Are you FIT for FILE?

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Abstract

The paper examines the course Facilitating Information Literacy Education (FILE) which aims to equip information practitioners working in the health sector with the competence and the confidence required to facilitate information literacy education. The main aim of the paper is to present an overall evaluation of the emancipating impact that ICT and other technologies have had on the participants of FILE drawing from the experience of its first cohort.

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FILE: Facilitating Information Literacy Education
FIT: Fluency in Information Technology

- Outline of FILE
- ICT resources available and reflections on their use
- ICT enhancing Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Media Technology promoting confident facilitation
- Overall impact of ICT and other media

Introduction

The course Facilitating Information Literacy Education (FILE) was commissioned by the London Health Libraries (LHL) [1] as part of its Learner Support Programme (LSP) and developed by the School of Information Management at London Metropolitan University as a continuing professional development (CPD) programme which is also accredited as a postgraduate module. Its main aim is to equip information practitioners working in the health sector with the competence and the confidence required to facilitate information literacy education. FILE is based on a blended provision involving five face-to-face intensive sessions and e-learning activities supported by a dedicated webpage. [2] The website is designed to host the learning resources that the participants produce as part of a professional portfolio assessed during the course. This is complemented by a blog [3] employed to foster reflective learning and peer-based evaluation. The long-term goal of FILE is to create a web-based repository of information literacy, consisting of existing web resources which are customised by the participants, or materials they develop independently as part of the portfolio. The underlying aim is to encourage effective sharing of good practice amongst the authors and enable further dissemination of information literacy education to a wider health-information community of practice. [4]

This paper presents an overall evaluation of the participants' testimonials on their professional development as facilitators of Information Literacy Education following the delivery of FILE between January and March 2007. As the title suggests, we shall explore the impact of the course in terms of developing Fluency in Information Technology (FIT, Lorenzo et al, 2006) to enhance the participants' Information Literacy practice for diverse user populations within the health care sector. [5] The data generated by the first online evaluation survey, [6] completed at the end of the taught part of the course, is used to illustrate how overall ICT enhanced the FILE

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[1] http://www.londonlinks.ac.uk/ (Accessed 2 April 2007).
[2] http://www.ilit.org/file/indexfile.htm (Accessed 2 April 2007).
[3] http://facilitatingileducation.blogspot.com/ (Accessed 2 April 2007).
[4] The e-porfolios created by this cohort are available at: http://www.ilit.org/file/eportfolios07_1.htm (Accessed 5 April 2007).
[5] Including home care workers, NHS support staff, clinical researchers, and perioperative staff ranging from nurses to surgeons
[6] http://freeonlinesurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?sid=m2buodhd6v2ogjo274447 (Accessed 2 April 2007). In particular, feedback to questions 8 to 11 covering the impact of ICT and video facilities is examined here.

participants' professional practice. Examples demonstrating this point include the use of PowerPoint to enhance their communication skills and the adoption of online surveys to support effective evaluative strategies. In addition, to enhance the participants' awareness of their public speaking performance one of the presentations delivered during the course was video-recorded and played back to elicit comments by their peers and the tutor. While not strictly part of the ICT domain, the impact of video-recording facilities is also assessed in this paper to demonstrate how this form of feedback has shown that most participants projected a more confident professional composure when addressing an audience than they had anticipated.

To start with, the paper examines a brief account of FILE to set the context of the course. This is followed by the analysis of the participants' responses for the evaluation survey's questions that deal with the overall use of ICT facilities, and other media, reflecting on the problems that hindered such a use. In particular, we will explore the impact that the technologies used during FILE had on the participants' professional competence and most importantly on their confidence. Feedback here shows how these technologies can further the professional development of information literacy educators.

The development of FILE

A full account of this course goes beyond the scope of the current paper and is given elsewhere (Andretta, 2008 in press). Here, we sketch a brief outline of FILE to set the scene for the evaluation presented by this paper. FILE was commissioned by the London Health Libraries in 2007 as part of its Learner Support Programme agenda, aiming to address the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs of information professionals responsible for the delivery of information literacy education within the health sector.

