TOWARDS ETHICAL IL

A thought journey. Christine Bruce 2021

PRELIMINARIES
Dear Conference Participant. It gives me great pleasure to work with you at this conference on Ethical IL. I am circulating this paper in advance so that you can get the most out of our hour together. If you are at Bihac you might like to log on by zoom so you can participate in the chat. You will also need a print out of the attachment at some stage or to have it on a device to work with electronically

Christine Bruce

Towards Ethical IL: a thought journey

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Abstract

In this paper I reflect on the conference topic of Epistemology, opinions, beliefs and realities, and propose that two complementary elements, values and ethics deserve additional close attention, as the conference elements could be seen as contributing aspects of an Information Literacy Ethics Framework. The development of an IL Ethics Framework is an important progression for the IL agenda as scholars and practitioners increasingly deepen and extend that domain. The IL Ethics Framework I propose assumes understandings of information literacy that permeate all aspects of disciplinary, professional, organizational, social and economic pursuits. It assumes information and other professionals developing IL programs in a range of contexts, seeking to activate information empowerment in others as well as in themselves.

I present for consideration some possible elements of an IL Ethics Framework, including a) the central principles of being other focused and empowering, b) the actions of creating programs that are grounded in beliefs and c) some suggested personal values that might underpin IL programs and personal activity. Each of these elements is discussed and an invitation extended to consider their development, adaptation or application in particular contexts. To conclude, I highlight some information literacy research and scholarship and professional activity which would seem to resonate with the ethical framework proposed.

Introduction

When I accepted the invitation to present the keynote address at this conference I was very taken with the theme of Epistemologies, opinions, beliefs, and realities. I could see that information literacy scholars have been interested in the question of epistemology for very many years, and have been consciously adopting an inclusive approach to knowledge, valuing the approaches to knowledge of many cultures and diverse groups. Only recently, Lisa Hinchcliffe captured this direction using the label of epistemology:

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"I am putting forth that we should adopt an epistemology of inclusion, equity, and social justice". (Hinchcliffe, 2018)

As I explored the meaning of knowledge, beliefs, opinions and realities, I came to see that our knowledge about Information Literacy (IL) is closely related to what we believe about IL and its many dimensions; these beliefs influence our actions, our personal actions and professional programming, which in turn create new realities for ourselves and others. Very closely linked to these ideas, are our values – beliefs that guide our actions. Making explicit, and taking responsibility for these elements and how they influence what we do, is an ethical responsibility we have as information literacy professionals. A graphical representation of these ideas appears in Figure One, below. The arrows represent lines of influence.
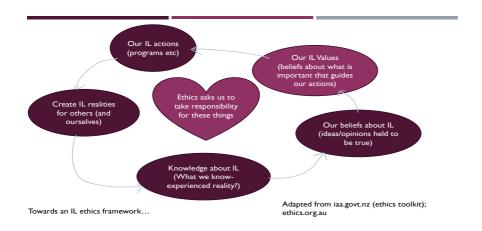

Figure One: Towards an IL Ethics Framework

While values and ethics are not explicitly present in our conference theme, I propose that considering them also, as part of a value driven ethical framework, is an important development for the information literacy agenda.

Puddleglum on knowledge, beliefs and realities

Let's first look at the words in our conference theme, by considering a short 'story moment' that I have extracted from C.S. Lewis' children's tale '*A Silver Chair*'. The background to this moment is that one of the characters, Puddleglum, and his friends, have strayed from the 'Overland', to the 'underworld' where trees, sun, moon and stars are no longer visible. They are being persuaded by the queen of the underworld that such things don't exist. As they start to accept the non-existence of the Overland, Puddleglum intervenes:

> "All you've been saying is quite right, I shouldn't wonder. I'm a chap who always liked to know the worst and then put the best face I can on it. So I won't deny any of what you said. But there's one more thing to be said, even so. **Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things - trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones**. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it

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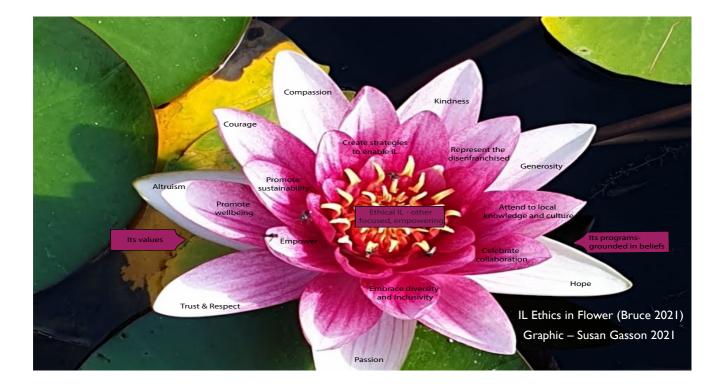
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Puddleglum '**knew an experienced reality**' – that which existed in the Overworld – he continued **to believe** in those things when they fell outside his experience in the underworld– he held to his **opinions/beliefs**– he **valued them** in the face of opposition – and ultimately brought his friends back into the Overland place – the **desired experienced reality**.

Ethical IL 'in flower'

I propose that we endorse Lisa Hinchcliffe's epistemological suggestion, and step further to propose that we acknowledge our knowledges, beliefs, and values as driving our actions and consciously adopt an ethical stance to our IL agendas, programs and directions. Figure 2 below, represents some possible elements of an IL Ethics Framework, including a) the central principles of being other focused and empowering, b) the actions of creating programs that are grounded in beliefs and c) some suggested personal values that might underpin such activity.

