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Information Literacy from Australia to Allendale

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Information Literacy from Australia to Allendale

Examining two frameworks for information literacy—the skills-based and a more holistic teaching approach—could lead all faculty to approaching the teaching and learning processes differently, finding, evaluating, and using information more effectively.

Information literacy (IL), finding, evaluating, and using information effectively, is an international construct, but the relational theory of information literacy is uniquely Australian. The relational theory concentrates on the changing relationships between people and their experiences with information. It is based on phenomenography, a teaching and learning approach which analyzes the meaning that people ascribe to the world. Phenomenography emphasizes understanding the underlying meaning of concepts, synthesizing new ideas, and applying them in real-world situations. Information literacy understood in this way began in Australia, and I learned about it during my sabbatical there in 1999. It was postulated by Christine Bruce (see references)—and now has proponents and primary researchers not only in Australia and the U.S., but also in Sweden, South Africa, Singapore, the U.K., Canada, and New Zealand. What does the relational approach mean for GVSU? How is it relevant for non-library faculty?

In the past, the library faculty have often been asked to focus on teaching the “finding” part of IL, which is the most behavioral aspect, and now we want to move into the relational. In the behavioral view, information literacy was a separate thing and librarians were almost solely responsible for teaching research skills. The relational approach integrates pedagogical theory and information literacy. (See Appendix 2.)

We want to work more closely with the classroom faculty because this has teaching implications for all faculty. As faculty, we hope to teach students to think critically to evaluate the quality of research; to synthesize, with their previous knowledge, valid to their concepts; to test products, where workplace settings available makes choices of using the first choice quickest and easiest; library has often been curriculum only and librarians were curriculums as co-planners refining curricula.

Affective Activism
One of the ways to acknowledge or own lived matter. Take a minute, feel your awareness of your body and your beliefs about how you relate to the world. We have learned that our thought process and our feelings can move us. Feelings about even our personal lives can and often do influence how we see the world and how we interact with it. We can help deductively through their first reactions to situations, and by sharing these to the topic. We can move into something that connect to ideas. We can move on. Just our feelings out in not as huge or scary can move on. Just from our human from the learner.
Information literacy is holistic teaching about approaching the differently, finding, more effectively.

Information literacy is based on the learning approach people ascribe to the understanding of concepts, synthesizing real-world situations. This way began in my sabbatical in Australia by Christine Bruce as an autonomous unit, and librarians were thought of having a place in the curriculum only as teachers of research skills. Part of this article's purpose is to help all of us see information literacy as an integrated part of the curriculum and librarians as co-planners in the process of creating and refining curricula.

Affective Activity

One of the ways to prepare ourselves for learning is to acknowledge our initial feelings about the subject matter. Take a minute to consider what your first reaction is when you hear or see the phrase "information literacy." Would call your reaction positive? negative? neutral?

My sabbatical in Australia was a very joyful time—I felt incredibly alive! Yet at the same time, some deeply painful things happened both in my personal and professional life. I found I had to deal with my feelings about those events before my ideas for this workshop began to flow. Brain research has shown that people's feelings about events in their personal and academic lives can and often do create resistance to learning. For example, many of our students have a fear of research. We can help decrease their resistance by drawing out their first reactions, which are often based on emotions, and by sharing something of ourselves in relation to the topic. We don't often get to express feelings in educational situations, but it can help us prepare to move into something more cognitive and also help us connect to ideas in a very personal way. If we can get our feelings out into the light of day and see that they're not as huge or scary as we might have thought, then we can move on. Just as our emotions cannot be separated from our human selves, learning cannot be separated from the learner.

Where Are We Now:
Behaviorism Segues into Relationalism

Definitions. This is not to simplify B.F. Skinner's theories, but he did leave us with the impression that humans are a collection of behaviors which can be trained and modified. Our emotions can also be trained and modified, according to Skinner's theories. Behaviorism translated into the education arena gave us skills-based learning theory. But the ability to perform a skill does not equal true understanding and an ability to apply knowledge to other situations. That is, one might have the skill to use the mirrors in a car to judge the relative distance of surrounding vehicles on the road. But, if one needs to back up a different type of vehicle without side or rear windows, using only the mirrors, and one doesn't really understand that depth perception is not accurate using mirrors ("objects are closer than they appear!")), unless one already has experience with the actual length of the vehicle, one is likely not to judge the distance accurately. We need to use both skills and knowledge to do an adequate job. We make the connection between theory and real-life practice. Relational theory focuses on embedding the ideas, not just the skills or behaviors.

