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Lessons from Forty Years as a Literacy Educator: An Information Literacy Narrative

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Abstract

This article summarizes the author's evolution as a writing instructor toward a career as a librarian teaching information literacy and finally as a scholar and researcher studying information literacy as an academic subject. Changes in writing pedagogy are explored as they relate to changes in the author's instructional practices and how they underlie an understanding of information literacy as a form of literacy practice closely related to writing. Questions about the future of information literacy under current management philosophy are presented.

Keywords

academic writing instruction; ACRL Standards; bibliographic instruction; critical librarianship; composition studies; information literacy; neoliberalism; new literacy studies; writing as process

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1. Toward a Literacy Narrative

'Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards' (Kierkegaard)
We are often told that our era differs from previous ones in significant ways. In our work lives, we are told that unlike our predecessors we will change jobs multiple times in our careers. Indeed, we may not be able to define a single 'career' but will, instead, refer to ourselves as having multiple careers. One reason literacy in our age is touted as such a public good relates to the flexibility implied in being literate or as we have come to understand it, having 'multiple literacies'. Information literacy is especially receptive to this narrative. People who are information literate have 'learned how to learn'. They therefore have the keys to taking on new roles, adapting to new environments. They quickly 'access the information needed' in assembling new knowledge about how to get things done, and they efficiently apply this information to solving problems. I have a theory that this narrative of multiple unrelated careers stitched together over time is only partially true. I believe that most people, having switched jobs in context over time, can in retrospect point to central threads of continuity. These threads may be at such a conceptually high level that they only appear through a backward gaze. I am one of these career switchers, having been through multiple jobs and contexts over the past forty years. I taught high school English, college English, moved to librarianship, and then into teaching in a professional program for librarians. Obviously, the 'teaching' thread provides some continuity, but in retrospect, what holds my career together for me conceptually is the focus on literacy. I have been a literacy educator for my entire career. Flexible definitions of literacy have allowed me to be very mobile about the contexts in which I've practiced my vocation.

Anniversaries afford us opportunities to reflect on these kinds of macro-patterns. In retrospect, we can see these threads of coherence. In celebrating the tenth anniversary of the *Journal of Information Literacy*, I want to take this opportunity to reflect on my own forty years of literacy instruction and to situate the past ten years of information literacy in the context of this longer story. In doing so, I hope to provide observations on the current status of information literacy, especially as it is defined and practiced by librarians in higher education. My personal career tracks closely to the development of information literacy and, in providing a form of 'literacy narrative,' my goal will be to provide a personalized history of sorts. This will not be a 'memoir' in any sense of the word. As an educator in public schools and public education in the United States I have been intentional about professional development and I have spent my career closely tracking the evolution of literacy as an academic professional practice. This practice has become increasingly sophisticated and increasingly reflective. In that sense, my goal here is to provide a relatively un-idiosyncratic personal history of how information literacy evolved as a branch of literacy instruction in the broader sense. I will try to assume the role of 'Every-Literacy-Educator' in this narrative.

In writing for a European publication from a position in an American academy, I need to acknowledge that this is an American story I intend to tell. It involves the way writing has been taught in the American academy, which is probably different from the way it has been taught in schools in Europe in general and the UK in particular. I can see two main ways this may affect the narrative and its reception. First of all, the teaching of writing in the American academy has largely been the responsibility of English literature departments. Coming from this academic environment, writing has been framed as a liberal arts project. Writing in this environment has also been shaped by the social and cultural challenges of working in the United States, especially the way the economic system in America has become increasingly polarized between those who are succeeding economically and those who are not. The United States has, of course, an historical problem with its history of racism and the way current racism has become systemic and institutionalized and economic. This history forms a part of the subtext of this narrative as well. Given these differences between the British and American systems, I still hope some of what I describe in this story will be of interest to the international reader.

2. 'Write like that': the exemplar approach to writing instruction

Graduating from an American university in 1976, I was already the product of a form of literacy instruction. I think of this as an unreflective age in the teaching of academic writing. At elite institutions students were not taught to write because teaching writing was considered a form of remediation. Since few colleges would admit to being less than elite, teaching writing was considered more or less 'beneath' most professors. No college-ready student should require instruction in writing. Academic writing was taught in English Departments by literature professors with the idea that these were the academic experts on good writing. Explicit instruction in writing was only present in the freshman year and its unspoken goal was to sort out students based on who was academically prepared to succeed – who was 'college ready.' If there was a conscious pedagogy it might be called 'exemplar instruction'. In classes I took as a freshman, we were presented with a series of essays by master writers, each one demonstrated a quality we were told to emulate. These essays were assigned and class sessions were devoted to close reading of these essays to help us see the strategies expert writers employed in doing the work of essay writing. In effect, we were presented with final products that were deemed 'good writing', and we were told to 'write like that'.

