

Empowering 8: the Information Literacy model developed in Sri Lanka to underpin changing education paradigms of Sri Lanka.¹

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Abstract

Information literacy (IL) is the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address an issue or a problem. It is a basic human right to lifelong learning. Information itself is becoming a transforming strategic resource of the emerging information society. Without information literacy, the information society will not be able to achieve its full potential. Therefore, the concept and practice of information literacy must be promoted from an early age among the school going children. Information literacy is more relevant for the developing nations to enable themselves to bridge the growing info-divide between the developed and the developing nations. In this context, a regional workshop was organized by NILIS to create awareness of information skills for learning among the participants from South and Southeast Asian countries.

Empowering Eight (E8), an Information Literacy Model was developed at this workshop organized jointly by IFLA-ALP and the National Institute of Library & Information Sciences (NILIS) of Sri Lanka. There were participants representing ten South and Southeast Asian countries. The objective of the workshop was to enhance the resource-based learning in these countries by sensitizing the participants to Information Literacy, which as a concept has not taken roots in majority of the countries in the region. When a plethora of IL models are already available, one may question why the wheel is being re-invented. Re-inventing the wheel or developing another model is essential because of the composite culture and local conditions in these countries. If an existing model used in a developed country is imposed, it would be difficult for the stakeholders to understand the philosophical roots behind the model. Therefore, the workshop participants, throughout five days worked from identifying the need of IL through comparison of different models to building the E8 to suit the local needs of the region.

This paper will discuss in detail the Empowering 8 model and its application and implementation in the Sri Lankan context.

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Introduction

Libraries component of GEP2

According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 1995, out of 8179 schools (excluding schools in North-East Province), 70% did not have school libraries. Several other significant issues also were identified by the survey and these are mentioned in Wijetunge (2002). Following table indicates the library facilities available at different kinds of schools at the time of survey.

Table 1 - Library Facilities available in schools

Category	No. of Schools	No. of Schools having permanent libraries*	%	No. of Schools having non - permanent libraries**	%
Government schools	9790	4000	41	2000	20
Private schools	85	68	80	17	20
International schools	87	87	100	-	-
Pirivenas	600	600	100	-	-

* Permanent libraries – A separate place with adequate space according to the standard criteria of the Ministry of Education.

**Non-permanent libraries – A room with some book cupboards, bookshelves or a small collection of books.

Under the Libraries Component of GEP2, School Library Development Unit (SLDU) was established to take leadership in school library development activities. Table 2 depicts the type of infrastructure development activities carried out in 4000 school libraries under the libraries component of GEP2.

Table 2 – Library development activities supported by the Libraries Component

Type of Library	Definition	Number	Support received
A	Senior schools with grades 10-13	250	Library building, books, furniture, training and AV equipment. 25 schools of this category received Internet facility as well.
B	Junior schools with classes from grades 1-9	1750	Library building (either new or renovated), books, training and furniture
C	Middle and small school in rural and urban areas	2000	Books and training

Since there was a severe lack of trained library professionals, it was decided to develop 4000 teachers as teacher librarians at the beginning and the project was searching for an organisation to undertake this responsibility. A proposal was submitted by the University Grants Commission, to the World Bank to establish a national institute and the World Bank accepted this proposal. NILIS was established in 1999 by an ordinance under section 18 and 24 of the Universities Act No. 16 of 1978 as an institution affiliated to the University of Colombo. Activities of NILIS in educating and training teacher librarians can be found in Wijetunge (2002), Wijetunge (2003) and Wijetunge (2004).

Information Literacy

To respond effectively to an ever-changing environment, people need more than just a knowledge base, they also need techniques for exploring it, connecting it to other knowledge bases, and making practical use of it. In other words, the landscape upon which we used to stand has been transformed, and we are being forced to establish a new foundation called information literacy. Now knowledge--not minerals or agricultural products or manufactured goods--is this country's most precious commodity, and people who are information literate--who know how to acquire knowledge and use it--are America's most valuable resources. (Owusu-Ansah, 2004). This applies to the Sri Lankan context as well.

