

Journal of Integrated Information Management

Vol 5, No 1 (2020)

Jan-June 2020



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*Christos Chrysanthopoulos, Alexandros Koulouris,
Dimitrios Kouis, Foteini Efthymiou*

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To cite this article:

Chrysanthopoulos, C., Koulouris, A., Kouis, D., & Efthymiou, F. (2024). The application of the PLUS model in a prison library: An information literacy microteaching. *Journal of Integrated Information Management*, 5(1), 13–19. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/jiim/article/view/37880>

The application of the PLUS model in a prison library: an information literacy microteaching

Christos Chrysanthopoulos^{1,2}, Alexandros Koulouris², Dimitrios Kouis², Foteini Efthymiou²

¹ University of Patras (GR), Department of History-Archaeology

² Department of Archival, Library & Information Studies, University of West Attica, Athens,
chrysan@eie.gr [ORCID: 0000-0001-9900-1342], akoul@uniwa.gr [ORCID: 0000-0002-4011-2678],
dkouis@uniwa.gr [ORCID: 0000-0002-5948-9766], feuthim@uniwa.gr [ORCID: 0000-0002-7970-0856]

Article Info

Article history:

Received 2 May 2020

Received in revised form 20 May 2020

Accepted 30 May 2020

<https://doi.org/10.26265/ijim.v5i1.4426>

Abstract:

Purpose – This article aims to detail a plan for the application of the PLUS information literacy model in the context of a prison library. A brief overview of the literature will highlight the importance of (co-)developing activities based on multiple models and learning theories. At the same time, the article argues in favour of the idea that the implementation of information literacy programmes in the context of excluded and socially vulnerable groups can substantially help to improve their self-image and their smooth integration within the restrictive walls of the prison, as well enhancing their capability of returning to society and functioning as law-abiding members.. This will be followed by a presentation of the steps for implementing such a work plan in a prison library, with the aim of helping second chance school learners prepare a presentation on racism. The article is based on an assignment prepared for the “Information Literacy” course at the Department of Archival, Library & Information Studies, during the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Design/methodology/approach - The research hypothesis for the project is situated within the context of a prison library. There, the educator teaching the subject of Sociology (Social Literacy) at the Second Chance School (SCS), will express their wish that each learner prepares a presentation - on the subject of discrimination (e.g. gender, political beliefs, religion, social exclusion, minorities, etc.). To this end, the educator will propose that learners seek guidance from the librarian on a topic pertinent to the concept of discrimination (racism). The approach followed by learners when preparing their presentation will be based on the PLUS model of information literacy. Subsequently, the steps taken by the librarian will be presented to them, and their choices will be justified on the basis of the literature concerning the design of learning processes. Methodologically, the study is based on the synthesis of fundamental theories of adult education with the PLUS information literacy model.

Findings - The development of work plans in an informational organisation environment, inspired by microteaching, can serve as a good example for promoting the application of informational models to their operation and services. This article, presenting every

step of this process, can serve as a pilot for the application of a work plan by educators and information scientists.

Originality/value - There are few examples of applications of informational models in educational processes for socially vulnerable or excluded groups. This article also enhances awareness on issues pertaining to libraries and education within prisons not just in Greece, but also abroad. Let us not forget that, in the 21st century, there still exist countries in which the human rights to education and information for detained people are still being violated.

Index Terms — Information Literacy, Information Literacy Models, PLUS model, Adult Education, Prison Libraries.

I. INTRODUCTION

The need for knowledge and information is long-standing and perpetual. All societies throughout history have developed ways to produce and communicate information which is essential for various processes and needs for socialisation and survival in communities. In late capitalist society, where technologies, sciences, and the internet have taken a central role in people's lives, information is of utmost importance. Given the enormous volume of information each person is confronted with on a daily basis, and given their educational, cultural, and awareness level, the cultivation of skills for identifying, retrieving, evaluating, analysing, and using key information from the early stages of formal education is essential. Described in basic terms, this entire field is dominated by information literacy and gradually, over the past few years- is being shaped into a dynamic field of research and technological development, that of Information Science.