Very few professors specialized in composition and rhetoric. Those who did tended to focus on classical rhetoric. Consequently no emphasis on a coherent pedagogy was enacted in this method. If this approach had a theoretical foundation, it was in the classical concept of ‘imitation’ (Corbett, 1971). Writers became good writers through reading and imitating what they read. Presented with good writing, students were expected to internalize the models of writing that they had absorbed through the close reading of the exemplars. In theory this made sense, but in practice we received no explicit instruction in how to write. The effect was somewhat similar to showing young players videos of Magic Johnson playing basketball and asking them to ‘play like that’. The distance between young writers and experts being vast, the use of exemplar writers only served to magnify the distance between our novice state and the expert state most of us would never achieve. As an emerging writer with solid language skills but limited academic literacies, I had very little success in these classes.

In retrospect, I have come to understand that my problem was under discussion among academics who had begun to shine new light on the mysterious process of writing. In the emblematic model, the student’s cognitive processes are assumed to be a ‘black box’. Something goes on in there, but processes are mysterious and ultimately magical. The language we used to discuss this magic refer to vague ‘aha moments’, in which students suddenly ‘get it’ in a flash of insight. Teachers light the fuses. Some students are duds and some explode in flashes of glory. Educational theorists like Jerome Bruner began to develop a theory called ‘constructivism’ to explore what actually happened in that black box, how students constructed an understanding of how the mind actually produces that magic. Bruner saw this work as a process of building, with the mind interacting socially with other minds (Bruner, 1973). The focus on the internal processes of how the mind work was a form of ‘cognitivism’, an approach that advocated systematic studying of the mind and its processes.

3. Making meaning: writing as process

By the early 1970s, composition studies had begun to make a pedagogical turn toward understanding writing as a cognitive process. Donald Murray published a very influential essay titled ‘Teaching Writing as a Process Not a Product’ (Murray, 1972). In it, he argued that because they were trained to analyze literature, most writing teachers tended to approach student writing with the same tools they would use to approach Shakespeare, tools of criticism and analysis. Murray claimed that in writing classes most students knew their writing ‘wasn't literature when they passed it in’, and that the way English scholars teach writing ‘does little more than confirm [students'] lack of self-respect for their work and for themselves’. In short, writing classrooms were depressing for almost everyone, and they were insulting for many students. Murray's main contribution (and it was a major one) was to see that writing could be productively taught by focusing on the process of composing rather than the final product. As an alternative to the exemplar model, instruction could focus on how one got to the product. He posited three big stages in the writing process: Pre-Writing, Writing, and Rewriting. This brief essay launched a profound reorientation of writing instruction that would shape the next twenty years, the ‘writing process’ movement.

Contemporaneous with the work of Murray, Kenneth Bruffee, (Director of the composition studies program at City College of New York) had begun to develop new instructional models that would be more effective in teaching a dramatic influx of new students, who were newly eligible for admission to the college under CUNY’s open admissions program. Open admission made college available to all students, regardless of their academic backgrounds. The radical new idea behind this model was the democratic belief that all students could learn to write, but they had to be explicitly taught how. This concept became key to composition studies. Teaching writing had previously been used

as a sifting mechanism, to keep ‘unprepared’ students from continuing higher education. Of course, ‘unprepared’ served as code for poor and minority students whose language practices made college writing especially difficult.

The exemplar model held out the writing of a group of mostly white male authors and told students to ‘write like that’. Bruffee and his colleagues developed a different way to teach based on ‘collaborative learning’, which emphasized conversation among students about writing and their writing processes. Bruffee's work was seminal to the formation of a pedagogy for writing centers, which became mainstays of composition programs. Two major publications cemented his reputation, *A Short Course in Writing* (Bruffee, 1972) and *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependency, and the Authority of Knowledge* (Bruffee, 1983). Rather than focusing on exemplars, students in collaborative learning classrooms turned to each other to help each other learn to write. Bruffee pioneered the ‘writing workshop’ as a pedagogical way to re-orient the teaching of writing away from product and toward process, and the concept of peer tutoring in writing centers emerged from this work.