Figure 2: IL Ethics in Flower

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Characteristics of Ethical IL

Let's begin by looking at some possible elements of an ethical framework for IL. As we work through these you are invited to consider your own views and experience around each.

- The first central principle of Ethical IL is that it looks outwards, towards others. Information is used, programs are created for the benefit of others. For those of you familiar with the 7 Faces of IL, this is the Wisdom experience of IL (Bruce 1997, 2008). As information literate professionals and as information literate people we attend to and esteem the diverse knowledges, realities or cultures. This requires an ethical stance involving potential sacrifice of self-interest to benefit the wider world (Stoodley, 2009) and a social justice orientation (Bruce, 2008).
- The second central principle is that it is empowering. It represents the disenfranchised, bringing the needs of disempowered groups to the fore. Ethical IL represents contexts of concern to the people and identifies strategies to enable IL. (Bruce, 2008, p. 92)
- Ethical IL is
  - Inclusive, embracing different epistemologies,
  - Articulates its beliefs about important aspects,
  - Recognises its values and keeps them on the agenda,
  - Acknowledges diverse realities (contexts),
  - Creates new realities for others through its actions/programs.

In sum, we could say Ethical IL is about engaging in, understanding and bringing about information literacy experiences through a value driven, culturally aware, inclusive, social justice lens. Its discourses and programs celebrate a wide variety of forms of knowledge, and the knowledges of all peoples and cultures.

An invitation to consider what Ethical IL might look like in your context

You may wish at this point to take a moment to consider what Ethical IL might look like in your context.

- What is knowledge in your context(s)? What beliefs are important to others and to you? What do you value – in general and about IL? How does this affect how you activate the (M)IL agenda?

- How could you adapt an existing program, by building in or making explicit relevant aspects?

- Could you modify the 'flower' (see Figure 3 below) for your own context?

- What one thing could you do now, today or tomorrow to consolidate this direction?
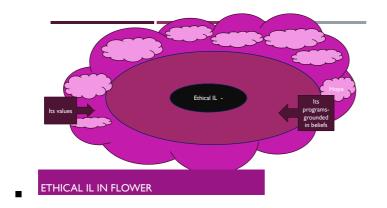

Figure 3: Ethical IL in new contexts

Ethical IL In Action

From our own experience there will be many examples of value driven, empowering programs we are aware of. It is a privilege to share a few that have been shared with me over time. Many others will be part of your experience, and much has also been shared at this conference

- Kim Morrisson worked to empower students of color in US classrooms (Morrisson, 2017)
- Mary Somerville and Dana Echohawk surfaced Latino/Hispanic memories through stories in formats traditionally disregarded (Somerville & Echohawk, 2011)
- Wisnu Wijaya reports migrant workers being empowered politically and socially through social media (Wijaya, Watson & Bruce, 2018)
- Heriyanto reports libraries supporting social and economic needs of village communities (Heriyanto, 2021)
- Mary Somerville and colleagues report blending IL and systems design to empower students in Kosovo (Somerville et al, 2018)
- Barb Johnson, Western Australian chef, blends her knowledge of nutrition and flavour to create meals the elderly want to eat (The Examiner, 2018)
- Mandy Lupton developed the expressive IL Window, approaching information in terms of information nourishment (Lupton, 2017)
- Hilary Hughes worked with Food Rescue enabling leaders and volunteers to source and tech each other digital applications to maximise the impact of their work (Hughes, Wolf & Foth, 2017)
- Elham Sayyad Abdi and colleagues created an information literacy resettlement framework for skilled immigrants (Sayyad Abdi et al, 2019)

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- Susan Gasson and Clarence Maybee, focusing on early career researchers developed 'Informed Research' (Gasson, Bruce & Maybee, 2020).

As we create realities for others through our actions and programs, we may find that others don't see the world in the same way. While those of us in the IL community may have differing epistemologies, beliefs and values, our colleagues from other spaces will have yet others. Let's challenge ourselves to understand our own ways of knowing, those of others, our beliefs and values about IL, based on evidence and experience; to work together to frame IL ethically in our contexts. Like Puddleglum, we are reaching for, and helping others reach for the sun, moon, trees and stars that may not always be visible. In our IL work we are visioning reality, creating futures and helping others do the same. Let's be conscious of our ethical framework, making it explicit for ourselves and others as we do so.

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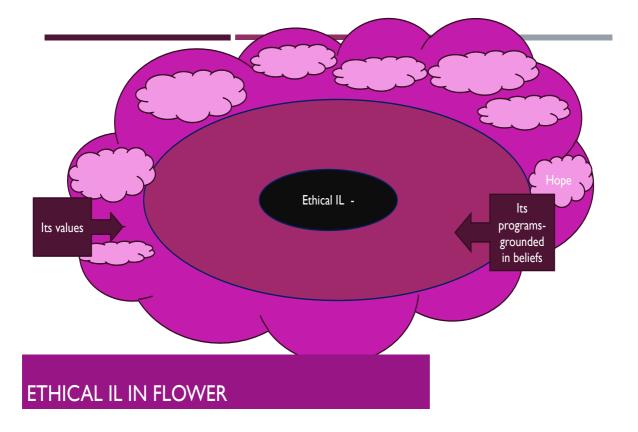
Acknowledgements

Attachment. For reflective work

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■ Could you modify the 'flower' for your own context?

ETHICAL IL IN FLOWER

Text in diagram: Ethical IL -, Its values, Its programs-grounded in beliefs, Hope

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IL Ethics in Flower (Bruce 2021)

Graphic – Susan Gasson 2021