

# FORMIST : a Network to Help Training in Information Literacy in France

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is about the structure of user training in France. It sets out how FORMIST - an e-training network for Information literacy - contributes to its development by both gathering resources on its website and contributing to the expansion of user education while working with libraries and universities. FORMIST is a service of the French National Library and Information Sciences School (ENSSIB: Ecole Nationale Supérieure en Sciences de l'Information et des Bibliothèques).

First, I'll explain briefly the background of information literacy (IL) in France.

I will then point out the structure of user education in France today, and how it is organised in a three level system: local, regional and national.

In a third part, and this will be the main theme of this paper, I will focus on what FORMIST has to offer: a - French - website, but also the nucleus of a network.

## BACKGROUND OF TRAINING IN INFORMATION LITERACY IN FRANCE

Training students in information literacy is not something new in France. There have been numerous experiences and courses since university libraries exist. These classes were most of the time the result of a few dedicated persons and there were more and more of them in the late nineties.

What are the reasons leading to this implementation of IL in the French libraries landscape?

We must underline two major facts. First, the Ministry in charge of Higher Education observed a very high drop out rate from students attending the first year at the university. Almost 50% of them didn't pass on to the second year, and many of them dropped out and quit the university. This drop out rate was 44% in 2000-2001. The year 1997 represented a real turning point for information literacy in France, because the Minister for Higher Education decided to introduce new courses for first year students. It was applied by the order of April 9, 1997, called "Bayrou reform" by the name of the

Minister. The first semester of the first academic year became an orientation semester. It included three units; the last one called: unit of “Methodology of the University“ (Méthodologie du Travail Universitaire, MTU), representing 15 to 20 % of the semester’s schedule. This last unit major interest for information literacy. The aim of these classes was assisting in promoting the autonomy of students and supplying them with the methods and techniques useful in the pursuit of studies (how to prepare a bibliography, how to use libraries and new sources of information, how to take notes, etc.). The courses were obligatory for first year students. In some places oral or written skills were developed instead of IL courses but nevertheless this legislative opening offered a framework to introduce IL in the curriculum.

The second important fact is that, from that time on, the State gave financial support to libraries involved in user training. The office in charge of libraries at the Ministry of Education (Sous-Direction des Bibliothèques et de la Documentation) gives subsidies to those libraries that set up training in IL and work in collaboration with the faculty. The Ministry also supports the structures building up to multimedia pedagogical products. At the end of the 90’s, many courses were offered to students, particularly in the part of the French High Education system called “Grandes Ecoles”, but also at some universities. We could call those days the “pioneer time” (Bretelle-Desmazières, Coulon & Poitevin, 1999). A think-tank of experts - teachers and librarians - worked together and published in 1998 recommendations to set up user training (Former, 1998). At the end of the 90’s and the beginning of the year 2000, the extension of Internet and computer use led to the creation of different multimedia pedagogical resources, and of e-training. Students were offered to use them either during classes or in self-training. It was in this context, in 1997, that the Sous-Direction des Bibliothèques et de la Documentation decided to create a new service: FORMIST to gather all resources on user education. It was implemented at ENSSIB.

#### USER TRAINING TODAY: A 3 LEVEL SYSTEM

The French system is now quite organised and different structures are involved in information literacy today. We can distinguish a local, a regional and a national layer. Each of them is autonomous, but they all work in collaboration with each other.

##### *Local level in training in Information Literacy*

The local level is centred on university libraries and universities. Teachers and librarians train students. We must emphasize the fact that user education is not obligatory. This leads to various situations. Information literacy can be included in the schedule, or not. Some libraries offer 2 or 3 hours courses during which students have time to visit the library, or watch a presentation of the OPAC, while at other places training involves a 20 or 30-hour course with assessments. The public attending these trainings can also be

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different. In most universities, and because of the MTU order, almost every first year student is trained. The most involved instructors - or universities - can also offer courses to higher-level students, from 1<sup>st</sup> year to PhD students. We notice that at most places, people concentrate their efforts on one public. This is mostly a matter of means (staff, room availability, and funds). The last and central question to ask is “Who is training the students”? It can be teachers, librarians or both of them working in collaboration. This is the nicest scheme. So, there is a very large range of possibilities, the best one being: teachers and librarians training students together, with a large amount of teaching hours, training included in the curriculum, and covering 1<sup>st</sup> year to PhD, and the least attractive possibility: librarians training 1<sup>st</sup> year students in 2 or 3 hours without visibility in the curriculum.