I began to teach high school English in 1976. As someone educated on the exemplar model, I was struggling to understand how not to replicate the bad instruction I had endured. By that time, this new approach to teaching writing as a process began to trickle down to this practitioner level based on an understanding developed by these theorists. Conferences for teachers of writing were emerging as places where the new pedagogical ‘writing process’ was being discussed and debated. I attended such a conference at the University of Kansas in my first year of teaching, and for the first time I had something like a philosophy or a pedagogy I could use to understand my own teaching. Consensus began to consolidate around understanding writing as composed of distinct stages: Brainstorming, Drafting, Revising and Editing. Each of these stages had its own logic, and the teaching of writing switched away from the teaching of exemplars (with class time devoted to discussions of close reading while the student did the actual writing alone at home) to devoting class time actually wrestling with the writing process.

I began to teach my classes on a rhythmic structure based on the writing process, with a linear sequence of sessions based on brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing. Students used class time to write and read each other's work through the stages. With the actual writing on display in the classroom, it became clear that writing was more than simply reporting knowledge. Writing was actually a meaning-making process that ‘serves learning uniquely because writing as process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning’ (Emig, 1977, p.122). This observation elevated writing from simply reporting knowledge to a form of processing knowledge into one's own words. Writing classrooms turned from skills development to learning how to think. A typical implementation of writing instruction would involve time spent brainstorming as a group activity in class, followed by students bringing drafts to class for shared reading and discussion (collaboratively), followed by students bringing revisions to class for further collaborative reading, with the final stage of editing. In essence, the composition classroom became a workshop with much of the intellectual work of writing being done in the public space of the classroom. This became the fundamental pedagogical pattern of my classroom.

As a teacher who began to use the writing process to structure teaching, I was much more able to work with students in developing their ideas, and I was able to move from feared expert to supportive coach, which changed the dynamic in my classes, making me more accessible and less threatening to students. Many of these students were already traumatized by writing teachers who had treated their writing as ‘literature’ and deemed it to be very bad literature, indeed. Through the writing process, I was able to create positive classrooms where all students could see some measure of success and could actually improve as writers and thinkers. All was not entirely flowers

and light, however. As a teacher of basic writing (or remedial writing), it was hard to ignore that my classes had a disproportionate number of minority students and students who were deemed 'not college material'. Writing under the process model continued to sort students into categories based on college readiness as if such judgements were value neutral.

Two related problems began to emerge almost immediately for me as an instructor using process pedagogy. I was increasingly unsure about the nature of the academic product. With the new freedom of the writing process, were students still expected to produce 'exemplar-like' essays? Were they allowed to write in their own 'voices', or did they need to emulate the white middle-class voice of the academy? If the latter, how and why should these expectations be conveyed and enforced? By moving from product to process, we opened up the black box of student cognition, but we also implicitly opened up the possible acceptable forms student writing might take. The second problem was related to the first. The process model was inherently less fun as we moved from brainstorming through revision to editing. The process model began to seem like a trick. We lured students into the process with a fun activity like brainstorming, only to slowly discipline them into the traditional academic essay.

4. The role of the library

Developing alongside this evolution in the teaching of writing was the relationship of the library to the process. The library has always had a symbiotic relationship to writing, and librarians in my experience up until this time had followed the exemplar model set by composition. At some point in the class, usually during an assigned research paper, a librarian would come to visit. He or she would bring reference books to class, including primarily indexes to periodicals we could use to do research. Instruction emphasized the resources themselves, how they were structured and what they contained. Students were taught the structure of citations and how to follow citations to understand how to find library materials. This kind of library session went by the name of bibliographic instruction (or B.I.). In the exemplar approach to writing instruction, the writing teacher tossed a good essay into the student's black box, and the librarian tossed an index into the black box. Some magic happened, and out popped an essay with a sound argument, elegant transitions and proper citations.

In retrospect, I learned that a major transformation in library instruction began to emerge in response to (or in parallel to) the writing process movement (I am not willing to claim cause and effect through this impressionistic narrative). In 1985, Carol Collier Kuhlthau published her first study of the library research process. Her work, developed from her doctoral dissertation, presented 'a six-stage timeline of the library research process'. Unlike the writing process with its four stages, Kuhlthau proposed that library research involved the stages of: '(1) initiating a research assignment; (2) selecting a topic; (3) exploring information; (4) forming a focus; (5) collecting information; and (6) preparing to present' (Kulthau, 1985). While not really integrated with the writing process, or even necessarily compatible with it, Kuhlthau's work urged librarians to see library research through the lens of cognitive constructivism, a universal process that gave structure to student work and could therefore structure teaching. Significantly, this development in librarianship lagged behind a similar realization in composition studies by ten to fifteen years.