Beginning with the introduction of the concept of “information literacy” in the United States of America in 1974, there have been several different attempts to define it. The rapid evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) may have also contributed to this. Briefly browsing through definitions in the field it is revealed that “informational education”/“critical information literacy” is concerned with the recognition, identification, evaluation, and use of information, while also it includes the field of lifelong learning, individual empowerment, and promotion of social integration and welfare internationally [1].

The development of various programmes of information literacy, combined with the need for timely information, have led to the creation and implementation of specific models of information literacy such as Big 6 Skills, Bruce's Seven Faces of Information Literacy, Research Cycle, Focus on Research, SAUCE, PLUS, SCONUL, etc. Clearly, both the development of these models and the selection of a model of implementation by information scientists or educators is carried out within a specific frame of reference which includes population groups (e.g. pupils, students, community, vulnerable group(s), etc), conditions (place, time, facilities), and needs (education, training, information, etc.), with varying levels of effectiveness [2]. Certainly, information literacy models are not a one-way street for education neither they are considered educational models themselves. Since, there are many different teaching and learning theories that have as their starting point either the education or information science, when an information literacy model is combined with them, it may lead to an efficient, information related pedagogical approach [3].

The case study presented in this article concerns the application of the PLUS model of information literacy skills in the context of a library functioning inside a prison. PLUS was developed in Scotland by James Herring, who specialises in informational education and who led the department of Information Management at Queen Margaret University in Scotland. He retired in 2012 from Charles Sturt University, where he taught. The model he developed categorises the process of information skills training into four main pillars: a) Purpose, b) Location, c) Use, and d) Self-evaluation. PLUS emphasises reflecting and evaluation skills. The steps do not have to follow each other linearly, while it is also possible to return to a previous step when needed. The structure and analysis of the four information skill pillars will be presented below, in the section discussing the case study in detail [4], [5].

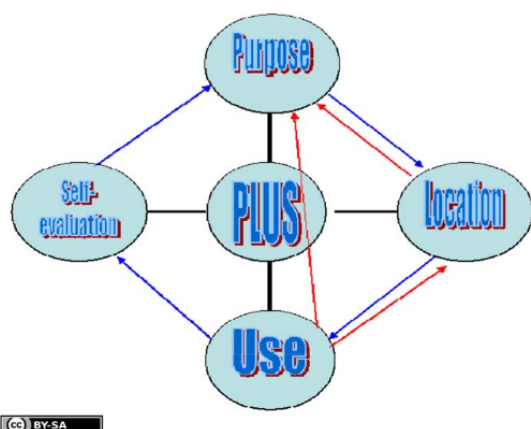


Figure 1. Purpose Location Use Self- Evaluation Model [6]

The article is entitled by the term “microteaching”.

Microteaching is a common educational technique for teaching “how to teach” other peers with planning and presenting a lesson [7]. Inspired by these educational practice, we proposed an applied education plan about “teaching” our peers for information literacy models.

II. PRISONS, LIBRARIES AND ADULT EDUCATION

The deprivation of liberty in prisons for people who commit illegal acts is a means of punishment for them as well as an example to avoid for other citizens [8]. Through the centuries, the methods and policies, used by those in power to impose punishment for illegal behaviors, and the very concepts of “illegality” or “crime” are constantly shifting, creating a field historically rich in debate and criticism.

Western societies paid much attention to the issue of inmate education in prisons, chiefly during the time of abolition of corporal punishment and torture, both of which were common practices prior to the 19th century [9]. The reintegration of former prisoners into society was closely linked to education and began, over time, to be considered a fundamental right for prisoners [10]. At the end of the 18th century, three initial attempts at prisoner education began, but certainly, far removed from the practical and conceptual content of prison education today [11]. The late 19th and early 20th century are defined by intense efforts to systematise and develop a consistent policy of education programmes for adult prisoners, steadily focusing on social integration and the minimisation of repeat offending [12]. Adult education in prisons continued to gain ground in the West during the 1970s a trend that was adopted by many countries. The United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries, and the United States pioneered this shift, along with a series of international and European guidelines and legislation [13], [14]. The key concern underpinning the implementation of education in prisons was the universal right of inmates to equal opportunities to multi-dimensional personal development and the opportunity to education.¹

It is easy to identify the relevant reference to education in prisons by the Council of Europe, which states, among other things:

*“All prisoners shall have access to education, which is envisaged as consisting of classroom subjects, vocational education, creative and cultural activities, physical education and sports, social education and library facilities”.*²

This recommendation is significant for this article, specifically because it refers to the right of prisoners to the use of a library, which will be discussed below.