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Dynamic relationship between learner & information (IL phenomena)
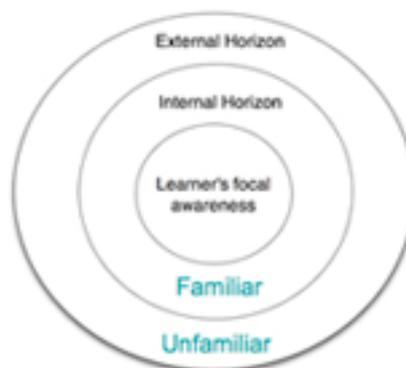
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FILE and the Relational model of Information Literacy

A detailed examination of the pedagogical rationale underpinning FILE goes beyond the scope of this paper. Here it suffices to note that the course adopted the relational model of information literacy, focusing on the awareness of the complex learner-information relationship and promoting reflective information practice. (Bruce, 1997; Lupton, 2004; Edwards, 2007, Bruce et al, 2007; Hughes et al, 2007 and Andretta, 2007). In FILE the relational model was based on three specific strategies: the use of a diagnostic test to establish the participants' needs and competences (Andretta, 2005), the formulation of learning outcomes that require the active production of information (Whitworth, 2007; Williams et al, 2007) and the employment of an iterative learning approach that encourages reflective practice (Hughes et al, 2007; Andretta, 2008 in press).

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Outline of FILE

To ensure that the course is underpinned by rigorous quality assurance, FILE is accredited as a 20 credit postgraduate module by London Metropolitan University. In consultation with LHL the FILE coordinator (also author of this paper) has devised the following learning outcomes for the course:

1. Identify diverse information literacy requirements of the users they support

2. Develop a learning strategy that appropriately addresses the needs of a targeted group of users

3. Facilitate a range of information literacy activities

4. Reflect on the process and the impact of information literacy practice on their professional development

These outcomes are fully mapped onto formative and summative assessment strategies driving the development of a portfolio which consists of five distinct components. A full outline of these components, and the schedule underpinning the delivery of FILE are available in a document found on the FILE homepage.[7] Here the components are summarised to illustrate how they map onto the learning outcomes of the course:

- *Component 1:* Professional Development targets. The participants produce a CPD profile at the beginning of the course to establish their initial expectations of FILE, and set a frame of reference to evaluate its impact on completion (Learning Outcome 4).

- *Component 2:* Group-based presentation using PowerPoint. This assignment focuses on the development of an information literacy strategy to target the information needs of a selected user group. The targeted audience is derived from the user populations found in the health sector (home care workers, NHS support staff, clinical researchers, or a subgroup of perioperative staff, such as Surgeons, Clinical staff, Theatre Nurses, OPDs, Modern Matrons and staff Nurses) (Learning Outcome 1).

- *Component 3:* Individual presentation of the information literacy programme using PowerPoint. Further practice of audience profiling is done at individual level, where participants devise an information literacy programme for a group of health practitioners (this group of users is different from the one covered in the team presentation) (Learning Outcome 2).

- *Component 4:* Implementation of a training session where participants are required to run one of the activities included in the information literacy programme devised for the previous component, testing the effectiveness of this activity on the FILE cohort (Learning Outcome 3).

- *Component 5:* Overall evaluation of FILE and professional targets achieved by the end of the course in May 2007. Here the participants run an information literacy session at their place of work and for a targeted group of users. Reflection on the impact of this session, together with the overall evaluation of FILE conclude the portfolio (Learning Outcome 4).

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[7] http://www.ilit.org/file/files/fileoutline.doc (Accessed 29 January 2007).

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ICT resources available & reflections on their use
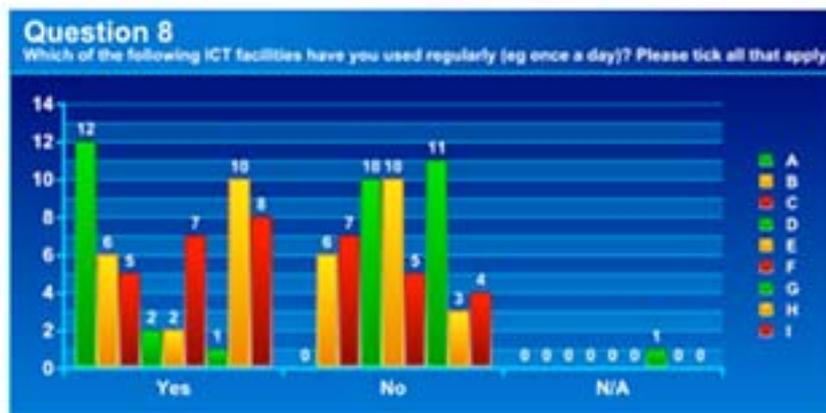
A: FILE website (12 out of 13)
G: Posted messages to blog (1 out of 13)