Looking backward on the evolution from the 'exemplar model' to 'writing process', I want to avoid the appearance that there was a sudden transformation or wholesale change in how writing was taught. In retrospect, the transition in the profession seems sporadic and halting, and it certainly was so in my own work. I embraced parts of the writing process and struggled with others. There was no dramatic transformation from one pedagogy to the other, and indeed, for many instructors

this evolution did not occur at all. I was not driven personally by intellectual curiosity about how the mind works, but rather by the immediate challenges of working with struggling writers teaching 'basic writing' without having them detest my classes. I was not a researcher, and I know that many of my colleagues, both teachers and librarians, made very little effort to keep abreast of academic developments in theories of writing and librarianship. There was no Internet to consult to provide timely insights into how we should think about composition theory. From the perspective of a practicing writing teacher in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I was not aware of Kuhlthau's work, and the relationship between writing instruction and library instruction remained strictly segregated throughout most of my experience teaching writing.

When I became a graduate student in English in 1982, I came much more closely in touch with writing theories. For more or less the next ten years, teaching writing in the academy as a graduate student, the writing process was our dominant model and this was an era of explosive growth for composition studies as an academic field. We were in what Thomas Kuhn would call 'normal science', which is to say that our paradigm, based around the writing process, was stable and we did the normal business of developing theory within a solid set of assumptions to make theory more congruent with practice (Kuhn, 1962). Compositionists created numerous intellectual 'objects' of great value and best practices evolved for implementing these objects. These 'objects' included coherent institutional structures.

On the institutional level, Freshman Composition matured into a coherent course. The Writing Center emerged as a presence on campus, with Muriel Harris at Purdue developing the model most Writing Centers would follow, using peer tutoring and collaborative learning through consultation and conferencing. Harris's book, *Teaching One-to-One,* was foundational in establishing an intellectual foundation for the writing center (Harris, 1986). Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) was born of a belief that writing in the disciplines needed to be 'owned' by the disciplines (not the composition program) and WAC became a faculty development program for all faculty. Best practices for WAC were codified in *Programs that Work: Models and Methods for Writing Across the Curriculum* (Fulwiler and Young, 1990). By the 1990s, Composition and Rhetoric had evolved into a coherent academic 'subject' with maturing theory and tenure-track specialists mentoring new teachers and directing composition programs. Being a college instructor in the environment allowed us more time (and more permission) to theorize instructional practices teaching writing. Looking back, I can see now that my emphasis was (like most of my colleagues) on the internal processes of the writing student. We were coaxing writing out into public space and disciplining it to academic norms.

My career as a writing teacher ended in 1996 when I took a position as Head of Library User Education in a large American university. I had made the decision to become a librarian when I discovered the Internet in 1992, a discovery that caused me to re-think the nature of academia, the ways we access and communicate scholarship, and the ways authorship would have to change in the context of the emerging new world. Consequently, I went to school to earn an MLIS, and I was hired to lead an instructional program with a strong collaborative partnership with the composition program. This job involved communicating with writing teachers, something the libraries had thus far had problems doing effectively. It soon became clear that composition instructors and librarians were speaking entirely different languages, and my job was not unlike an ambassador, travelling between two foreign lands translating concepts and goals from each to the other. Like the way the process movement and cognitivism transformed composition studies in the early 1970s almost a decade before emerging in librarianship, it was also clear that in this historical moment, something significant was going on in composition studies that had not begun to happen in libraries.

5. The Social Turn

In the early 1990s, the settled paradigm of the writing process began to change. A 1994 review in *College Composition and Communication* entitled 'Taking the Social Turn: Teaching Writing Post-Process' clearly signaled that change. This review of three recently published books points to the crisis in literacy as perceived by American society. In a contextualization that could serve as summary of my reflections so far, Trimbur notes that:

> When process pedagogy emerged on the scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s, process teachers and theorists sought to free themselves from the formalism of current-traditional rhetoric and return the text to the student composer. But the distinction between product and process, which initially seemed so clarifying, not only proved conceptually inadequate to what writers do when they are writing, it also made writing instruction appear to be easier than it is. (Trimbur, 1994, p.109)

Trimbur goes on to describe the crisis in 'product' and the ways that industrious students soon figured out that what teachers wanted was 'authenticity' and 'engagement', and they quickly invented the genre of the student personal essay to meet that need. The problem for writing teachers, and for the development of meaningful literacy, was that 'writing process' encouraged an intense introspection that students could easily fabricate, assuming they were willing to make themselves emotionally open to the teacher. This vulnerability required trust - or a willingness to fake it. Students who lacked the requisite trust (which included nearly all students from homes where standard English was not spoken) often refused to 'perform' process on demand. The 'social turn' in writing theory pointed composition away from encouraging student self-exploration and toward a more socially connected pedagogy that explored ways that the academy's own social constructions created advantages for majority students who played the school game effortlessly. We began to see literacy as a set of socially situated signs and symbols used to make meaning in social contexts (with the academy being one such context). Along the way, it seemed to me, it also created an immense opportunity for librarianship to reinvent instruction to bring information literacy into alignment with these new meaning-making structures.

