mixed sector, TAFE libraries are prioritizing their services as institutes move toward the stronger academic learning context and pedagogy of HE. A fundamental question is what differences exist between vocationally based IL, relevant for example, to apprentices and certificate level students, and the emerging TAFE library HE IL training, now predicated on Bachelor and higher level qualifications. This paper will utilize a mixed method research approach to investigate the implications for HE TAFE libraries (mixed-sector) and librarians in transitioning to a new HE skill set and culture. Survey and interviews of HE TAFE liaison librarians will examine the effect of HE delivery on the IL training and practices. The research has implications for the role of librarians in TAFE, including vocational institutes now delivering HE. It raises issues about the nature of library services to different clients and how the principles of IL can be developed for specific student cohorts.

BACKGROUND

The Australian Higher Education system is now comprised of more than universities. The demarcation between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) continues to converge. Government policy reviews have sought to increase educational productivity by raising qualification levels as well as opening up tertiary education to a market of both private and public providers. Technical and Further Education (TAFE), as the government supported sector, is Australia’s largest provider of VET.
Since 2005, a number of TAFE institutions have offered HE qualifications of an applied and practical orientation. Higher Education is both epistemological and pedagogically different from vocational training. It demands cultural and strategic change in vocationally based libraries requiring a greater academic and theoretical understanding of knowledge that is absent from competency based vocational education (Craig & Dow, 2010, p. 853; Moodie, 2009; Wheelahan, 2009).

Within Universities, Information Literacy (IL) is strongly linked to meeting the information and research needs of students and staff. IL is defined by Doyle (1992, p. 92) as the “ability to access, evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources”. Salisbury (2011) describes IL as “a threshold concept that is critical to research and research process”. Nimon (2002) argues that lifelong learning is a central tenet of HE and that strong advocacy for IL is an essential skill for lifelong learning (Bruce, 1995; Bundy, 2004).

Based on the Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework (Bundy, 2004), IL encompasses the ability to learn, locate, sift and sort information into relevancy and importance for the user. Libraries are now more closely aligned to curriculum development and skills based information skills. They accept their responsibility as facilitators in the negotiated learning process of students (Clark, 2005). Within HE teaching and learning strategies, IL assumes the foundation skill of research practice and fundamental skills strongly linked to the development of life-long learning, including critical thinking and problem solving.

There is a plethora of research on IL in library and information science (Bundy, 2004; Fafeita, 2005; Ivey, 2003; Leong, 2007; Nimon, 2001). IL in the context of TAFE institutes remains an under-developed concept with minimal in-depth studies reflective of its relationship to student learning development. Fafeita’s (2006) longitudinal quantitative study of TAFE libraries against the ANZILL framework (2004) is a standalone effort that reinforces a perception of VET students IL training as being different from HE, and both inconsistently understood and applied in TAFE institutes. There is acknowledgment that the tradition of TAFE libraries lies within a vocational orientation towards competency based training, workbook and module assessment, and a practical work-based and self-paced curriculum. While TAFE libraries have developed and implemented IL programmes that differ in nature, content, and consistency within different State based structures and arrangements the individual institutional impetus to position IL centrally within a broad academic framework of study and research generally is situated within a reference to university context, and the academic skilling this implies.
“If given the chance to talk freely, people appear to know a lot about what is going on” (Bertaux, 1981, p. 39).

The primary focus of this research is to explore the impact of Higher Education (HE) on IL training in TAFE. Secondary questions will concern whether IL training differs for VET and HE student cohorts in TAFE institutes now delivering their own HE qualifications, and if so, why? The study also will consider the extent new information technologies e.g. Discovery layers like Primo, or a Learning Management System (LMS) like Moodle, are geared towards supporting IL of HE students. The paper also will investigate how libraries are involved in these new developments. Finally, the study will examine whether IL training in HE TAFE is modelled on university library practices.

Qualitative research seeks contextual understanding of the participants’ world of reality. It implies a way of seeing enquiry as interpretation of collective experience within natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research seeks understanding through valid, rich, deep and thick data, with the researcher as instrument. The research design adopts a qualitative approach because it is guided by a research question that explores the impact of HE on IL training in TAFE through the actions and beliefs of librarians.

Interviewing is a qualitative methodology that stresses the importance of human behaviour through language. It is a basic mode of inquiry that seeks understanding via personal lived experience and the meaning derived from that experience (Seidman, 1998). O’Toole and Beckett (2009) note that interviews only capture words, not gestures and emotional subtexts. This paper focuses on how Liaison Librarians intervene in the development and delivery of IL in TAFE libraries to both VET and HE student cohorts in their institutes. Liaison Librarians were chosen because of their close collaboration and involvement with HE staff and students. This purposeful sampling selection offered a forum for extracting rich data around a topic that is best served from library specialists in the library IL training of their institute.