In Greece, the right to an education is enshrined in Article 16 of the Greek constitution, while the penal code and applicable provisions determine the way in which prisoners can access education. The history of prisoner education in Greece will not be presented here, nor will there be any

¹ United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10: 1966.

² “Education in Prison”, Council of Europe Recommendation, No. R (89) 12: 1990.

extensive reference to the various educational opportunities in and out of prison, but it is important to note that the responsibility for this area is shared between the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, via the Secretariat General for Lifelong Learning, together with the Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, the qualifications offered are equivalent to the different levels of education attainable via typical and non-typical routes outside of prisons.

In Greece, the founding and operation of Second Chance Schools (SCS) in prisons began in Larisa in 2004, and is an innovative and substantive practice for the reintegration of prisoners. SCS within prisons operate with the same educational and learning goals as outside of prison. There are currently 68 SCS in Greece, 12 of which operate within prisons [15].

As previously mentioned, one of the rights of prisoners is to use the library and to have a life of dignity. It could be argued that the operation of libraries within prisons follows the evolution of the penal system and the provision of education within it. In the United States, the first adequately organised prison libraries were created in the 19th century, while during the 20th century, this was promoted as a key goal [16]. The United States, Canada, England, and the Scandinavian countries pioneered both prison education and library use, and provide an organized library system similar to that outside of prisons.

In Greece, the first prison library was created during the 1990s at the Youth Prison in Kassaveteia, Volos [17]. However, despite relevant legislative provisions, studies have shown that there is a gap in the development of policies, specialised staff, and funding [18].

III. THEORETICAL FRAME (THE BASE OF THE PROJECT)

Learners at the SCS of a prison are instructed by the educator for “social literacy” to each prepare a presentation on issues of racism. The entirety of the project takes place in a prison library, with the support of a librarian. The design of the study in the library is project-based, as there is evidence that this method, in the context of SCS, promotes substantive collaboration between educators and learners and offers a range of techniques which may foster the development of learning goals, as part of an educational process. Moreover, this method is considered a best practice both within and outside of SCS, because it complements the work being done in the classroom [19].

For the purpose of this study, the literature suggests three main theories of learning which have influenced the development of educational models: a) Andragogic (Malcolm Knowles); b) Social Change (Paulo Freire); and c) Transformative Learning (Jack Mezirow) [20]. It is clear that the learning process in adult education has been mainly influenced by the principles of behaviourism and constructivism. In every scientific field, there is usually a wide-ranging debate and criticism and as expected the aforementioned theories have also been criticized, both in terms of conceptual approach and practice [21]. The proposed implementation plan utilises Paulo Freire’s theory

of Social Change, due to the fact that it mainly addresses excluded and vulnerable groups. This theory consists of three stages: a) research (identifying and naming the problem), b) topic (analyzing the causes of the problem) and c) reflection (finding solutions to the problem) [22]. In addition, the work plan for the information literacy programme in the prison library makes use of the fundamental principles of empirical learning theories, such as that by Peter Jarvis specifically the theoretical assumption that the learning process for each individual begins from a state of conflict, when the learner is confronted with a new experience [23], [24]. The educational plan that will be described below follows the logic structure of the Plus Model, taking into consideration various elements which these three aforementioned theories propose.

Lastly, in Second Chance Schools, the subject of sociology is part of “social literacy” and is taught with a view to respond to the needs of learners, so that they can understand social phenomena, while equally important is their significant social experience as adults [25]. In this context, racism is a multifaceted phenomenon which creates social conflict; therefore, it is essential that it is being studied as part of SCS programmes [26].

