**MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY**

**Introduction**

Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.

**Purpose and Scope**

Information and Media Literacy (IML) enables people to interpret and make informed judgments as users of information and media, as well as to become skillful creators and producers of information and media messages.

IML is a combination of information literacy and media literacy. The purpose of being information and media literate is to engage in a digital society; one needs to be able to use, understand, inquire, create, communicate and think critically. It is important to have capacity to effectively access, organize, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms. The transformative nature of IML includes creative works and creating new knowledge; to publish and collaborate responsibly requires ethical, cultural and social understanding.

Empowerment of people through information and media literacy is an important prerequisite for fostering equitable access to information and knowledge, and building inclusive knowledge societies.

**Why is Information Literacy Important?**

The definition of an **information literate person** extends beyond school and application to academic problems--such as writing a research paper--and reaches right into the workplace. Information literacy is also important to effective and enlightened citizenry, and has implications that can impact the lives of many people around the globe.

The ability to use information technologies effectively to find and manage information, and the ability to critically evaluate and ethically apply that information to solve a problem are some of the hallmarks of an information literate individual. Other characteristics of an information literate individual include the spirit of inquiry and perseverance to find out what is necessary to get the job done.

We live in the Information Age, and "**information**" is increasing at a rapid pace. We have the Internet, television, radio, and other information resources available to us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, just because so much information is so easily and quickly available does not mean that all of it is worthwhile or even true.

Because of resources like the Internet, finding high-quality information is now harder than ever, not easier! Finding the good stuff is not always quick! And the good stuff does not always come cheaply, either! (In short, to make it in today's Information Age, you have to be even smarter--not dumber--than your typewriter-schlepping predecessors!)

To make matters worse, just because you know how to use a information technology today does not mean that there is not another one right behind it that you will have to learn how to use tomorrow! Once seemingly exotic technologies like "**word processing**" and "**electronic mail**" are now common place, but at one time, they were amazing and revolutionary. (To some of us, they still are).

Today's employers are looking for people who understand and can adapt to the characteristics of the Information Age. If a student has "learned how to learn," upon graduation, they are a much more attractive job candidate. An information literate individual--with their strong analytical, critical thinking and problem-solving skills--can be expected to be an adaptable, capable and valuable employee, with much to contribute.

**Barriers to information and media literacy**

The barrier to learning to read is the lack of textbooks and novels while the barrier to learning IML is the lack of technology access. Highlighting the value of IML helps to identify existing barriers within the school infrastructure, the staff development, and the support systems. While there is a continued need to work on the foundations to provide a sustainable and equitable access, the biggest obstacle will be school climate.

Marc Prensky (2006, para. 25) identifies one barrier as teachers viewing digital devices as distractions by stating, “Let’s admit the real reason that we ban cell phones is that, given the opportunity to use them, students would vote with their attention, just as adults would ‘vote with their feet’ by leaving the room when a presentation is not compelling.”

The mindset of banning new technology, fearing all bad things that can and sometimes do happen can affect educational decisions. The decision to ban digital devices impacts students for the rest of their lives.

Any tool that is used poorly or incorrectly can be unsafe. Safety lessons are mandatory in Industrial Technology and Science. Yet safety or ethical lessons are not mandatory to use technology.

Not all decisions in schools are measured by common ground beliefs. One school district in Ontario banned digital devices from their schools. Local schools have been looking at doing the same. These kinds of reactions are often about immediate actions and not about teaching, learning or creating solutions. Many barriers to IML exist and we need to remove them.

Youth produced media is a distinct component of the information society. Most of the youth of the industrialized world are users of electronic media and – in some form or another – producers of media. They are as much creators of media content as they are consumers of media in the digital world. Recognizing and encouraging youth media is a fundamental part of media and information literacy.