Semi-structured interviews not only allow specific questions to be addressed, but also permits the interviewee a degree of freedom to elaborate and explore areas of interest to them (Kvale, 1996). Semi-structured interviews of half an hour’s duration were held with Liaison Librarians of the five HE TAFE libraries in Victoria, namely:

- Box Hill Institute
- Chisholm
- Holmesglen
The specific questions asked in the semi-structured interviews were:

- Has IL instruction changed to cater for HE students at the institute?
- Are HE teachers engaged with IL and keen for students to receive instruction?
- Are new technologies in the institute supporting or capable of supporting IL instruction?
- What involvement do librarians have with online learning/ LMS?
- Is IL training in HE TAFE modelled on the university library practices

Each question was formulated on the basis of themes from the literature and personal experience from both researchers.

All participation was voluntary. Information about process and due consent to anonymity and privacy was provided. Interviews were carried out with ten participants. Interviews questions were all framed around the impact of HE on IL training and delivery by librarians in HE TAFE institutes. All comments were recorded via note taking with transcription to computer word file occurring as close as possible after each session to ensure accuracy of data. Note taking as a grounded self-contained approach was used due to difficulties associated with audio file compatibility and availability of the researcher. A balance between narrative flow and direct personal quotations was sought. A narrative context was favoured to produce a reflexive sense of purpose to the questions consistent with a qualitative interpretivist approach. Quotations from participants were used wherever possible to support Boyd’s (2006) theory that specific quotes link analytic concepts to informed action topics and causality.

Nine interviews were conducted. One participant from a non-HE TAFE delivering institute was not included to conform to the research sample. At the conclusion of the interviews, patterns of opinion were grouped and tabled into organized themes “for interpretative reflection” (O’Toole & Beckett, 2009). Coding and grouping of themes was based on the Charmaz (2006) protocols for a flexible, interpretive practical approach to the data collection. The following approach informed the semi-structured collection of interview data:

- What is going on?
- What are people doing?
- What is the person saying?
- What do these actions and statements take for granted?
• How do structure and context serve to support, maintain, impede or change these actions and statements?

As a grounded theory approach, it suggested open coding line by line of text as a protocol. This means a sweep through the text or notes before proceeding to a second stage of deeper focused axial coding. Axial coding refers to the ordering into groups of these codes. It is recognised that this subjective interpretivist approach has the researcher examining and categorizing events, meaning and conditions and is a reflexive activity contingent and dependent of researcher values and beliefs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though a large amount of literature on IL exists, research that deals directly with IL in TAFEs remains limited with the exception of a few notable studies (D. Booker, 1995; Burnheim, 1992; Fafeita, 2005; Ivey, 2003; Leong, 2007). This comparatively sparse volume of research contrasts with studies that promote IL as essential in higher education and learning more generally. Research encompassing theories relating to IL and its application in different contexts is also substantial. What exists though is a disparity between the amount of commentary around IL and its actual practice. This imbalance does not go by unremarked, and is lamented by those who recognize that progress in IL instruction remains restricted. Townsend, Brunetti & Hofer (2011, p. 853) note that:

“Yet while information literacy programs and statements generally espouse goals of critical thinking and lifelong learning, research on the practice of information literacy instruction finds that it is often taught as a kind of enhanced bibliographic instruction. This dissonance between espoused theories and theories-in-use suggests that while many innovative approaches have been theorized, librarians in the trenches sometimes struggle to relate theory to practice”.

While IL is traditionally associated with higher education, its perceived value beyond the academic sphere has grown increasingly, and is considered an important skill in vocational education and training (VET), work and individual development.

For IL in VET, the Mayer Report (1992) was significant because it identified IL as one of seven major competencies required for work or post-compulsory education, specifically the “ability to collect, analyse, and organize information”. Burnheim (1992) undertook a major study in exploring whether these skills were taught and understood across Queensland TAFEs, concluding with a recommendation to the Mayer Committee that a skills curriculum to support these competencies be developed. This
competency as a primary job responsibility was still considered central to IL in Fafeita (2006) survey of TAFE librarians in 2006.