ICT resources available and reflection on their use

The responses for question 8 of the evaluation survey, displayed in the table below, show that all but one of the participants consulted the FILE website on a daily basis (12 out of 13). This is not surprising given that the website provides access to the documentation used to deliver the course, conveniently locating on one page the online resources that the participants needed or wanted to use.

Question: 8. Which of the following ICT facilities have you used regularly (eg once a day)? Please tick all that apply.	Yes	No	N/A
A. FILE website	12	0	1
B. Archive FILE sources folder	6	6	1
C. Archive FILE resources folder	5	7	1
D. Existing Online survey examples	2	10	1
E. Creating an Online survey	2	10	1
F. Blog – checked posting by others	7	5	1
G. Blog – posted my own messages	1	11	1
H. email FILE tutor	10	3	0
I. email other FILE participants	8	4	1

Email correspondence with the tutor (10 out of 13) and with each other (8 out of 13) also feature as regular occurrences, indicating a reliance on the familiar electronic communication channels as an effective and timely means for online tutorials, or as a way of establishing a virtual community of practice. A participant sums this up by stating that: *"I found feedback from the tutor particularly helpful and this was always really quick too. It was also really useful to maintain contact with other FILE participants between classes to share ideas."*[8]

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[8] All the quotes presented in italic are extracts from the FILE evaluation survey.

Other resources available from the FILE website, include facilities such as the archived sources[9] containing details of relevant papers in short or full text formats; the FILE archived information literacy resources[10] consisting of already available tutorials on the Internet that the participants could customise to suit their current practice and complete the assessed portfolio; examples of evaluation surveys created by the FILE tutor with Free Online Surveys.com,[11] as well as the opportunity to access this resource to create their own surveys; and the FILE blog as a source of information and a communication tool to share their ideas with the rest of the group.
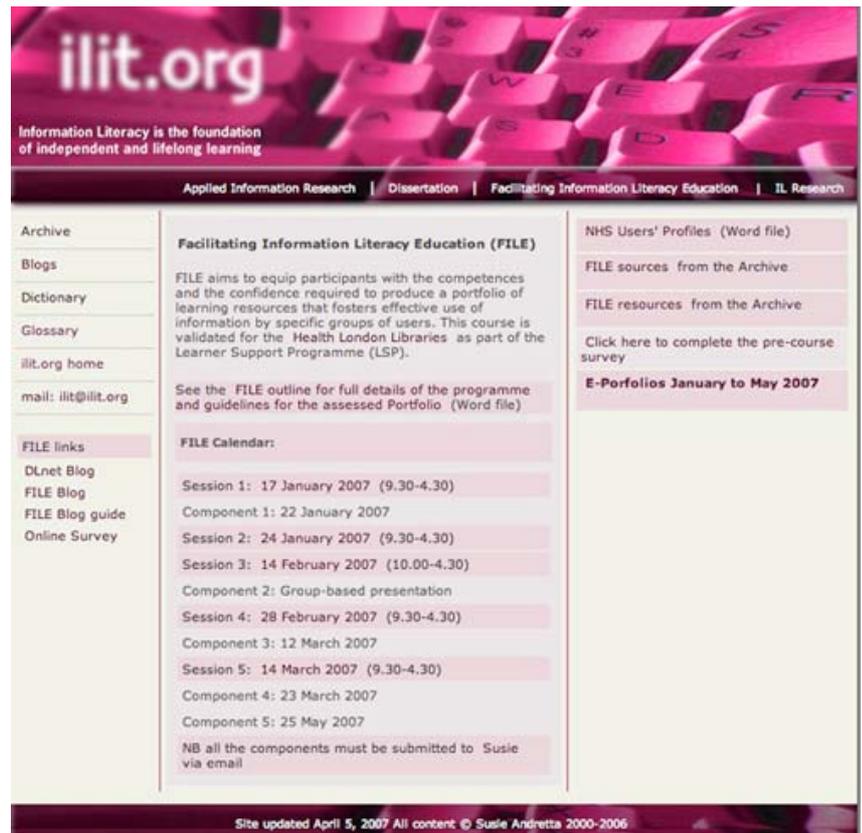
Some of the facilities remained largely unexploited, such as posting a message to the blog and the use of the online survey (including both options of looking at examples and creating their own). Question 9 sheds some light on the reasons as to why the majority of the participants did not interact with the blog in the way that it was originally intended, ie as an active communication tool. Here respondents were asked to elaborate on the technical difficulties they encountered with any of the options listed in question 8 and, as expected, the FILE participants raise problems with setting up their own account in order to become members of the Blog's team and post messages for dissemination. The change-over from the beta testing version of the blog to the full version compounded this problem, as the participants who had joined the beta version had to re-register with the new version (which is Google based), leaving some unable to transfer the account and take full advantage of this facility. When this occurred the participants recurred to more familiar technological modes of communication: *"I had problems with the Blog due to the changeover to Google, so I was never able to interact with my colleagues. However I was able to contact them by email if necessary, so this was not a major problem."* The difficulties