Information Literacy is defined as the ability to access, evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources. As students prepare for the 21st century, traditional instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics needs to be coupled with practice in communication, critical thinking, and problem solving skills (Costa, 1985).

An information literate person is one who:

- Recognizes that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision making
- Recognizes the need for information
- Formulates questions based on information needs
- Identifies potential sources of information
- Develops successful search strategies
- Accesses sources of information including computer-based and other technologies
- Evaluates information
- Organizes information for practical application
- Integrates new information into an existing body of knowledge
- Uses information in critical thinking and problem solving (Doyle, 1992)

In an information literate environment, students engage in active, self-directed learning activities, and teachers facilitate students' engagement through a more adventurous style of instructional delivery. Students involved in information literate activities:

- Seek a rich range of information sources;
- Communicate an understanding of content;
- Pose questions about the content being learned;
- Use the environment, people, and tools for learning;
- Reflect on their own learning;

- Assess their own learning; and
- Take responsibility for their own learning. (Hancock 1993).

These students feel good about themselves as learners, and they leave school feeling passionate about some content. Teachers trying to create an information literate environment for their students have given up the view that teaching is telling, that learning is absorbing, and that knowledge is static. They constantly make difficult choices about old curriculums, examining subject-area requirements closely, setting priorities, and considering process as well as content. They look beyond their classrooms for resources that will enrich the learning environment. They engage in collaborative activities, which enrich their own professional development and their students' learning experiences. They seek the expertise of their school library media specialists as partners in the curriculum planning process. (Hancock 1993).

Requirement of the Information Literacy workshop

The World Bank initiative to develop school libraries was taken to support the resources-based; student centred learning emphasized in the new education policy reforms of Sri Lanka. Even if the physical structures are developed, human resources are not yet developed in all these libraries. Still the library is perceived as a storehouse of books.

In order to promote resource-based student centred learning and to promote competencies in learning to learn, NILIS has incorporated information literacy in all its teacher librarianship programmes. Initially there were no lecturers available with competency to teach this subject but under GEP2 support extended to NILIS Dr. Penny Moore who is an authority on Information Literacy was invited in 2003 to conduct a two-week workshop for a group of NILIS visiting staff. With this initial training NILIS introduced information literacy to its students. However, it was felt that NILIS as well as Sri Lanka in general need more exposure to information literacy.

With the support and guidance of Prof. Russell Bowden who is a member of the Board of Management of NILIS and an Honorary IFLA Fellow, a proposal was developed and submitted to IFLA/ALP to seek funds to conduct a one-week international workshop on Information Skills for Learning. National Institute of Library and Information Sciences is the national body responsible for Library and Information Education of Sri Lanka and also the national institute responsible for the education and training of Teacher Librarians for the 4000 school libraries developed under the World Bank project (and also for other school libraries). Therefore it was felt that it is the best institution to undertake this kind of an international workshop and initiate the changing process of 'school libraries' into 'school learning resource centers'.

By conducting this workshop we expected to promote the new 21st century role of the school librarian/teacher librarian, which emphasizes the inculcation of information literacy skills among school children.

Objectives of the workshop were to;

1. Re-orient classroom situations from 'chalk and talk' to project-directed learning away from classrooms and into learning information centres;

2. To re-position the 'library' as the central core providing students' learning experiences and for teachers as the central resource to guide the learners [away from the age-old 'teaching notes'];
3. To re-orient School Libraries from 'libraries' to 'Learning Resource Centres' in order to improve the quality of school education;
4. To re-focus school librarianship skills away from materials-based collections' management to active information provision exploiting IT;
5. To make known IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto and IFLA / UNESCO School Library Guidelines.
6. To define 'information literacy skills' – i.e. 'what is information literacy'? 'What does information literacy look like'? 'What makes it work'? What skills do children require to become information literate?
7. To develop strategies in educational institutions for incorporating information literacy skills teaching as an integral part of curricula;
8. To develop a realistic model to introduce information skills at national level.