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT IN THE PRISON LIBRARY

The proposed implementation plan includes activities which are interrelated and introduce workflows which permeate or circle back, as in Herring’s illustration (Figure 1). The activities/stages creatively intermingle over the course of the project and each one forms a basis for transition to the other (Figure 2).

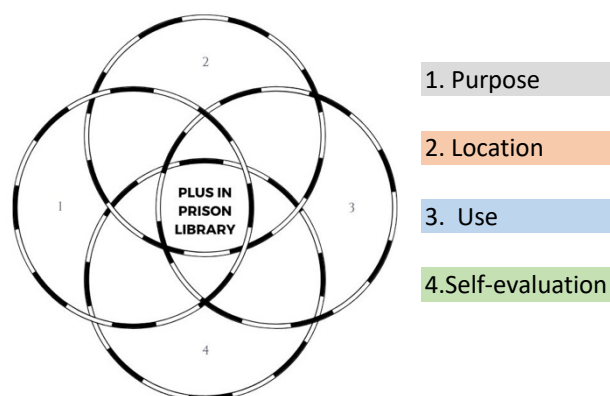


Figure 2. PLUS in the Prison Library

Details of the structure, skills, goals, and information questions covered by the library activity in prison, as mapped to the PLUS framework by Herring [27], are depicted at the tables below (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4).

Firstly, librarian will meet before the project with the “social literacy” educator for a briefing about the curriculum content and the educational scope of learners visit at the library. This collaboration is very important for the effective and sustainable learning outcomes [28]. Then, Learners will come to the library space and sit in a circle together with

the librarian. After a short introduction about the library and the purpose of their visit, participants will be asked to briefly introduce themselves. Introductions contribute significantly to the cultivation of trust between learners and the librarian, and also help the librarian identify basic social and learning characteristics which will aid in the development of the information literacy project. Moreover, the aim of the visit will be made clear, similarly to a learning contract, so that all trainees may participate equally in the process. The introduction will last ten minutes.

Following the above introduction, the first stage will be brainstorming and planning for the assignment. With the guidance of the librarian, participants will brainstorm ideas for defining racism and will present personal experiences of this issue. At this point, it is expected that a shared experience will be identified, that of social exclusion because of delinquent behaviour and incarceration. In addition, it is expected that, especially among certain groups of prisoners (e.g. Roma, Albanians, etc.), yet more facets of racism will have been experienced. Certainly, it is essential that a critical discussion of these experiences will precede this stage, as it has been noticed that, in the context of educational processes, racism is either denied or presentation of experiences takes too long. Participants will then be split into groups of three, based on their different experiences. This means that each group will comprise of people with different experiences, so that they can discuss this multi-faceted phenomenon), according to their personal experiences of racism and to present the similarities, differences, and consequences of racism to the entire group. Following these presentations to the entire group, the aim of and the questions on racism will be defined and each learner will be asked to create a presentation. At the same time, through discussion, it is possible that the complexity of defining racism will be brought to the fore. This first stage is expected to last 25 minutes.

PLUS Structure / Educational Plan Stage	
1. Purpose / Introduction - First Stage of the Project	
Skills / Aims	Questions
Knowledge skills for defining the topic and identifying pre-existing knowledge	How is the concept of racism defined?
	What pre-existing knowledge is there on racism?
Thinking and reflection skills using brainstorming	How do I present my personal experience(s) on the topic?
	What can I learn from my fellow learners and their experiences of racism?
Skills for formulating questions	What questions do I have about racism?
Skills for sourcing information from print and electronic materials	Where can I find information on racism in the library and online?

Table 1. Purpose / Introduction - First Stage of the Project

The second stage involves activities making use of library facilities. Learners will be once more split into two groups, and will seek information on their topic, under the guidance of the librarian. The first group will seek information from a total of 25 different books placed by the librarian on a table. Some of these books will be about racism, while some will not be irrelevant to the subject. Learners will be asked to understand -from the books' titles, summaries, prefaces or introductions- whether the sources are relevant and useful for preparing their presentation. At the same time, the second group will carry out a search for online sources, initially on Google, and, after they have identified at least ten websites on the topic of racism, they will visit the library blog -already created by the librarian-, which will direct them to specific websites with related information. After comparing the sources which they will have identified to the sources provided by the librarian, they will be asked to select the ones which will be useful for their presentation. Each team will be given 15 minutes to complete the process and then ten minutes to present to the entire group the materials they will have identified, as well as the reasons for selecting the ones they will use. The librarian will coordinate them and will ask questions on the assumptions made by each group. This second stage is expected to last a total of 25 minutes.