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[9] The FILE sources and resources are stored in an archive developed by this author using FURL (File URL), available at: http://www.furl.net/members/janus_sa?enc=UTF-8&search=browse&sort=&dir=&pos=&keyword=&date=0&x=45&y=16&category=1410719 (Accessed 2 April 2007).

[10] http://www.furl.net/members/janus_sa?enc=UTF-8&search=browse&sort=&dir=&pos=&keyword=&date=0&x=33&y=8&category=859839 (Accessed 2 April 2007).

[11] http://freeonlinesurveys.com/welcome.asp (Accessed 2 April 2007).

encountered by the participants could be attributed to the fact that blogs are seen as a new technology which has not yet been integrated in their everyday practice. In addition, the fact that participants could rely on email as a more familiar and effective mode of communication undermined the need to use the blog to share ideas. As a result, they did not persevere beyond the initial difficulties encountered when joining the blog.

Feedback shows that the importance of presenting blog technology as a way of enhancing communication and reflection is not enough to ensure use. To provide the appropriate incentive required to overcome the unfamiliarity of this medium interaction with the blog must be integrated in the assessment strategies of the course. Evidence of blog's use was not made an assessment requirement during the first delivery of FILE, and this was a deliberate decision based on the assumption that not all the FILE participants would be familiar with this mode of communication. The feedback from the evaluation survey illustrates that this original assumption was correct, and that the course was challenging enough without tying the assessment to the use of a new technology. It is clear that to fully integrate blog technology in the learning experience of the participants, future deliveries of FILE will need to be preceded by an induction to this facility.

Similarly to the blog, the online survey software was unfamiliar to the cohort before the course started. However, in this case widespread interaction was ensured by linking the completion of two surveys to two assessment components, generating a 100% response rate in both instances. The first survey[12] was implemented prior to the course (December 2006) in the form of a diagnostic questionnaire. Here individual results were used by the participants as the basis for reflection of their expectations of FILE included in Component 1. The second survey, at the end of the taught part of FILE (March 2007), was completed to generate feedback on the course, and also to determine whether the participants' initial expectations had been fulfilled by the end of the taught provision. This latter aspect was used as the starting point for Component 5. On the other hand, interaction with the online survey facility as a way of evaluating their own practice (both in terms of exploring existing examples or creating their own surveys) was rare as only 2 out of 13 participants accessed it regularly. Although, in the case of creating a survey such a lack of use was due to the fact that the participants had very little time to become familiar with the software to integrate it in the evaluation strategy required for Component 4. It is expected that the majority of the participants will be employing an online evaluation strategy for Component 5, as that they have two months to complete this assignment which should give them sufficient time to become familiar with Free Online Surveys.com.