The social turn involved a fundamental reorientation of thinking that reverberated through most of academia, but it hit hardest in the social sciences. In disciplines like Sociology, Economics, Political Science, Linguistics and Anthropology, inquiry began to shift from an empirical study of humans and their behavior to an increased emphasis on the subjectivity of the researcher and the ways communities create meaning. This is an extremely complex evolution, and it would be an exaggeration to suggest that every department in every university in every social science field was completely transformed or even affected by the social turn. Clearly, however, questions about how social worlds affect individual's circumstances gained new traction. Many of these new questions were fueled by questions that related to justice, equity and the distribution of economic goods. A new awareness of the problematics of 'community' began to emerge, along with an awareness that communities establish unique customs and behaviors and that mastery of a community's 'codes' creates a form of social capital we call literacy.

Brian Street, an anthropologist, wrote an article titled 'What's 'new' in The New Literacy Studies' (Street, 1993). In retrospect, this can be seen as a landmark in the arrival of the social turn and the formation of something that would become hugely influential as a powerful new framing of literacy. In this article, Street argues that historically literacy has been viewed as an 'autonomous' act. In the autonomous model students are either literate or they are not, and their literacy is the product of their internal cognitive processes. Street contrasts this with what he calls 'ideological literacy', a phrase that points to all the social and cultural ways that we use literacy to do the invisible work of establishing baseline values, deciding whose voice can be admitted into conversations, and how

the various codes of literacy established a web that Foucault would call ‘discourse’ (Foucault, 1969). In effect, Street’s work began the process of pluralizing literacy, so that we could see it as more than just the official language of grammatical writing. Viewed through Street’s lens, all communities have literacies, and these literacies are used to negotiate belonging in communities.

Of particular note here is the work of the New London Group, which formed in the mid-nineties, to find a new way forward with the concept of literacy in light of the social turn and the impact of new technologies on literacy. This group (named for the location of its initial meeting in New London, New Hampshire) was diverse in both nationality and disciplinarity. Australia was very well represented but a good representation came from the Global South in a more general way. Educational theorists dominated the group, but other social scientists (notably James Gee, a linguist) were included. In effect, the New London Group consolidated and gave voice to a new field of study, ‘New Literacy Studies’. They published a manifesto (New London Group, 1996) and began to articulate a way of understanding and teaching literacy based on the social turn, especially focused on how students’ social and cultural environments shaped their ability to learn the social codes of their communities (including the academic communities they hoped to join) and how new technologies of writing would reshape literacies.

In their 1996 ‘manifesto’ (p.63), the group described a consensus among its founders that ‘disparities in educational outcomes [between social groups] did not seem to be improving’. There was agreement that we needed ‘to rethink the fundamental premises of literacy pedagogy in order to influence practices that will give students the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their aspirations’. Finally, they concluded that ‘cultural differences and rapidly shifting communications media meant that the very nature of the subject – literacy pedagogy – was changing radically’. (New London Group, p.63). The work of these theorists injected tremendous energy and excitement into spheres where literacy education was happening. They literally redefined the concept of literacy, liberating it from past cultural assumptions and ideological hegemony, especially the hegemony of academic literacies in general and academic writing in particular.

6. Missed opportunities? The ACRL Standards and the social turn

At the time the New London Group was committing itself to rapidly changing literacy pedagogy, librarianship seemed determined to codify more traditional ways of understanding literacy, which put information literacy as a professional practice in librarianship largely at odds with the new emerging field of literacy studies and the social turn. This is an interesting and under-examined moment in librarianship. From the perspective of someone new to librarianship with a background in teaching an extremely political academic practice like writing, I was very receptive to the social turn. It addressed concerns that I had long held about teaching writing on the process model and the way it had involved accepting certain ‘anomalies’ (to return to Thomas Kuhn’s terminology). From a purely practitioner’s point of view, the process model involved power, the enforcing of a very linear form of composition onto the work of an emerging writer. It privileged docile students who would perform process on demand. More importantly, the process model ignored the most obvious social questions about product. Why are some academic papers successful while others are not? How do different disciplines express their expectations for academic writing? Why are these kinds of papers so important, and why do we not teach students the answers to these questions? To put these questions into the terminology of the social turn, how do academic communities create and enforce academic genres, with all the macro and micro expectations that come with a written form?