Booker et al. (1996, p. 1) in their *Focus on Learning* report further promoted IL, arguing that TAFE libraries should support national VET training goals, specifically through: “methodologies and programs that ensure students develop lifelong learning skills and competencies for using information effectively”. This potential for IL to contribute to lifelong learning is significant, and is central to many statements and policies, including UNESCO’s Alexandra Proclamation (1997) which states that IL

“empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion in all nations”.

IL’s importance in lifelong learning is now underpinned by the pervasiveness of electronic information and means of access, where more information may be available, but it is likely to be more difficult to understand and evaluate. This led Bruce (2002, p. 1) to conclude that “Information literacy is conceivably the foundation for learning in our contemporary environment of continuous technological change”.

The Council of University Libraries (CAUL) reinforces this:

“Information literacy is required because of proliferating information access and resources. Individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices... Increasingly information comes unfiltered. This raises questions about authenticity, validity, and reliability. Sheer abundance of information and technology will not in itself create more informed citizens without a complementary understanding and capacity to use information effectively” (Harrison, 2001, para. 3).

With IL accorded such gravity and seriousness in the literature it’s natural to assume that IL in TAFEs is ascribed the same worthy consideration and application. While studies generally reveal a progression and persistence with IL instruction in TAFE libraries, it appears to remain primarily a library-driven and focused occupation or even simply ‘enhanced bibliographic instruction’ as described Townsend et. al. (2011), and dogged by issues such as resourcing, and also suffering from various interpretations of IL.

Studies show that IL in TAFE libraries has been directed mainly at instruction in library-specific skills, though there’s some evidence of more advanced IL incorporating databases, web evaluation, referencing and critical analysis (Aust & Burrell, 2010; Fafeita, 2006). The necessity to move beyond library-specific skills and to strengthen IL
skills through training is repeated throughout the literature, and is acknowledge by Streatfield and Markless (2008), who state that IL instruction requires a broader and deeper framework in its formulation and application for broader and more transferable skills to develop in students. Broader and more complex content in IL sessions is important, but it is also considered imperative that a greater integration with curriculum, or embedding of IL units in courses, be achieved (Gunn, Hearne, & Sibthorpe, 2011; Price, Becker, Clark, & Collins, 2011).

Harrison’s report (2001) found that a majority of classes related to library services, while sessions incorporating more generic and advanced skills were progressively being implemented. In response, Harrison (2001) recommend that TAFE libraries adopt the Council of Australian University Libraries (CAUL) IL framework and that a specific TAFE IL curriculum be investigated (2001). Fafeita (2006, p. 143) found that IL remained library focused, but also noted an increase in information skills training from the purely library-based practice, particularly in the use of databases, concluding that “the increasing number and complexity of resources in the information environment, as well as librarians’ efforts in advocating training in information literacy skills to students and TAFE teachers”.

Fafeita’s (2006, p. 151) study also highlights recognition of the problem of aligning the competency-based education with the objectives of IL, describing it “at odds with lifelong learning and information literacy”. It was found that the structure of competency based training allowed little opportunity for real study beyond the discrete units offered in each course, meaning that students have not been taught how to study. With the emergence of HE in TAFEs, there is now the requirement to cater to a more academic mode of learning, with Kloppenborg (2010, p. 199) stating that “one of the critical issues surrounding HE teaching in TAFE is the difference between the traditional VET model; mainly module driven, and HE programs requiring greater rigor, currency, critical thinking skills, and research activity”.

Kloppenborg’s (2010) study is one of the few examples of research on the impact of HE on TAFE IL instruction. Kloppenborg describes the impact of HE on mixed-sector institute libraries, describing how TAFE libraries adapt to the applied and academic leanings of HE. New demands are placed on libraries, including the requirement for more IL classes, referencing and citation assistance, and customisation of instruction for specific subjects. Other studies have examined the role of libraries in this evolving sector, including Aroche et al (2012) who provides a review of library services as HE in NSW TAFEs expands. Aroche at al (2012, p. 4) found that libraries must now provide more IL workshops and training, assist in ‘scholarly research’ for staff, and provide more instruction in referencing and copyright. The report states that libraries are “considered critical to the success in getting a course accredited and also recognised as valuable support services for students during the delivery of the degree course”.

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Similarly, Aust and Burrell (2011) also describe Southbank Institute of Technology’s progression from TAFE to dual sector institute and the developments made in IL; including more customization of classes and broader content, as well as greater content in classes, covering the library catalogue and website, copyright and plagiarism, citing and referencing, electronic resources including databases, internet searching, and analysing an assignment (Aust & Burrell 2010). Southbank Institute also developed an online program of modules related to IL called SAIL – Southbank Assignment writing and Information Literacy.