PLUS Structure / Educational Plan Stage	
2. Location / Introduction - Second Stage of the Project	
Skills / Aims	Questions
Skills for using the library space, accessing information through the catalogue, in books, indexes, and online	How will I look for the information I need?
	Which keywords will I use in my search?
Skills for selecting and evaluating the relevance of information sources to informational needs	Does the material I identified cover my needs, in terms of content, accuracy, validity, language?
	Is it useful for my questions?
IT and internet use skills	How do I access a search engine?
	How can the library website/blog help me?

Table 2. Location / Introduction - Second Stage of the Project

After a 10-minute break, followed by an overview of the work done up to this point, the team, guided by the librarian, will proceed to the third stage, which involves the composition of an individual presentation by each participant. After having learned about different types of

information sources and the ways in which useful and reliable sources can be identified, each learner will then be asked to identify additional sources and to prepare a presentation, which is the central task of this project. Using a behaviourist approach, learners will be able to refer to the library blog for a model presentation plan, which can be used as a guide. The librarian will be present in the room during that time and will address any issues or questions which may arise from the individual work of each learner. In more detail, a best practice educational model that derives from behaviorism is the following: (a) Entrance to teaching - Informing learners about what they will learn (in this case how to make a presentation), as a product of mandatory consensus; (b) Continuation of teaching - Presentation of the lesson step by step with speech, pictures, maps, experiments, blueprints, and mainly the library blog. Use of many examples, so that through the accumulation comes the "cognitive explosion". Provide explanations of how and why with the help of examples; (c) Folding of teaching - Repetition with the use of the learning hierarchy (learning, retention, discrimination, generalization). Checking the retention of knowledge with closed questions; (d) Exit from teaching - Practice with identical exercises, such as the initial one, without additional requirement and without parasites, immediate feedback and reinforcement [29]. The total time allocated to creating the presentation will be 45 minutes.

PLUS Structure / Educational Plan Stage	
3. Use / Second - Third Stage of the Project	
Skills / Aims	Questions
Reading skills and identification of specific information in print and electronic material	How can I quickly decide whether the information is useful?
	Where can I find needed information?
	How can I extract meaning from the source about my topic?
Skills for comprehending material	Do I have questions about the information I have found?
Skills for rejecting informational material	Is the material I have identified relevant to my topic?
Skills for evaluating the validity of informational material	Who is the author of the material?
	Is the information biased?
	Is the information outdated?
Skills for comprehension and use of the informational material and creating a presentation	What notes should I keep from the information I have gathered?
	How will I use the material in my presentation?

	Which method will I use to create the presentation?
Skills for knowledge synthesis	How will I synthesise the material with the questions and aims set for the presentation?
Writing and presentation skills	How do I structure a presentation?
	What style and way of writing will I use?

Table 3. Use / Second - Third Stage of the Project

Following a five-minute break, learners will move on to the fourth and final stage, which involves a (self-)evaluation of the process in the library. Each participant will present their experience to the group, explaining whether they found it useful and will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire with five closed questions, so that the librarian can receive feedback on the continuation and redesign of activities of this type. The total time for the last stage will be 15 minutes.

PLUS Structure / Educational Plan Stage	
4. Self-evaluation / Fourth Stage of the Project	
Skills / Aims	Questions
(Self-)evaluation skills, skills for recognising weak and strong points and points to improve	What have I learned through this process?
	Was it useful?
	Did it fulfil my motivations and aims?
	Did I prepare the presentation correctly?
	Did I use up-to-date and relevant information?
	What must I do differently next time?
	Can I do it on my own?
	How did I interact with the team?
	How did I interact with the library?
	How did I interact with the librarian?