In the late 1990s, these questions were central to my thinking about information literacy, but they were not on the mind of American Library Association (ALA) leadership. Instead, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and ALA were occupied with the production of Standards based on the autonomous student and the process model. Much has been written about the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards. I will not add much to that discussion here, except to say that as the social turn was fundamentally transforming the way we understand the role of students in the academy, the Standards were committing information literacy to a vision of 'autonomous literacy', with the writing/researcher framed as an autonomous agent producing a product within an unproblematic social context. The assumptions are inherent in the language.
An information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally

(Association of College and University Libraries, 2000)

With the emphasis on what 'the information literate student is able to do', the Standards put the emphasis (and responsibility) on the autonomous individual student to succeed or fail. The way the Standards move in a linear path – from determining need to accessing efficiently to evaluating critically to assimilating knowledge to using effectively to understanding social issues – mimics the process model. These Standards, approved in 2000, landed with a huge thud in the world of academic librarians who had been following the larger academic uptake of the social turn and imagining information literacy in the exciting context of these new literacies. I personally knew librarians I respected very much who left the profession rather than work in an environment governed by the Standards.

As a librarian going between other librarians and writing teachers, I strained to speak the language of both worlds, becoming more aware all the time that the social turn and new literacy studies were challenging the information literacy paradigm being forwarded by ACRL. In 2000, when I became a research faculty member in Library and Information Science, I wanted to focus on the ways new conceptions of literacy might help us shape information literacy, but there were few models and the publication venues in professional journals were not receptive to work based on the social turn. I did not perceive this resistance as malevolent. Library research was deeply committed to empirical social science, and research journals were conditioned to see empirical 'studies' as the only kind of 'real research'. Editors seemed puzzled that researchers in library studies were trying to substitute what they called 'think pieces' for research.

In 1999, Allan Luke (a founding member of the New London Group) and Cushla Kapitzke published 'Literacies and Libraries: Archives and Cybraries'. This article reads as a manifesto for critically-minded librarians. The authors advocated breaking from past conceptualizations of libraries and library research to forge new directions based on new technologies as new contexts for learning. This work foregrounded ways that the fossilized infrastructure and thinking about libraries and librarianship stood in the way of libraries taking a creative place in the educational process. Reading 'Literacies and Libraries' in the first year of my time as an LIS faculty member solidified my resolve to follow this train of research. It also made clear that doing so might be extremely disruptive within the library community. As Luke and Kapitzke's article rippled out through the information literacy landscape, two responses seemed to emerge. In the first, librarians attuned to critical theory and the social turn felt validated that someone had found a way to talk about

librarianship with these ideas. In the second, there was significant resistance to admitting this thinking into the conversation, steeped as it was in critical theory and seeming to move against the grain of current library thinking as embodied in the Information Literacy Competency Standards. It seemed to me that to do this research, it was important to frame each publication as a dialogue with practice, to demonstrate knowledge of current library practices and to be able to articulate why current practices were unsustainable, inadequate, or inappropriate based on a coherent critique.

Between 2003 and 2006, I published six articles and co-edited a book, all with a focus on using ideas from the social turn and New Literacy Studies to develop a theory of information literacy. There were many others working in similar directions. It is interesting to track the influence of the social turn in librarianship through the ACRL Instruction Section's Ilene Rockman Publication of the Year Awards from 2000 to 2010:

2000 Bonnie Gratch Lindauer for ‘Defining and Measuring the Library's Impact on Campus-wide Outcomes’
2001 Linda Shirato for ‘A LOEX 25-Year Retrospective’, a special issue of *Reference Services Review*
2002 Betsy Baker for ‘Values for the Learning Library’
2003 Elmborg, James K. ‘Teaching at the Desk: Toward a Reference Pedagogy’
2003 Esther Stampfer Grassian and Joan Kaplowitz for their book, *Information Literacy Instruction: Theory and Practice* and Ann J. Grafstein for her article, ‘A Discipline-Based Approach to Information Literacy’.
2004 Trudi E. Jacobson, University at Albany and Lijuan Xu, Lafayette College, for their book, *Motivating Students in Information Literacy Classes*
2005 Michelle Holschuh Simmons, University of Iowa, for her article, ‘Librarians as Disciplinary Discourse Mediators: Using Genre Theory to Move Toward Critical Information Literacy’.
2006 James K. Elmborg, University of Iowa, and Sheril Hook, University of Toronto, Mississauga, for their book, *Centers for Learning: Writing Centers and Libraries in Collaboration, Publications in Librarianship #58*.
2007 Patrick Ragains, University of Nevada - Reno, for his book, *Information Literacy Instruction That Works: A Guide to Teaching by Discipline and Student Population*.
2008 Kent State University librarians Carolyn Radcliff, Mary Lee Jensen, Joseph A. Salem, Jr., Kenneth J. Burhanna, and Julie A. Gedeon for their book *A Practical Guide to Information Literacy Assessment for Academic Librarians*.
2009 Heidi L.M. Jacobs, University of Windsor, for her article, ‘Information Literacy and Reflective Pedagogical Praxis’.

