Cleveland State University

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The Middle Way: ACRL's Framework

Mandi Goodsett

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THE MIDDLE WAY:

ACRL'S FRAMEWORK FOR INFORMATION LITERACY IN PRACTICE

AUTHORS:
Alyssa Archer, Joe Eshleman, Mandi Goodsett, Nicole Tekulve, and Karen Tercho
LIRT Teaching, Learning, & Technology Committee

ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy has garnered much attention and lively discussion since its introduction to the academic library world. Responses have ranged from concern over the effects of sunsetting the Standards on institutions' information literacy programs, to critical information literacy voices protesting that the Framework does not go nearly far enough in addressing social inequities tied up in the production and dissemination of information (Beilin).

Nonetheless, the Framework is an exciting new perspective and is sparking curiosity in both students and librarians, helping to free us from the shackles of a "just show them where to click" existence and instead allowing flexibility and adaptability in our teaching as it drives both the conversation around information literacy and professional librarianship into the future (Swanson and Jagman). The Framework's scope and ambition are wide, with mention of semester-long lesson plans. But from a practical standpoint, especially for those of us working with students in one-shot instruction sessions, we cannot "cover everything," so it is necessary to find creative ways to leverage the expansive ideas of the Framework within one 50-minute class (Buchanan and McDonough 19-21). Thinking in terms of a "middle way," how can we ensure that students will leave the session with a firmer grasp on one of these concepts than before they walked into the classroom? In this article, we will provide outlines for how the instruction librarian can use technology as a means to present Framework concepts within one-shot instruction sessions.

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

> Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required (ACRL).

For a teaching librarian hoping to help students with this threshold concept, the instruction session could be spent exploring what it means when someone says he or she is an authority or an expert. What does it mean when we say that authority is contextual? One response to this question is that "authority" is not a concrete term that can be applied uniformly to any resource. How "authority" is interpreted by someone using information can change based on the context of the information itself. It's important to help students understand that what is meant by authority here is not the common use of authority as power, but authority as a basis for trust and credibility. Emphasizing the appearance of the word "author" in authority should help drive this point home.

A potential assignment based on this Frame using social media could begin with this question posed to students: Are you an expert and/or an authority? Of what? And why? Students will choose their preferred social media platform (e.g. Pinterest, Twitter, or Facebook), and then "inventory" and reflect upon various social media content that they have produced. Follow-up questions to students include the following: Is there content that you have

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produced, or skills or experience that you have that make it feasible that you could be considered to be an expert or an authority on a certain topic? For example, are you an expert on basketball, or how to throw a party?
In small groups, students will comment on each other's expertise, and a wrap up discussion could center around discussing the use of social media as a reliable source for academic work. For students not active in social media, workarounds include asking students to look at various Twitter feeds of those considered experts in certain fields. Alternatively, discussion could center around what constitutes a "scholarly" source and analyzing the various credentials that authors present to the world.

Information Creation as a Process

> Information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via a selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences (ACRL).

As with the exploration of contextual authority, students need room to experiment with different formats, to understand how information is created so that they can select formats that fit their needs. One lesson plan that would help librarians teach this threshold concept builds on the early childhood education concept of learning centers, adapted to higher education in a recent article by Fontno and Brown. In a learning center-oriented class, groups of students cycle through stations, each station having a specific focus. These learning centers would help students to "assess the fit between an information product's creation process and a particular information need" by encouraging them to critically examine a variety of sources.

The learning center model works best if the class has a common research topic. If not, assign a sample from current events for the whole class, or assign a different topic to each group. The students explore the following resources at respective learning centers: 1) Twitter, 2) databases with scholarly articles, 3) blogs, and 4) Flickr. Students will share their opinions about the usefulness of each type of resource via a shared Google Doc or Poll Everywhere quiz. This process could be simplified by assigning each group to a computer pod. It's important that prompt questions are carefully constructed for self-guided learning. Ensuing discussion will center around these various types of resources, how they were created, and the research process as a whole. To ground the discussion in "Information Creation as Process", the instructor could incorporate a variety of sample interrelated research topics, and ask the class to decide which of the formats they explored would be the best fit to use as sources for each of the topics. Some may need the first-person accounts provided by Twitter, and others may need the longer perspective of scholarly articles. Assessment can be implemented using the Google Doc or Poll Everywhere results collected during class.

Research as Inquiry

> Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field (ACRL).

