The school library, a new space for knowledge: from “basic knowledge”[1] to school information culture

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Abstract
For fifteen years, educational actors (teachers, school librarians, academic advisors ...), among which the teacher librarian plays a major part in the Centers for Documentation and Information (CDI, school library), have been teaching, evaluating, requiring students expectations on a supposed "cultural background" , commonly called “general culture” in French, supported by the educational institution and the social world. In a first part, we wish to define the question of an overall school culture and show how the school librarians have slowly claimed the development and support for a "Culture of information " for each student and, more broadly, each citizen. In a second step, we discuss the similarities, differences and links between “basic knowledge” and information culture. In which way are they similar, fundamentally different, what is specific and new in the “culture of information” for young people? In a third step, we frame the components of the culture of information, deeply rooted into culture and the digital developments of information. The culture of information is the field of curricula, educative actions and debates, revealing tensions within libraries, between school requirements and social expectations. In a fourth and final step, we will show and advocate for a dynamic conception of academic culture of information "in action", connected to the media and social events, in classrooms and school libraries, updating the weak links between general education and information culture.

Keywords: Information culture, information literacy, informational competencies, digital competencies, basic knowledge

Introduction

For at least the last three decades, it has been the job of all practitioners in educational establishments (teachers, school librarians, pedagogical advisers, etc.), headed in France by teacher-librarians in the documentation and information centres (CDI), to teach, assess, encourage and grade their pupils in accordance with the expectations and representations of a supposed “basic knowledge”, upheld not only by the educational establishment, but more

[1] Basic knowledge for « Culture générale » in french language.

widely by the social world. In the field of documentation and information, the adjective "general" has gradually been replaced by "information" so that professionals are now talking more and more about information culture rather than basic knowledge. This concept has emerged in France relatively recently (1980s for *information literacy* in English-speaking countries, 1995 for *information culture* in France[2]), but it nevertheless represents a fundamentally different approach to information, documentation and media.

Basic knowledge, information culture: convergence and divergence of expectations

In this paper, we intend first to discuss then define what is traditionally included within the scope of the general school culture, and then show how school librarians have gradually demanded that more encouragement be given to supporting the "Information culture" of each pupil and, more broadly, of the citizen. We shall describe the resemblances and the divergence between basic knowledge (BK) and information culture (IC) and the logical interconnections between them. In short, how are they similar, how are they fundamentally different, what specifically does information culture offer young people that is different and new?

Basic knowledge and school

BK, often seen as the goal to be achieved, has two main meanings, as described by Jean-Claude Forquin (1989). First, the "sociological" meaning which covers all the practices, values and spontaneous representations of a given population, especially in terms of information; the choices and interests surrounding the informational culture of young people, teachers, and information professionals fit directly into this environment. Second, the "heritage transmission" meaning, which corresponds to a body of knowledge, of uses and values, which are never stable and in a constant state of flux, depending on evolving technologies, practices and consumption modes in society; thus the role of the teacher is to transmit a set of educational, information heritages, where methods and content reflect a desire to attain mutual knowledge, shared between individuals from the same society and/or shared social space, where individuals can be brought together. All this knowledge is put in place and supported by strong formal systems, such as teaching programmes, guidelines, not to mention certification procedures.

In France, we seem to be gradually witnessing a confusion between BK and the prevailing academic culture: basic knowledge is dependent on strong social intentions, whereas the ultimate aim of academic culture is to ensure that the individual (in our case the pupil) becomes compliant with his surrounding environment (school, university, work). As early as 1952, in "*A critical review of concepts and definitions",* A. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn had already found more than 200 definitions of the word "culture". We can see that meanings and definitions differ fundamentally, depending on whether the author is putting forward a linguistic, sociological, philosophical or psychological point of view, or on the levels of comprehensive analysis being applied (generic or specific).

[2] Mollard, M. « Pour une culture de l'information, Les centres de documentation à visée pédagogique : les CDI, un "cas d'école" » ? *Documentaliste – Sciences de l'information,* 1996, vol. 33, n° 6, p. 275-279.

