Information Literacy in Austrian UNESCO Associated Schools

*A Project conducted by the Austrian Working Group on Information Literacy –
Member of the Austrian National Committee for IFAP*

I. Point of Departure

In order to better address challenges concerning „Information for All" at a national level, five working groups have been installed within the Austrian National Committee for IFAP in early 2009.

Within the **Working Group on Information Literacy** one issue quickly appeared to be of special concern: Information Literacy in schools. The Working Group was argueing that the application of the new media, particularly the use of the www, is highly demanded in schools but no training is offered in dealing with information. Drawn from personal and professional experiences, the working group assumed that also the child-oriented regulation of use neither seemed to be a reality in school nor at home.

Thus, the working group agreed to gain deeper insights by means of a short questionnaire.

The goal was to understand how kids conceptualize and operationalize research activities for school work and everyday life use and especially how they resolve issues of credibility and relevance in the digital age. Based on the results, the Working Group will then be able to bring into line future projects with concrete demands.

The Working Group relied on the definition of Information Literacy framed by the *International Working Group on Information Literacy* in their Terms of Reference.

The Austrian UNESCO Associated Schools were identified as a partner; presently this network encompasses a cross-section of all school types, representing a total of 75 schools. (60 within the ASP network, 15 candidate schools)

The questionnaires were aimed at three target groups: students, teachers and parents. Since the lens of the student experience was viewed central in the project, both a student and a teacher contributed to the preparation of the questions.

The questionnaire was sent out via email to the co-ordinators of the respective Associated Schools. It was up to the schools to print out the questionnaire and distribute it in class, to colleagues and parents.

Nobody at this early stage could guess the enormous success of the project.

II. Key findings

Approximately 650 questionnaires have been returned! So far, the project has had considerable impact and already was able to add to the awareness and the better understanding of information literacy. The students share in response was the largest (73%), followed by teachers (18%) and parents (9%).

The project results held some surprises:

- All target groups showed a great amount of confidence in the www as a source of credible information; the perceived reliability of content seems to heavily influence on the capacity to evaluate the quality of information.
- Most of the students in our sample demonstrated an absent consciousness regarding the ethical use of information; only 2% claimed to consistently indicate the source of information in their school work.
- The consultation of teachers and parents revealed that training for students in issues of information literacy is rudimentary both in class and at home; moreover, the answers displayed insecurities on both sides regarding the meaning of information literacy and proper education.

The results of the project have been presented by Gabriele Sauberer, chairperson of the Austrian National Committee for IFAP, on the occasion of the annual ASP meeting which took place in early November this year.

III. The Way Ahead

The unforeseen high response rate as well as the great interest in the subject, articulated by students, teachers, and parents alike, proves the relevance of the subject of information literacy in schools. The findings raise as many questions as they do provide answers.

On request of the schools it is envisaged to conduct a workshop on information literacy in the scope of the next ASP meeting in November 2010. The workshop will be organized and held by the Austrian National Committee for IFAP.

As the project results provide a snapshot of the standard of information literacy, the Working Group is planning to conduct more research and consult students, teachers, and parents on a regular basis.

The evaluation of the responses concludes the work in phase I of the project. A comprehensive report of the project findings has already been prepared (in German).

In the upcoming year the report will be issued, sponsored by the German publishing company Bertelsmann AG. This report will also include specific recommendations developed by the experts of the Working Group on the basis of the findings.