Table 4. Self-evaluation / Fourth Stage of the Project

Once the process has been completed, the librarian will compile a report in the form of a descriptive evaluation of the project, which will be shared with an SCS educator. In this way educator can have an overview and an additional tool for discussion in class. After the learner's presentations at the classroom, the librarian along with the educator met again to debrief and evaluate together the project. The effective collaboration between them entails multiplier

benefits both for them and for their learners [30].

V. CONCLUSION

The substantial linkage of models of informational education with various learning theories and educational models can lead to the upgrade of both the educational process and service provision in an informational institution. In the case presented here, within a prison setting, learners in a second chance school visit the prison library and implement a project with the aim of creating a presentation on racism for the subject of "social literacy". The use of multiple tools and methodologies for the application of the PLUS information literacy model may bring about important changes among learners, not only in terms of information literacy, but also in terms of knowledge of and feelings towards using the library. The cultivation of a climate of acceptance and safety is a prerequisite for all of the above.

The contribution of the prison library to the wider set of policies exercised by the state -justice, education, society- is central, and has a pivotal role in the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills and more widely the information literacy of detainees (Figure 3). It is essential that, in Greece, modern policies with substantial state provision be developed on this issue, taking advantage of new technological developments and informational needs.



Figure 3. Prison Library and State Policies

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VII. AUTHORS



Christos Chrysanthopoulos is PhD candidate at the University of Patras (GR), Department of History-Archaeology (former Department of Cultural Heritage Management and New Technologies). His doctoral research focus on "Digital Public History". He is research fellow at the University of West Attica and at the National Hellenic Research Foundation. He obtained his BA in History (University of Thessaly-Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology) and he continued with a fast-track graduate entry for a second BA in Archival, Library and Information Studies (University of West Attica). He received a Master's Degree (M.Sc.) in Modern and Contemporary History (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences-Department of Political Science and History) and a Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Adult Education (Hellenic Open University-School of Humanities).



Alexandros Koulouris is Assistant Professor in the Department of Archival, Library & Information Studies at the University of West Attica. He has been involved in several European and national R&D projects in the field of information management (DELOS, EuropeanaLocal, Europeana, CrossCult).

From 2011, he actively participates in Europeana as a member of the Europeana Network Association. He is member of the Information Management laboratory at the University of West Attica. His research interests include information policy, digital libraries, repositories and open access. He has published more than 45 articles in journals and conferences. In the past, he has worked as a librarian for the National Technical University of Athens and for the National Documentation Centre of Greece. He holds a PhD in Information Science from Ionian University, a BA in Library Science from the Technological Educational Institute of Athens and a BA (Hon) in International and European Studies from Panteion University. More information can be found at <http://users.uniwa.gr/akoul>.



Dimitrios Kouis received his Diploma in Computer Engineering and Informatics from the University of Patras and his PhD from National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) in 1994 and 2004 respectively. His scientific interests

include Library Networks, Digital Publishing, Scholarly Communication topics, Software development, Content Management, IT middleware platforms, meta-data modelling etc. He has been involved in several European and national projects and has published more than 30 articles in journals and conferences. Currently, he is an assistant professor at the Department of Archival, Library and Information Studies, University of West Attica.



Foteini Eftymiou works as a Technical and Laboratory Staff at the Department of Archival, Library and Information Studies of the University of West Attica. She holds a bachelor degree in Librarianship from the Faculty of Management and Economics of the Technological Educational Institute of Athens (1998), a Master of Arts in Librarianship from the Information School of the Faculty of Social Sciences of The University of Sheffield in UK (2005). She worked as a librarian at the NTUA Central Library from 1999 until 2019 and she was the main coordinator of the library's IL Service. Also, she worked for the implementation of the Hellenic Academic Libraries Union Catalog, its interconnection to the Central Interlibrary Loan Software & Network "Iris", and for the implementation of the HEAL-Link "Advanced Services for Open Access Digital Libraries", from 2005 until 2013. She is a member of the Information Management Laboratory at the Department of Archival, Library & Information Studies of the University of West Attica. Her research interests include: Information & Media Literacy, Learning Theories, Bibliometrics.