The 5 levels of basic knowledge (BK)

Jean-Claude Forquin, in "*Ecole et culture"* defines five levels for understanding culture, levels which can also be used for an understanding of information cultures:

- first, culture in the clearly defined macro-social and philosophical sense, which positions man in relation to nature. Culture is learned, is transmitted, is enriched through exchanges and confrontation with others;
- second, culture is built up from a basis of traditional knowledge, which consists of completing an education process, after which the individual possesses a body of academic knowledge and operative skills, so that after his schooling he can be positioned in an "academic" classification of knowledge: the diploma is an excellent illustration;
- third, culture in its descriptive, or even naturalistic sense, considered as all the characteristic traits of a society or a group, including its most mundane aspects. This sociological standpoint leads us to think that classes and groupings of individuals can be constructed around culture and BK, according to their social and cultural practices;
- fourth, the heritage, differentials and identity meaning of culture, defined as all the knowledge and skills specific to a human community, where the heart of the concept lies in transmitting to others and to the young in particular, especially via teaching and cultural practices;
- and lastly, fifth, culture in its universalist and world sense, where the key is to look for links, points of convergence between individuals, so that ultimately preoccupations, representations and practices are considered the same everywhere in the world and shared by all: here we recognise part of the myth of universal man.

Thus the concept of IC forms part of a new vision of *information literacy* where the aim is gradually to leave the confines of procedural approaches and enable citizens and children of school age to comprehend the world and the information society not only through initiation into the basic concepts, but also by discovering the predominating rationales surrounding information: business, politics, consumerism, disagreement, etc. Consequently, we can now say that the aim of this IC is for even the youngest children to acquire a political, critical and civic culture.

Some basic elements of Information Culture (IC)

The elements that make up Information Culture (IC) are firmly established in and around culture and the growth in technologies and digital content. Thus the information culture that is becoming the subject of more and more teaching, support and debates, is giving rise to tensions in school libraries between educational requirements and the expectations and influences of the social world; many professionals are now confronted with a widening gap between the desire to demonstrate and provide training in reflective and standard procedures, when the users often inhabit digital spaces and technologies quite spontaneously and without reflection. IC combines ways of learning, of living and of appreciating the social world with information, via the acquisition of knowledge, the desire to communicate with others and to create using digital technology. Thus IC is associated with a power of action, with the ability to knowingly influence the world, and is in fact made up of "reserve knowledge", the expression used by Gilles Deleuze (1995): a store of information, individual and collective memorisation of knowledge, and contribution to strong social communication (especially with one's peers through digital social networks). In this regard, the latest report by the *Conseil national du numérique* (French Digital Council) (2013) entitled

"*citoyens d'une société numérique : accès, littératie, médiations, pouvoir d'agir : pour une nouvelle politique d'inclusion*[3]" ("citizens of a digital society: access, literacy, mediations, power of action: for a new policy of inclusion") is a perfect example of the realisation that this IC is necessary if we are to put our action as a citizen and our critical thinking to work in contemporary society, especially given that stakeholders in the educational world seem to be gradually wanting this role to make a greater contribution at school. For example, the ecological approach (Davenport, 1997) to informational practices highlights the fundamental role of the environment in which the subject establishes his relationship with the search tool, especially a digital one, and projects himself into situations of explaining or of information gathering. Informal practices, which relate to situated action, and which are barely or not at all visible to the teacher, are very reliant on the context in which they take place, and within which the subject negotiates his position, his space for expression and appropriation. The informal sphere (peers, home, close friends and family) structures the relationship with information, and with the search tool, especially when it is digital. In our opinion, information practices used outside the educational establishment should be described as "informal", in that for their users they have a true legitimacy, and furthermore are considered to be efficient in terms of meeting their requirements. Information practices are legitimate for users, of whatever status, especially as they have been accorded a strong social legitimisation within the family and emotional sphere. In addition, using information practices inside the sphere of family, friends and sociability can lead to a collective imagining of information, information gathering activities and search tools, which may then become an obstacle to later learning in the formal context. Hence the advantage of studying this informal culture, structured outside the school establishment, but nevertheless a major component of the information culture specific to each individual. Schools at present, at least in France, are having difficulty integrating and fully understanding this social dimension of information practices, and treat them only as incidental. However, during class, taking this informal culture into account creates a problem for teachers, who have developed their own imaginings in relation to the pupils' information practices, and these are often negative and moralising.

Five characteristics to define Information Culture (IC)

Information Culture has five main characteristics which accelerate behaviour changes, and even changes in values:

- Firstly, increased interactivity with Web 2.0 architectures, making information distribution and dissemination easier and increasing peer-to-peer exchanges and resource sharing; with IC we are seeing the first signs of a multifaceted interpretation of intelligence where the collective tends to take precedence over individual intelligence.
- Secondly, taking elements of the user's profile and personality into account in contents and productions. In this way, digital (and analog) media promote user participation and encourage personal expression. IC is therefore based on personal experience and expressiveness.
- Thirdly, personal and private practices; faced with the boom in ownership of personal and family equipment, mobile technologies, laptop computers, etc., we are witnessing