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[12] http://freeonlinesurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?sid=n1cv568kep1cj2t240701 (Accessed 2 April 2007)

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ICT enhancing Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

- Design principles to enhance the message
- Iterative process led to more confident presentations
- Sharing of 'tips' to expand/confirm the communicative strategies

ICT enhancing CPD

Question 10 of the evaluation survey asked the participants whether their competence in presenting to an audience had been enhanced by the use of PowerPoint underpinning the delivery of components 2 to 4.   The responses point to an overwhelming increase in confidence thanks to the adoption of competent design and presentation techniques in their practice: *"My confidence at presenting to audiences has increased, as has my knowledge of how to structure PP slides so that they are informative and interesting but not to distracting. I also have more of an awareness of how to design them taking into account issues such as font colour and size."* The effective use of design principles is associated with a much clearer message: *"The feedback received from the tutor and participants helped me to enhance the clarity of my presentations in relation to maintaining a balance between readability and content coverage, maintaining eye contact and consistent use of font type and size demonstrating good practice in slide design."*

In addition, practice with PowerPoint seems to address the needs of participants who are new to this medium "*My competence in presenting has been enhanced by use of PowerPoint because I had not previously prepared my own presentations.*" Although, even those who had used the software before the course found that the iterative approach adopted by FILE, and complemented by reflective feedback on their performance, dispelled any professional insecurity, leading to a more confident future practice: "*Yes, I now feel a lot more confident. I don't think I was necessarily lacking ability before the course, but I wasn't very confident and felt that I came across as unsure. However, doing the presentations has shown me, through other's feedback and the video, that I come across well and this will definitely help me in future.*"

Furthermore, the sharing of PowerPoint's 'tips' meant that the participants were able to acquire alternative methods of presentations that enhanced their communicative repertoire: *"[..] it has been very very useful to see how my colleagues have chosen to use it as well. I go away with many ideas to put into practice."* Or simply reassured them of the effectiveness of their existing techniques: *"I have used PP regularly in the past and the course confirmed that my technique is OK."*

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Media technology promoting confident facilitation

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the presentations for Component 3 were video recorded and watched by the whole group with the intention of providing detailed peer and tutor-based feedback on the performance and the clarity of the content. Overall the impact of video recording this activity was extremely positive, and participants were pleasantly surprised about the confidence they exuded during the recorded presentations, thus assuaging any initial fears of performing badly: *"[seeing the recorded presentation] has increased my confidence as I found I am not as bad a presenter as I thought."* Similarly, expectations of poor performance mainly due to nerves, was dispelled by further reflection and feedback on the recordings: *"[..] I realised I didn't seem too nervous even though I was feeling it, and the positive feedback from colleagues was confidence inducing."* Confident delivery was also associated with an active engagement with the audience which, in turn, led to enhanced professional gravitas: *[I] came across as / looked more confident than [I] felt. Surprised by how well articulated, clear, easy to follow it was. Increased confidence that audience would take me seriously because I appeared to have credibility."*

Watching the recorded presentations also had a positive impact on the participants' reflective practice, highlighting the areas they needed to work on and the communicative competences they could be confident about: *"[..] although I did not particularly like to watch myself presenting, it helped me to note points of my strengths and weaknesses in giving that presentation."* Only in one case the video recording had the opposite effect of undermining the presenter's confidence making her realise that her performance was not up to the standard she had expected: *"Seeing myself actually made me loose confidence for a while."* However, it should be noted that even in this case subsequent performance during the completion of Components 4 and 5 showed substantial improvement in the confidence of her delivery.

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Overall impact of ICT and other media on FILE's participants:

- *Individual*: increased confidence as facilitators of IL (evidence-based advocacy of IL)

- *Collective*: established a virtual information literacy community of practice

Overall impact of ICT and other media

If used appropriately ICT (and other technologies) can emancipate information professionals as the feedback by the FILE participants has shown. Here the benefits they experience are manifested at both individual and collective levels. In the former individual participants arrive at the realisation of their own competences as information literacy facilitators, where being FIT leads to a blended facilitation of information literacy and independent/lifelong learning. While collectively, FILE fosters the establishment of a supportive community of practice that enables the sharing of resources and ideas, face-to-face and virtually, thus enhancing the participants' professional identity. This is a crucial factor that helps to emphasise the value of FILE by promoting evidence-based advocacy of information literacy amongst educators, users and organisations in order to embed the information literacy policy within the educational and CPD agendas.

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