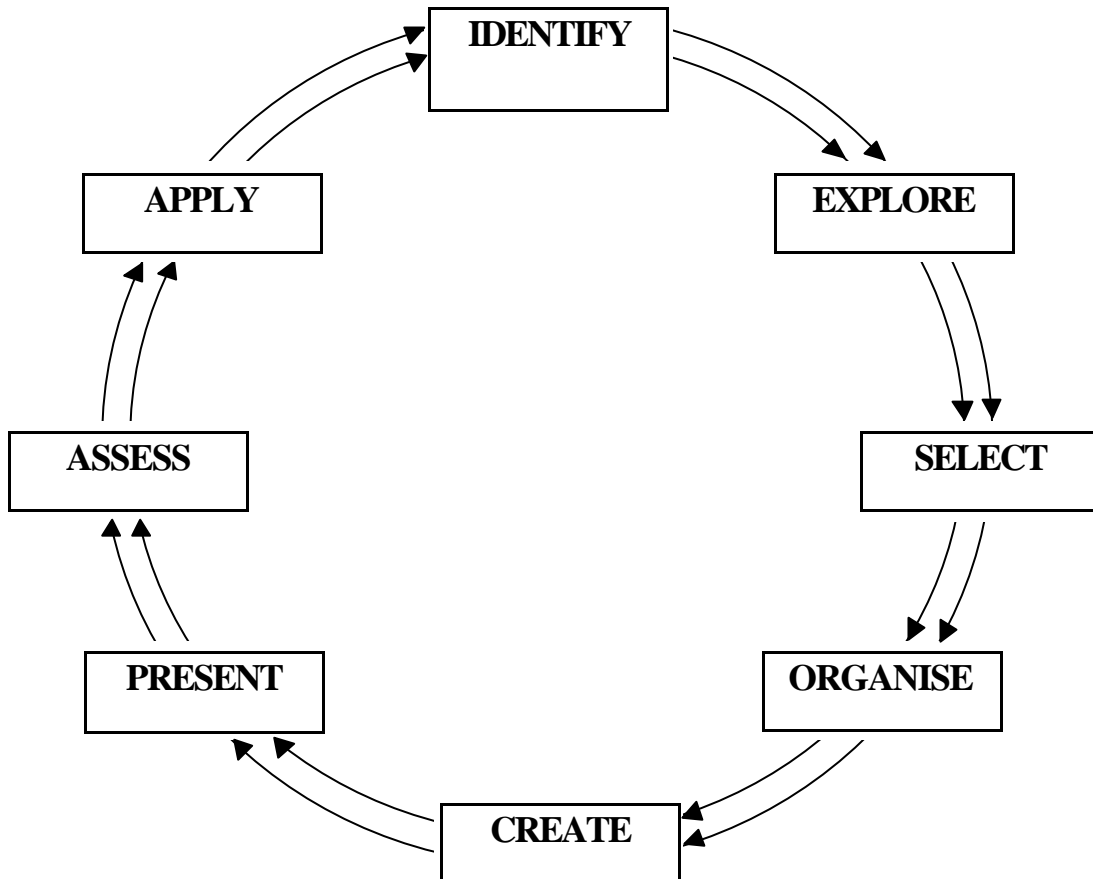
Thirty participants from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand participated at the workshop. Key resource person was Gerald Brown (consultant to NILIS) from Canada while there other resource persons were from IFLA (Prof. Russell Bowden), IASL (Diljit Singh (Malaysia)), and ASLA (Karen Bonanno (Australia)), and Sri Lanka, (Linda Oldham from Overseas School of Colombo, Sri Lanka).

The plan of the workshop was as follows;

- Resource persons introduced the concepts of Resource-based learning, Information skills and the role of 21st century school library.
- Participants presented country status reports, which were analysed and synthesised along several common themes.
- One or more lead papers were presented each day. The participants engaged in group work and plenary sessions along the themes introduced in lead papers.
- A study tour to an international school was made to gain first hand experience of information skills practice.
- On the fourth day the participants developed a national model of introducing and integrating information skills into the school curriculum
- On the final day, this national model was discussed in terms of problems and prospects of implementation.