[3] « Citoyens d'une société numérique : accès, littératie, médiations, pouvoir d'agir : pour une nouvelle politique d'inclusion », Rapport du Conseil national du numérique, Octobre 2013. Available at: http://www.cnnumerique.fr/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CNNum_Rapport-inclusion-num%C3%A9rique_nov2013.pdf

an overlapping of “information” practices in private, public, school and/or professional spheres. Most of our cultural practices and consumption happens in the domestic space, with much less in the school sphere. Thus the role of the school when confronted with IC is to try and understand and problematize familiar ways of being with others, ways of doing things with others, ways of becoming involved in a close relationship with others. To date, educational establishments are falling behind in this and are struggling to incorporate this digital social situation into information practices and teaching.

- Fourthly, IC is a culture centred on images, visual elements and navigation ergonomics (studies by Liu, etc.). The school still deals sufficiently well with the analysis and compared understanding of the image, whether it is still, moving, digital, or augmented reality. Alan Liu believes that the computer industry explores tactile, visual and audio methods at high speed, and this is not considered in the analysis made by ordinary schools.
- Fifthly, IC is an exploratory procedure, to analyse and understand spatial reorganisation, layouts and the expected informational uses. In fact, most daily activities, at home or at work, involve first of all an online access or connection, which has direct repercussions on the individual’s relationship with the information.

Thus IC, which is in essence technical, tries to help pupils carry out a comprehensive review of techniques and content production, which ranges far beyond the limits of mere documentation. IC can therefore be considered as a concept open to interpretation and multi-disciplinary analyses, drawing on other concepts such as *information literacy* or *transliteracy*. Mediators and practitioners in IC in school contexts in particular will have to ensure that the way it is approached is not by attempting to standardise information practices, but that on the contrary it promotes and examines cultural diversity linked with information production and the social circulation of information.

For Information Culture in action

In this third part, we describe and argue for a culture of educational information “in action” in our classrooms and school libraries, a culture that is dynamic, in touch with the latest media and social events, keeping the links between basic knowledge and information culture up to date. We illustrate some aspects of an information culture in action, with some examples based on generic skills that can be worked on. And what if information cultures were to constitute a new form of basic knowledge with its point of departure consisting of technologies, digital technology and mass media and creative media?

Information culture and targeted performances

IC is used in organisations (school, business, university, etc.), and involves a real concern for efficiency and for improving educational or professional practices. Those advocating a strongly educational IC are aiming for 3 levels of performativity:

- first, pragmatic performance, where the question of information practices and an efficient search for information are linked together so as to optimise and improve information search skills while at the same time developing culture and knowledge of the subject. This first level combines the efficiency of the search with an enrichment of knowledge through reading. The aim of this first type of performance is to consider, organise and structure information practices better, and would only be meaningful in their view if it had a direct influence on improving the curriculum.

- second, social performance, in the sense that strengthening information practices should bring users closer to the other pupils (actors in the system), to public government bodies, thus enabling them to construct communities of users, informal networks for shared learning, exchanges on innovative and spontaneous practices.
- third, performance in environments: participants are constantly confronted with the question of the adaptability of their information practices to the needs and rules of the organisation to which they belong, and of taking organisational pressures into account as they work. Thus in the school environment, adolescents show that they can use different practices according to the chosen context (school, home), thereby demonstrating an ability to adapt these practices according to the rules set by the organisation. Some studies go so far as to describe uses specific to a supposed "school Internet" and another talks of a "personal Internet", which is more open, adapted to centres of interest and to personal sociability networks (Dioni, 2008).

Consequently, these levels of performance encourage us to consider information cultures as intellectual processes turned towards the social world, and we are required to pick up information in order to develop our own professional, social and citizen commitments.

Information Culture and convergences

The aim of IC is to bring into conjunction zones of convergence between the worlds of media, documents and computer technology. This convergence can cover 3 levels of concern, which are:

- First, a "*semio-language*" level, based mainly on making comparisons then fixing a vocabulary that is common to the IC components (media, computer technology, documents), especially in what defines the understanding of a document, of information and of data.
- Second, a "*technical-media*" level which relates to identifying then understanding the potential and the technical constraints of each aspect of information technology and communication or of their dedicated digital environments. At this level, the aim is to define forms of writing, types of display, changes in substance and form of media transformations and transfers.
- Third, a "*social-relational-deliberative*" level, based on the abilities of each person to take a step back from their own reception of messages by defining forms of writing and information processing, personal modes of receiving information, the underlying and expected uses by those involved in production and publishing, also taking into account economic and legal frameworks, and the positioning of self in a networked environment that is on display and accessible via the various digital networks that have what is called a social and community dimension.