These major studies indicate some progress in IL, but they also depict a number of consistent problems and barriers, including resourcing, staffing, time-constraints, and perceptions and understanding of IL by teachers and management. Another issue arising frequently is around definitional issues and its impact on delivery, with Leong (2007) suggesting that TAFE students have had little systematic instruction or support for acquiring the attributes because of confusion and uncertainty over what IL is.

RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

- How has IL changed in mixed sector institutes?

Participants generally recognized the impact that HE has had on IL training in their library. Though some acknowledged the slow impact of HE on library services, the need for more thorough searching, research skills, referencing and customization of classes were all seen as changes occurring. To be successful in academic progression, more specific skills, such as smart searching, databases, website evaluation and subject specific knowledge, were seen as critical to HE IL training. Typical of classes were advanced searching, for example how to find a journal title in a particular area with a certain word in the title that needs referencing. Another example suggested was a focus on subject terms or the use of specific databases.

The difference from VET IL was noted. VET IL training was seen as being part of a general library orientation, or as being shown “how to look for books but that is all”. A common view from librarians of teachers was that a VET class needed the catalogue only, despite the push for students to ‘feed into HE’.

Variations across all 5 institutes in the uptake, volume, frequency and marketing of IL were recorded. Consistently noted was the dependence of librarians on the enthusiasm or interest of the HE teachers or faculty. This in turns reflects on the nature and format of the instruction, with librarians providing instruction according to the degree of teachers’ interest and appreciation of IL.
From a student point of view, comments related to HE students were divided between them “not seeing the benefit of IL training”, or “I really wish I had known this before”. Librarians interviewed commented on the “paucity of information skills of HE students”, “information literacy skills are weak” or the “nightmare of timetabling all this”. Similarly, there was a perception of HE IL concepts and ideas being present and required by this new cohort of students. More classes of changed or more complex content were mentioned, though it is still in its nascent stages of development.

- Engagement with and perceived value of IL by teaching staff

“No teachers are really keen on knowing. Some are just hopeless, seriously hopeless”

“Depends on the teachers….some are keen and value the library …others have little interaction despite the library reaching out”.

Responses from librarians varied substantially across the sample. Engagement with IL was seen as being very much dependent upon the teacher with “different areas having different demands… for example, my area is mental health”, commented one librarian. “Teachers are proactive and work closely with the staff”. The drift towards a more academic culture flavoured some responses where teachers undertaking a Master’s degree or higher, pushed the research agenda at their institute. In cases where the institute structure or extent of HE delivery was pushing forward, liaison with senior educators and degree co-ordinators provided intervention between the library and teacher. In these cases, IL classes were seen as integral to a student’s welfare and academic progress. The library assumed a greater proactive position to match student and teacher expectation of necessity and benefit IL training.

Misunderstanding about “everything being online now- meaning Moodle and Internet” coloured some responses. One respondent stated “Getting the library to do all the work for them” was indicative of a lack of teacher knowledge or an intimidation by IL. Nevertheless, lack of apparent success or engagement with teachers did not deter the majority of librarians interviewed from “the uphill battle” of continuing to advocate IL.

- How new technologies feature in the instruction of IL?

HE TAFE libraries are increasingly present in leaning management systems (for example Moodle) as a means of accessibility in the student space. This is evident in the linking of library resources to curriculum content. More than this, some libraries are extending library involvement and interaction in student learning by embedding in their LMS quizzes, online tutorials and LibGuide links. There was general consensus of
teacher commitment to drive students towards online learning. However, the universal presence of an LMS in HE TAFE institutes demonstrates the need for libraries to be proactive beyond the catalogue to where students congregate online. It provides potential for HE TAFE libraries to consider assessment tasks and subject outlines in this space, and tailor their library services to meet this need in the curriculum. However, there appeared to be no formal institute-wide approach and methods of using the LMS as a tool for library instruction.

The interviews revealed variability in take up and adoption of new technology areas capable of supporting IL instruction.

“We are looking at what we can use and apply in different subjects. With mobile apps and iPad technology, we are trying to figure out best practice”

“There is potential for that…but problem here is our own technical skills [for librarians]. There is a lack of understanding it as a tool.”

E-Books have generally been fast-tracked for HE students, especially in terms of preference for purchase. Library training sessions uniformly mentioned the marketing of e-resources, in particular e-book suites such as EBL and Knovel. Though comments were received on ebooks not yet being a heavily used resource, “teachers are starting to use it. Hopefully it will peter down to the students.”