#### *Regional level in training in Information Literacy*

At the regional level, one finds Regional Units for Training in Information (Unités Régionales de Formation à l'Information Scientifique et Technique, URFIST). The URFIST were created on an experimental basis in 1982. At that time their mission was to train library staff as well as the academic public (post-graduate students and teachers) in scientific and technical information seeking, and more generally to introduce them to new information technologies. There are only seven URFIST units for the entire French territory in comparison with the important need for Information literacy training. They now focus their mission on three main points

- The training of instructors. URFIST set up training essentially for information professionals, higher education teachers and post-graduate students. These individuals in turn, have to train other staff members.
- The setting up of cooperation networks within universities, even though academic libraries remain their major partner.
- The development of training tools (teaching aids, educational software etc.). These tools are designed to help instructors in their teaching tasks and may also be used by end-users (students). Those tools and resources can be found on each of their websites. They are gathered on FORMIST's website according to their themes or disciplines.

#### *National level in training in Information Literacy*

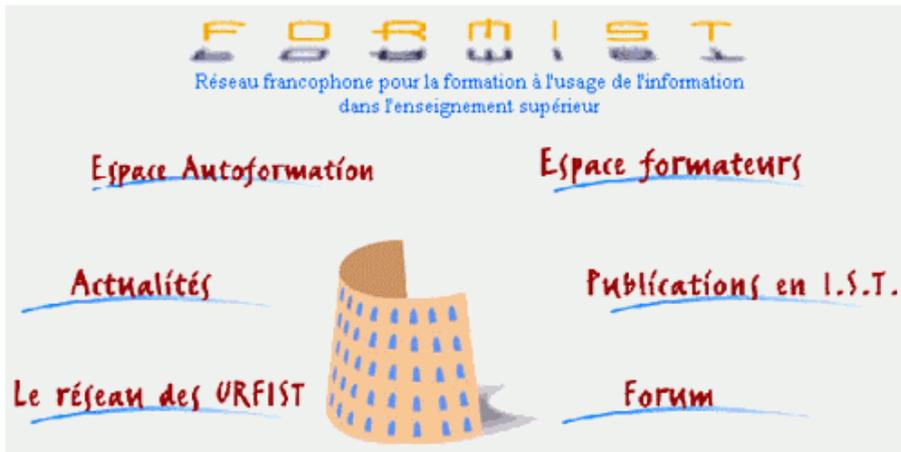
At the national level, one finds FORMIST which is a website gathering all types of documents about user education and information literacy. FORMIST is also the nucleus of a network in IL.

## THE FORMIST WEBSITE

The website started in 1999.

It is intended for two types of people:

- Students who can use FORMIST during IL courses or in self-training.
- Teachers - or rather instructors since they can be teachers, librarians, and PhD students. They use FORMIST to construct their courses, they also use it during classes, and they update their knowledge by consulting articles and publications about information literacy and pedagogy.



FORMIST is organised in 5 sections:

1. Autoformation – self-training
2. Formateurs - instructors
3. Publications en I.S.T. - publications about scientific and technical information
4. Actualités - current events
5. Réseau des URFIST – the URFIST network

FORMIST offers different types of documents: courses, tutorials, educational resources, short sheets on databanks or CD-ROMs, additionally articles about IL, pedagogical skills, new educational technologies, e-learning, projects or experiences in IL, and also

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colloquium announcements or acts on these subjects. Most of these documents are in html, but some are in Word or PowerPoint format.

These documents are produced by individual authors or within the framework of pedagogical projects.

Two librarians who are responsible for FORMIST select the documents and submit them to a publishing committee (Comité Editorial et Scientifique CES). The 14 members of the CES are teachers or librarians. They analyse the documents and decide whether they should be published on FORMIST or not. Sometimes the CES ask the authors to improve their documents before publishing. The comments of the CES are in the summary of the document. Another way to get documents on the website is when an author or anybody else who sees an interesting document proposes it to be published on the FORMIST homepage. They are then analysed by the CES. In self-training and instructor's sections, documents must be validated by the CES.

One can find two types of electronic publishing on FORMIST:

It gathers the recommendations from the think tank group that was presented earlier.

REPERES - Ressources Electroniques pour les Etudiants, la Recherche et l'Enseignement. This publication is a guide about the use of electronic resources information seeking.

To end this part about FORMIST as a website, I would add that it is a 4 year old site, using a Lotus Notes platform to allow a groupware work. It now needs updating. A new website is planned for 2004. It will aim at the same public, but with two different accesses. It will offer new contents, such as news reviews or a translation of the major articles on information literacy. It will be organised on a knowledge base and build up with different partners - such as the URFIST. Of course, all this needs funding from the Ministry of Education.