In this list, we see two strains of thinking evolving side-by-side. The two main themes in the discussion are ‘information literacy and the social turn’, reflected in the work of Elmborg, Elmborg and Hook, Grafstein, Holschuh Simmons, and Heidi Jacobs. The other theme is dedicated to pragmatic approaches to information literacy instruction and its assessment. It is fair to say that the national conversation about literacy is accurately reflected in these themes and this list.

7. The Current State of Information Literacy: Some Observations

In the late 2000s, the social turn in librarianship began to evolve into critical pedagogy and the related concept of ‘critical information literacy’. Critical information literacy focuses on academic pedagogy and the ways our teaching encourages students to reflect on their place in the world and provides the skills and concepts students need to become active agents in shaping their own realities and the realities in the larger culture. Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) has been foundational to this work. We have seen a veritable explosion of this publication in critical

information literacy, including several book-length collections of essays and articles exploring how critical information literacy might give shape to library instruction in the academy. Eamon Tewell's excellent literature review (2015) surveying the evolution of this new scholarship should provide anyone not familiar with this work with a solid introduction. As one deeply invested in understanding literacy and information literacy through the social turn, I tend to see the growth of this movement in extremely positive terms. Indeed, the New Literacy Studies have allowed information literacy instruction to shed dysfunctional assumptions and more honestly align instruction with librarianship's social values and student needs. Critical Information Literacy as a growing academic discourse has, likewise, provided a community for librarians who enter the field looking for a chance to intervene on behalf of marginalized or disengaged youth, and with a framework and pedagogy for thinking about how to do so.

My reflections on the current state of information literacy are more general and long-term. First of all, I am struck, in writing this narrative, by how closely information literacy has tracked with writing instruction as an academic subject. Both movements arose out of post-sixties efforts to open the black box of student work and to understand the processes that take place when students respond to academic assignments that involve producing quality academic products. Early efforts to understand that work focused more or less on cognitive processes, with rhetoric developing the writing process through the 1970s and library instruction developing the research process through the 1980s. As I and others have noted, it seems remarkable that in the early stages of the work of this era, there was not more collaboration between writing instructors and librarians to make the processes we both shared more coherent for students. What makes this lack of collaboration especially regrettable is the timing. Writing instruction 'discovered' process in the early 1970s. A network of publications spread writing process theories through National Council of Teachers of English publications and through other more scholarly channels. While librarianship had its own network of professional communication, its research traditions did not accommodate anything close to the inquiry into pedagogical theory that was cognitive constructivism.

Because of these institutional factors, librarianship and composition studies have never been able to coherently leverage their shared concerns. Composition was able to invent abundant new models for teaching writing (the process model, the writing center, writing across the curriculum) largely because of its location in the academy. On most campuses, Freshman Composition is required in some form. At The University of Kansas, where I was a Teaching Assistant, we regularly had thousands of freshmen each fall enrolled in composition. A small army of Teaching Assistants taught those sections. As academics, we were theoretically inclined and there were genuine issues of social fairness that needed to be addressed in the way writing was positioned as a gateway to further college work. Librarianship, on the other hand, has always existed in the bureaucratic structure that is the library. Unlike composition instructors, who have autonomous control over their classrooms, librarians tend to work in collaborative teams to establish standardized content. As an example of the intransigence of library pedagogy, the much deplored 'library one-shot' instructional session has never been successfully displaced, despite the fact that the profession almost unanimously detests the model.

8. The View from Here

As we gain some distance from the economic catastrophe that was 2008, it becomes clear that we will mark that event as a landmark in social and cultural understanding. Theorists for the almost ten years since then have increasingly focused on the ways global leadership has made the emerging world economic order seem natural, even as the signs of impending disaster loomed. David Harvey opens his hugely influential book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* this way:

> For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. (Harvey, 2005, p.5)

Harvey goes on to argue that the rise of the new economy has been achieved largely by making aggressive new forms of capitalism seem like necessary, natural, or even inevitable responses to global demands. In reality these crises have been manufactured by global leadership in order to make the argument for the new economy in the first place.