Empowering 8 Model

Figure 1 – Empowering 8 model



International participants and Sri Lankan participants worked independently to develop an information literacy model and at the end both groups discussed these two models with the assistance of the resource persons. Finally both models were refined and merged to form a generic model. This was named as “Empowering 8”. While the above figure depicts the eight components of the model, following table illustrates the eight components and their corresponding learning outcomes.

Table 3 – Components and Learning outcomes of Empowering 8

Step	Empowering 8 Components	The student will be able to demonstrate an ability to:
1	Identify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the topic/subject • Determine and understand the audience • Choose the relevant format for the finished product • Identify the key words • Plan a search strategy • Identify different types of resources where information may be found
2	Explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate resources appropriate to the chosen topic • Find information appropriate to the chosen topic • Do interviews, field trips or other outside research
3	Select	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose relevant information • Determine which sources are too easy, too hard, or just right • Record relevant information through note making or making a visual organizer such as a chart, graph, or outline, etc • Identify the stages in the process • Collect appropriate citations
4	Organise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort the information • Distinguish between fact, opinion, and fiction • Check for bias in the sources • Sequence the information in a logical order • Use visual organizers to compare or contrast information
5	Create	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare information in their own words in a meaningful way • Revise and edit, alone or with a peer • Finalize the bibliographic format
6	Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practise for presentation activity • Share the information with an appropriate audience • Display the information in an appropriate format to suit the audience • Set up and use equipment properly
7	Assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept feedback from other students • Self assess one's performance in response to the teacher's assessment of the work • Reflect on how well they have done • Determine if new skills were learned • Consider what could be done better next time
8	Apply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the feedback and assessment provided • Use the feedback and assessment for the next learning activity / task • Endeavour to use the knowledge gained in a variety of new situations • Determine in what other subjects these skills can now be used • Add product to a portfolio of productions

Implementation of the model

Empowering 8: National implementation Committee

Those who participated at the workshop from all key institutions of Sri Lanka gathered on 23rd December 2004 to discuss the implementation activities of E8 on different platforms. It was unanimously decided to formulate a national implementation committee. Members unanimously agreed that the positions of Chairperson and Secretary should be with NILIS since NILIS was responsible for organizing the Workshop. Members also agreed that Prof. Bowden should chair the committee and Mrs. Wijetunge to be the Secretary. They both accepted the posts.

Members also decided that the National Implementation Committee (E8 NIC) should have a focus group with a limited number of members from the key institutions, which will be the stakeholders for implementing the model; NILIS, School Library Development Unit, UGC, National Library, Sri Lanka Library Association, National Inst. of Education, and the commissioner of National Colleges of Education.

It was decided that these focus group members should represent the interests of their respective institutes and that they should report the E8 NIC decisions to their institution and vice versa. E8 NIC Focus Group members are encouraged to establish Sub-Focus Groups within the respective institutions to facilitate communications and inter-actions. Focus group will meet as and when necessary to take key decisions regarding promotion and implementation.

It was decided to invite the following to become members of the main 'Empowering 8 National Implementation Committee'. This will meet to endorse the interim work of the Focus Group and to provide advice on general policies and strategies relevant at the national level.

1. 8 Provincial Education Directors
2. 8 Provincial Library Co-ordinators
3. Representative from Faculty of Education, University of Colombo
4. Representative from Faculty of Education, University of Jaffna
5. Representative from Dept. of Education, University of Peradeniya
6. Representative from Dept. of LIS, University of Kelaniya
7. Representative from Sri Lanka Teacher Librarians Association
8. A principal from Type 1AB School
9. A Principal from Type 1C school
10. A Principal from Type 2 school
11. A principal from Type 3 school
12. A Representative from each NCOE
13. Any other person / persons considered as significant for the promotion and implementation of 'Empowering 8'.