There are many skills that students develop as they begin to grasp the Research as Inquiry threshold concept; these include the ability to formulate an appropriate research question, use new and varied research methods as appropriate while searching, and organize information in a way that effectively communicates with others. One way teaching librarians might begin to help students with these tricky concepts is to introduce them to a congregator Web 2.0 tool like Scoop.It. Scoop.It is a content curation tool with a social media element, and Scoop.It users can post up to ten posts or "scoops" per day to a board for free.
For a teaching librarian with an interest in using technology and only 50 minutes to teach students these complex topics, Scoop.It provides an easy-to-use, visual platform for students to develop their research questions and

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collection of sources. First, students could be asked to find scholarly and popular articles relevant to a research topic and post them to a shared Scoop.It board. Each student is asked to include a comment for every source posted, explaining how the source relates to his or her thesis statement, and perhaps also evaluating the source using librarian-provided criteria. The social nature of the tool allows students to re-scoop and comment on the collected articles of classmates, which can be an especially helpful review for a class in which all the students are researching topics addressed in the course. In a reflective activity, students could be asked to identify information gaps in the literature about their research topics, and consider ways to formulate or modify a research question based on those gaps. They could also be asked to find a meaningful way to organize the information found and explain their organizational strategy. Formative assessment can be implemented in a variety of ways here, from the teaching librarian taking notes during class and adjusting the direction of the class based on what s/he observes, to analyzing the Scoop.it board after class and contributing feedback comments, to sharing and discussing the Scoop.it board with the faculty member who requested the session.

Searching as Strategic Exploration

> Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops (ACRL).

Librarians are natural information sleuths, happily mining the depths of databases to find the best sources. Students in the average one-shot classroom are not as tenacious. By exploring the "Searching as Strategic Exploration" frame, teaching librarians have the opportunity to communicate the complexities of the search process. A simple database demonstration revolving around a randomly selected student topic can illuminate common problems student face in the search process. The teaching librarian, depending on the search, may have the opportunity to show students how to mine for alternative keywords using subject headings within the result list, create new searches around related ideas, and compare items found within a result list to determine the most appropriate source for a particular topic.

Those interested in a more technology-centered approach may consider the use of mind maps to assist students in brainstorming keywords and ideas related to their topic. This approach would work especially well in a flipped-classroom environment where students would have ample time to consider their topics in advance. Mind maps can be created using a number of free online tools, such as MindMup (www.mindmup.com), Bubble.us (https://bubbl.us/), or Text 2 Mind Map (https://www.text2mindmap.com/). For easy-to-set-up and low-tech approaches, whiteboards or easels are indispensable. Students in small groups can be tasked with creating concept clouds or mind maps, taking turns with their individual topics or all working on the same topic, depending on the assignment.

Quite often students are fuzzy in terms of their research assignment topics. The successful teaching librarian must first assess whether students have a grasp on what topics they will be researching and writing about. A classic theory in our field, Carol Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (https://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~kuhlthau/information_search_process.htm), describes a valuable way for the teaching librarian to determine where students are (Buchanan and McDonough 30-38). Simple, low-tech activities, such as having students pair off to explain their topics to one another and help each other generate succinct keywords, are easily implemented and very effective.

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LIRT AWARD NOMINATIONS OPEN THROUGH DECEMBER

The nominations process for the 2016 awards is now open, so we encourage you to send in your nominations now, and plan to fête the 2016 recipients in Orlando next summer.

The 2016 Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) Awards nomination period is now open until December 31, 2015.

The Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) is now accepting nominations for two awards created to recognize excellence in information literacy and instruction.

The LIRT Librarian Recognition Award will be presented to an individual librarian in appreciation for her/his contributions to the field, while the LIRT Innovation in Instruction Award will be given to a Library that demonstrates innovation in support of information literacy and instruction.

The awards will be presented at the ALA Annual Conference. Award winners will receive a $1,000 cash award, a plaque, and a $500 travel stipend to be used to attend the ALA Annual Conference. Awards are sponsored by the Library Instruction Roundtable.

Recipients will be honored at the 2016 ALA Annual Conference in Orlando.

For full details on how to apply for or nominate an individual/library for these awards, please see: http://www.ala.org/lirt/awards.
Thank you and good luck!

Michael Saar
Assistant Professor/Reference Librarian
Mary & John Gray Library
Lamar University
409-880-8120

Information about the awards can be found at the LIRT website: http://www.ala.org/lirt/awards, and on pages 12-13.