Harvey goes on to argue that this new form of capitalism (which he calls neoliberalism) actually began to take shape under Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Harvey quotes Thatcher, who in 1987 made the following statement: 'there's no such thing as society, only individual men and women' (Harvey, 2005, p.23). This statement, of course, stands in direct philosophical opposition to the social turn and the commitments embraced by the New Literacy Studies, and it is also looked to as a key moment in the framing and naturalizing of neoliberalism. By equating freedom and personal responsibility to the shrinking of government investment in social institutions like schools and libraries, neoliberalism has been successful in convincing people to abandon the social structures that have made literacy education a moral imperative including, and especially (for this discussion), libraries. In some cases, it has also convinced librarians themselves to abandon those imperatives as a necessary strategy to survive in the neoliberal age.

Readers in the UK will no doubt have much more familiarity than I do with Margaret Thatcher's politics, and my sense, writing in the United States, is that universities in the UK have been much more affected by neoliberal policies than we have yet in the U.S., though the gap seems to be unfortunately shrinking. Others have written persuasively about neoliberalism and its economic implications. As a literacy educator with a background in the humanities, I am wary of claiming any expertise in economics. Therefore, rather than mounting an economic critique, I want to close this reflection with my sense of what I see as a looming rift in librarianship based on the emerging neoliberal management of universities. Neoliberalism has made significant inroads into American universities. Decreased state funding has left universities with manufactured crises, forcing choices between balancing the desire to maintain historic benchmarks of quality in what it means to be a university and the need to make significant cuts in core areas to offset state funding decreases. Subsequent raising of tuition fees to offset cuts puts college more out of reach for those already on the social margins. These people 'on the margins' are a primary focus of critical librarianship and my own academic career.

In terms of academic leadership, we increasingly see university Presidents from non-academic backgrounds. These leaders, usually with experience managing businesses, arrive with the mandate to shrink the university around cost centers that reflect core missions and to balance return on investments. Assessment permeates the new culture of higher education as we are all asked to open our books to auditors to see what we produce and what we take in. Successive economic crises are introduced into the system forcing universities into more aggressive austerity measures, with neoliberal management deciding who thrives and who suffers. Libraries are an interesting presence in this environment. To the extent that libraries envision themselves on the neoliberal model – high-tech centers for job creation and collaboration with industry, designed to satisfy the needs of the twenty-first century library customer – libraries tend to reap rewards from neoliberal management. We are often told by our library leaders that the survival of the library depends on our ability to speak the languages of the funders and to design our services to reflect their values.

There are, however (as this literacy narrative has shown) strong opinions on the other side of the argument. Advocates of critical librarianship, critical pedagogical work, and advocates of the new literacy studies all reject the notion that 'there is no such thing as a society'. Indeed, as a profession, librarianship has invested great energy in aligning itself with progressive values and social purpose. Many of the fundamental assumptions of the neoliberal academy directly conflict with these values, and critical librarianship is now directly challenging many of these neoliberal assumptions. Up to this point, library leadership (both in ALA and at a more local level) seems more or less inarticulate in response to the emerging debate. We have two ideological systems in place right now in academic libraries, and they are fundamentally in conflict. Neoliberal managers tend to present themselves as ideologically neutral, simply practical people who are doing what is necessary for the library to thrive in these difficult times. Critical practitioners respond by saying that neutrality is not possible within this debate. By choosing to be practical and choosing to restructure ourselves under neoliberal management, we are betraying our historical library values and irreversibly transforming ourselves into something other than libraries.

I am not a purist in this debate. Libraries and librarianship have always existed in a productive tension between idealism and pragmatism. I am fond of the work of the 17th century theologian, Richard Hooker, who advocated for the foundational importance for humans in finding the 'right relationships in their spirituality' (Marshall, 1944, p.387). In the same but secular way, there is a 'right relationship' between critical theory and pragmatics, between the technical and the theoretical. Wise leaders and wise managers will seek this right relationship. My concern right now is with leadership. Across the landscape of libraries, we see neoliberal leaders, hired by neoliberal provosts and deans, driving libraries toward a neoliberal vision of the library as a high-tech, customer-driven information mall. Critical librarianship is increasingly frustrated by not being heard or taken seriously in this environment. Indeed, library leaders seem by-and-large unequipped to understand the equal legitimacy of both sides of the argument, when doing so would drive them to seek the right relationship that will allow librarianship as an intellectual and technical enterprise to evolve into more than information-infused IT for the twenty-first century. It will take sensitive leaders to understand and value critical librarianship, which often seems invisible or even threatening to technocrats. It will take strong and articulate leaders to resist neoliberal provosts and deans who want to push libraries into service centers for information consumers. At this historical moment, we have desperate need for leadership that can navigate this complex environment. As of yet, as nearly as I can tell, we have not even begun to have the conversation.

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