Copyright of 'Empowering 8'

NILIS took action to obtain copyright of "Empowering 8" to NILIS to assure that the right of use of the concept and its products will be legally controlled by NILIS. Any organization wishing to use 'Empowering 8' for workshops, or any similar events, will be required to obtain the written permission of the Director/NILIS. NILIS would take legal action against any organizations or individuals, violating the copyright of 'Empowering 8'. A logo for the model was designed in order to register it as a trademark in order to provide additional protection against mis-use.

Future activities

Launching of the Proceedings

On 19th May 2005 the Proceedings of the international conference and the logo was launched by the Secretary to the Ministry of Education at the Ministry. By this launching Empowering 8 was presented to the key stakeholders of the education sector so that it can be incorporated in to future activities of the MOE.

National Conference on Empowering 8

It was decided that on completion of the 'follow up' Workshop a National 'Empowering 8', a Conference should be held in Sri Lanka, for principals and other educators to promote the take-up and use in Sri Lanka of Empowering 8 within the curriculum.

Translation of the model into Sinhala and Tamil

Asst. Librarian of NILIS who participated at the workshop has already translated the model into Sinhala, and a participant from the National Library has translated it into Tamil. Once completed the translations will be evaluated by the focus group members for accuracy and before being adopted. Together with the model, IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto also was translated into Sinhala.

Follow-up workshop

Developing "The Empowering 8 Problem-Solving Model" as a dimension of information literacy provided the beginning stages in the exploration of an idea that can permeate pedagogy at many levels and stages of education. The follow up workshop should be seen as stage 2 of that empowerment for the learners in the workshop. It became apparent as the workshop evolved, that there were many new ideas and new teaching methods that could be explored in greater depth in order to make Empowering 8 a much more effective tool.

Objectives of the proposed follow up workshop are to;

1. Review the concepts at each stage of the Empowering 8 Problem-Solving Model as specific steps in the definition of information literacy, as a refresher for continuing participants, and as an up-grade for newcomers to the workshop.
2. Investigate the skills needed to make it possible for an independent learner to apply E8 in personal learning settings.
3. Identify the aspects of the Components of a Modern Quality School Library Program that match each stage in the E 8 model.
4. Clarify and specify the roles of the teacher, teacher-librarian, and administration in the implementation of the E 8 model in an educational setting.

5. Consider the training requirements for a teacher-librarian to be able to implement the specific role identified above.
6. Devise rubrics for the assessment and evaluation stage of E 8 that are directly linked to both the content and skills identified in the specific learning outcomes of any assignment.
7. Draft a generic Information Literacy Policy statement as related to the UNESCO IFLA School Library Manifesto, and the IFLA / UNESCO School Library Guidelines for use in the participant's local setting.
8. Outline specific steps for implementing the above Information Literacy Policy.
9. Detail personalized specific steps for implementing E8 as a problem-solving model in the agencies or institutions represented by the individuals in the workshop, and in teams, if more than one representative from a country is in attendance.

Conclusion

Information itself is becoming a transforming strategic resource of the emerging information society. Without information literacy, the information society will not be able to achieve its full potential.

Information Literacy is characterized by the individual's ability to; Recognise the need for information, Formulation of questions based on information need, Identification of potential sources of information, Evaluation of information, Organisation of information for practical application, and use of information in critical thinking and problem solving (Doyle, 1992)

The World Bank initiative to develop the education system of Sri Lanka through the school libraries was taken, to support the resources-based; student centred learning emphasized in the new education policy reforms of Sri Lanka. In order to promote resource-based student centred learning and to promote competencies in learning to learn, NILIS has incorporated information literacy in all its teacher librarianship programmes.

Since information literacy is not yet established its roots in Sri Lanka NILIS planned to conduct an international workshop with the auspices of IFLA. "Empowering 8" was developed at this workshop and a number of programs i.e. establishment of the Empowering 8: National implementation Committee, obtaining Copyright of 'Empowering 8' for NILIS, Launching of the Proceedings, National Conference on Empowering 8, Translation of the model into Sinhala and Tamil and a follow-up workshop are planned by NILIS to propagate the model in Sri Lanka as well as in other South Asian countries.

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