Information Culture and meta-skills

By putting together a set of data gathered during our field studies in universities and schools (mainly high schools), we gradually see the first signs of some skills emerging, which are sometimes being managed by the actors themselves in ways that are more or less intuitive and/or spontaneous. In the accounts that we collected, interviewees also demonstrate "implicit skills", which were not put in place by the teachers and do not derive from guidelines for formal skills. Five of these meta-skills (MS) emerged and could be routes for future exploration in both professional and educational contexts.

MS1: "*information knowledge"*: the purpose behind this skill is to work on declarative knowledge linked with information, information dissemination and the existing tools. The key

to this meta-skill is to be capable of owning the vocabulary for expression, designation and representations linked with the world of information. Our studies show that the media, technical systems, information processing tools, etc., are not necessarily referred to in the same way, especially by the information practitioners (teacher-librarians, teachers, technicians, etc.) and the learners; this will inevitably lead to all sorts of misconceptions, misunderstandings and a discrepancy between intentions.
MS2: procedural knowledge relating to technical systems (or "*information application*"); the basic aim is to be able to use the main technological tools efficiently in order to be able to respond to a need and carry out a task. Knowledge of the technical capacities of the tools and the software is still closely linked with the opportunities the individual has to discover everything about the possibilities and features of the systems and the environments available to him.
MS3: the ability to appreciate the "*information potential*" of the environment or the technique being used. It has to be acknowledged that our interviewees assumed the potential rather than really testing it, and often discovered the functions and features that were available to them rather late in the day or merely by chance. Strengthening the way one uses and assimilates techno-media innovations involves this ability to project oneself into them and to gain expertise by oneself from the information environments that are available.
MS4: "*actional strategies"* are oriented towards the organisation and sustainability of one's personal memory of work. The aim of information culture is to adopt personal procedures for processing content for future re-use and transfer to new professional and/or learning situations. Behind this meta-skill we are concerned with methods of classifying, indexing, describing resources and documents, with the aim of being able ultimately to re-use them in similar contexts, via transfer.
MS5: the last meta-skill is "*anthropo-centred"*, wherein each individual is able to identify and characterise his own cognitive style[4]. In order to be able to adapt to different environments, the user must be capable of getting to know himself by himself, by being able to define these predominant cognitive styles: is he more hyper-reactive, or more field-dependent, does he consider that he reacts by impulsivity or reflectivity, etc.? The ultimate aim is to act on one's weak points to try and compensate for them.

In our opinion, these 5 meta-skills reposition the school librarian around support activities, expertise in resources and knowledge mediation. He must also be able to devote some time first to defining the users and negotiating with them, according to their information needs, of course, but also to the level of skill required and/or expected. From now on, the school librarian is not so much a supplier or even a recommender of resources, but more a specialist in working methods and in defining the rich deposits of resources and techniques that can be mobilised for an educational project. Areas such as "learning centres" are firmly committed to these new directions.

In conclusion

In the course of our observations, the main point to be identified is that the teacher-librarian is virtually absent from info-communicational situations concerning IC, but only carries out reception tasks and sometimes logistic support for activities geared to information. It is still rare to find an establishment where the school librarian, or even the subject teachers, has an interface role in the educational and engineering aspects of organising knowledge, or is a

[4] Consider studies by H. Witkin, S. Paper, J. Kagan or J. Bruner.

regulator of complex information situations. With regards to subject teachers, we identified extreme variations in the distribution of tasks and in the commitment of the different teaching teams. However, situations of exchange, advice, document analysis and information searches with pupils still take place more often, and are more formal and well organised. The high points of educational supervision occur when the issues for consideration are being determined, when the work plan is being approved and the type of content is being identified, and are therefore still based on traditional activities involving information searches and work with documents, techniques which are firmly anchored in IC.

Ultimately, working on IC in schools relies on upstream collaboration between teachers and librarians to identify key moments in the construction of knowledge by the pupils; they will therefore have to design beforehand the actions and facilities that are to be provided. Hence a reinforcement of the teacher's engineering and methodology skills is absolutely essential. From now on we should see the beginnings of a gradual rearrangement of the way school is organised, since thus far it has been organised partly around a division into teaching knowledge by discipline, with time segmented for organising and planning activities, but this seems to be declining in the midst of the "information culture" approach. In addition, for the meta-skills identified in school activities, it is clear that teaching teams will eventually have to devise procedures for supporting and managing these new educational goals; they cannot continue to be discovered merely by chance when navigating information processes and activities.

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