LibGuides featured predominantly across most libraries. Its integration into the LMS was seen as a potentially strong marketing tool for IL and other library services. It was seen as dependent on the nature of the courses. However, as commented by one librarian, “Stats were showing that by having Libguides and electronic database, usage was going up”.

Three of the five HE TAFE libraries currently use Discovery layer search functionality on their catalogue to facilitate easier access to electronic material. One more library is due to go live with this shortly. The push from HE teachers was cited a key driver by many as the reason for its adoption. The introduction of Discovery has necessitated a need for further training by librarians for both teachers and students. The easier access to journals has implications for the more academic research that is part of HE.

Despite the emphasis in IL classes on referencing skills, software such as Endnote and Mendeley was only being considered by some HE TAFE libraries. As of 2013, it has been implemented at only one library. There was a discrepancy between what librarians are asked by teachers to train their students in, and the library technology available that could support it. Possible reasons for the prominence of referencing in
the responses to IL training, is teacher concern over plagiarism by students, as well as striving for academic standards.

- Online learning and learning management systems: the opportunity for libraries

  “Library staff have some involvement with online learning. HE students are expected to use Moodle a lot more”

  “We are trying to break into that captive audience”

Librarians saw their teaching departments as more and more involved in online learning. This has meant greater push by them for the students to use the LMS. In some cases, librarians were involved to the extent of IL quizzes and activities in Moodle. One librarian reported on their orientation subject being present in their LMS. There was a consistent expression by the interviewees of their library’s intention to further embed IL training into the LMS. However, in practice, this remains at an early stage for most.

- University practices and TAFE: are they the best option?

  “Absolutely”, replied one librarian. “But TAFE is different….smaller classes and we suit the mid-level student.” Librarians consistently commented on the fact that, though they were aware of university library practices, for example the Research Skills Development Framework, that they had a different student cohort and needed to model their IL training to suit. “We take more account of who they are…take a softly softly approach”

  “IL is delivered in the best way we know rather than modelling it on unis. They are bigger. TAFEs are smaller scale and more customized. We have different degrees want IL more customized”

A hybrid model of IL for HE TAFE was noted. Elements of university library practices were seen as appropriate to some extent. Examples of this were the standards expected of students in IL classes and the targeting of classes to particular disciplines. From the librarian’s point of view, teaching students about Intellectual Property and how to use information was seen as a life skill that “will stand them in good stead”. However, it was commented by some librarians, that the skill level was poor and below what you would expect of HE students.
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

An opportunity exists for future research in several areas raised by this paper. These include:

- Why do librarians emphasize referencing so much as part of IL training?
- Should university IL standards apply to HE TAFE students?
- Should there be a specific IL framework for HE TAFE students?
- Why is there inconsistency in the level of technical skills for HE TAFE librarians in the area of ICT as it applies to IL?
- How can IL in HE TAFE be more accepted as an essential component of student learning outcomes?
- How can greater collaboration be achieved between teachers and librarians in regard to the delivery of IL?
- How will the LMS feature in the role of the library and IL?

CONCLUSION

While this study has revealed that Victoria’s five HE TAFE libraries are actively supporting and delivering IL training, there is inconsistency in how it approached for the specific HE student cohort. There was great variability in the level of engagement from both library and teaching staff. Individual librarians’ focus was seen as significant in determining the type of IL training that occurred. The study shows that the level of interest mirrored that of teaching departments. Motivation and marketing and liaison were each mentioned as important drivers of IL development.

It is acknowledged across all the libraries that a hybrid library model of IL training is suitable for best practice. This was revealed in the low level of library interest in aspects of IL such as the RSDF and the academic rigour it requires. This could be implied from the different type of student cohort that is diverse in its learning background, for example more part-timers, articulation from a vocational qualifications, or students with different learning needs.

The study showed no consensus in how best to embed IL into the LMS. While agreeing that library involvement in the space where student online learning and interaction occurs, the five libraries are still gaining traction in this evolving area. There was no agreement on how to define IL. Unlike University IL training based on agreed standards and frameworks, the study showed uncertain focus on how best to achieve certain outcomes. Rather than specific IL goals, what was revealed was the struggle to establish IL and have it recognised as important.
As well as the above issues, the current difficulties of formalizing and fulfilling the aims of IL delivery in HE TAFE must be acknowledged. The evolution of HE TAFE to greater HE qualification delivery will impact on the library’s role to support their institution’s strategic education objectives. The impact of this metamorphism will hopefully translate to greater profiling of the importance of library IL in student learning outcomes.
REFERENCES