## FORMIST - THE NUCLEUS OF A NETWORK IN INFORMATION LITERACY

It is my point of view that FORMIST as network is as important as the FORMIST website. Both aspects are necessary, and they complement one another. The idea when FORMIST was created was that many people were doing the same things on their own, and that it would be worth sharing ideas, projects, resources about information literacy and working together. FORMIST attempts to add vitality to its monitoring and publishing role and also to animate a real teaching network. Its role is essential in the interchange of tools and experiences. From the beginning FORMIST's team participated

in working groups, round tables, workshops, conferences, both in France and in other countries.

Starting from 2001, FORMIST has organised an admission free conference once a year, for all those interested in information literacy: Rencontres FORMIST. The term 'rencontre' means 'meeting' in French. People attending this meeting come from different parts of France - and other European countries - and also from different types of establishments. These meetings are for instructors - either teachers or librarians - a means to make acquaintance with each other, to participate in 'think tanks', to contribute to the improvement of the website, and the possibility to contribute to the fulfilment of common projects. In 2001, the theme was "Building multimedia pedagogical projects in information literacy". In 2002 we looked at what happened to information literacy 5 years after the setting of the Methodology of the University and if this legislation helped user education to develop in France. Many experiences were shown. In 2003 the "Rencontres FORMIST" were about IL in Europe. The first part was about the impact of the Bologna agreement on our trainings, with the role of the European Union (EU) in this matter. Professor Carla Basili, from the Italian National Research Council presented a book she published, making a state of the art in IL in 14 of the 15 countries belonging to the EU (Basili, 2003). She was involved in creating a European network on Information Literacy (EnIL). The second part of the conference was about evaluation of information skills. The acts of the third "Rencontres" might be published in a printed book next spring, but some of the texts and presentations are on the website.

FORMIST is a service of ENSSIB, and the two librarians developing this service are also teachers. We are training future librarians and chief librarians to become instructors in information skills. This last task contributes to the extension of the network because the people who are attending classes in library schools today will be trainers at the university libraries tomorrow. All our students have at least a one-day class about IL and some of them attend a special session on this subject (Chevilotte, 2002).

## TO CONCLUDE

Training in Information literacy is quite developed and well organised in France today, and it is supported by a national policy. There are different structures working on this field and they work together. I must underline that we are considering new issues and we meet new challenges. The application of the Bologna agreement can give us an opportunity to include IL in the curricula in each European country. It should lead us to work more in partnership, first with other European countries, by joining ENIL, the European Network in Information Literacy. FORMIST belongs to this newly created network. As Professeur Eric Froment, the President of the European Universities Association, said when introducing our last Rencontres FORMIST: "All the changes

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universities are carrying through today should be in a European framework, the national level does not exist anymore“. We are also developing a network with our partners from Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec as members of a French-speaking area. Our first aim is to reach a common definition of IL and of its content. Since partnership was the theme of this 32d LIBER Congress, I'll end this paper by pointing out that when faculty and librarians work together information literacy will increase.

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4. *Former les étudiants à la maîtrise de l'information : repères pour l'élaboration d'un programme*. <http://formist.enssib.fr/reperes/>

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

Deuxièmes Rencontres FORMIST : travail universitaire et maîtrise de l'information : de la stratégie aux méthodes pédagogiques.  
<http://formist.enssib.fr/412567A000579660/VLSRW/140ED2795540989AC1256B41003A915D?OpenDocument&Langue=Français>

EnIL - European network on Information Literacy.  
<http://www.ceris.to.cnr.it/Basili/EnIL/index.html>

ENSSIB - Ecole Nationale Supérieure en Sciences de l'Information et des Bibliothèques.  
<http://www.enssib.fr/>

FORMIST - FORMation à l'Information Scientifique et Technique.  
<http://formist.enssib.fr/>

Premières rencontres FORMIST : les supports pédagogiques multimédia dans la formation des usagers - conception et utilisation.

<http://formist.enssib.fr/412567A000579660/VLSRW/76AA8BAE3A717DFEC1256A7200366A3F?OpenDocument&Langue=Francais>

Rencontres FORMIST.

<http://formist.enssib.fr/formist/IG00BaseREVUE.nsf/ListeRubriquesCaches/20010619112744>

REPERES - Ressources Electroniques pour les Etudiants, la Recherche et l'Enseignement. <http://repere.enssib.fr>

Troisièmes rencontres FORMIST : Formation à la maîtrise de l'information à l'heure de l'harmonisation européenne : problématiques et perspectives.

<http://formist.enssib.fr/412567A000579660/VLSRW/6792D8A810F16A03C1256D94004FFC92?OpenDocument&Langue=Francais>

URFIST - Unités Régionales de Formation à l'Information Scientifique et Technique.

<http://www.sup.adc.education.fr/bib/info.htm?85&Info/Format/Urfist/urfist.htm>