Australians are deeply practical, pragmatic people. So real-world applications are a vital part of their educational system. Being able to extrapolate to new situations is necessary for survival—thus, deep, true understanding is also vital. Our ability to distinguish good information from poor quality research, our ability to
use that knowledge to good end, the transformation of knowledge into wisdom, and the communication of that wisdom to others—that is relational information literacy.

A U.S. example of a master educator who also espouses these ideas is Parker Palmer (*The Courage to Teach*), devoted to equality, integrity, community, and responsibility. This field has immense teaching and learning implications.

**Teaching Implications**

Phenomenography in practice means that if we want students to know more, we have to teach less. We have to provide time for students to contemplate and discuss, make connections, and learn theoretical ideas in terms of common sense and give them ample opportunities to use their knowledge to solve or explain problems; we must test with open questions and problem solving rather than test with fixed answers. We can ask learners to explain rather than describe, and list similarities they perceive. We have to emphasize the meaning that can be drawn from activities. We can measure learning in terms of the quality of understanding, changes in how students interpret the subject content, changes in the level of understanding of key concepts.

Library/bibliographic instruction programs and the educational movement in the 1980s and 90s emphasized skills and their transferability. However, we're more than just stimuli and responses. Phenomenography's premise is that if learners synthesize and integrate discipline-embedded concepts, practicing with real-world applications, and thus have a deep understanding, then they will be able to extrapolate to other situations. But when we focus heavily or exclusively on behavioral outcomes, and assessment, there is too much leeway for misconceptions.

Performance indicators, behavioral outcomes, etc., are good, but not enough. There is something indefinable and unique about each of us as human individuals. So we can't just use behavioral means of assessment or behavioral teaching and learning processes.

**Toy Activity**

By sharing with each other, we not only help ourselves to understand more deeply on an individual basis, but we also create a community together.

The Writing Group, for example, on making toys, such as "Building Workshop," each participant starts with a piece of wood and the containers. If you have a say in what you want, you have to do with your research process. If you've just taken a process, how would you use it a few minutes to follow up by stating, "But, if I give you a research process, how would you use it a few minutes to follow up by stating?"

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The transformation of communication of personal information

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We are more phenomenography's and integrate disciplinary understanding, then a different context. But not on behavioral too much leeway for

Il AS RELATIONAL: Why this makes sense; why this is better for our students.

Society's understanding of humanity and community is changing. We are becoming more global; we have entered the post-modern age: Generation Y perceives and processes information differently. One example: many of us look for and read text first. Our students tend to look at graphical representations first, and may not even read accompanying text. They prefer non-linear visual representations like mind or concept mapping to linear web pages. [E.g., see WEBBRAIN at http://www.webbrain.com/ and search for information literacy.] This is why we need to change our teaching.

Phenomenography is qualitative, hypertextual, fluid, quantum, postmodern. IL conceived of in this way is very relational. Previous educational theory and practice approaches to IL were behavioral, standards- and skills-based. When approached this way, IL is left-brained and sequential, quantitative, mechanical, dualistic.

The U.N. published guidelines on incorporating information skills into curricula in 1986! IL really took off in the U.S. in 1989, with an American Library Association report, but ALA's view of IL is very behavioral. IL is seen as quantifiable (asks how much has been learned), is portrayed in terms of skills, and focuses on the qualities of an individual apart from the environment. The ALA's Association of College & Research Libraries' “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” exemplifies my saying that “competencies beget competencies.” It has five standards, or goals, twenty-two performance indicators (objectives), and eighty-seven outcomes. If we talk about using information in a socially responsible way, for example, we have to define what this means—one might define it as not plagiarizing. In a behavioral objective, this means that students will quote, footnote, and create bibliographies. Here's the problem—once we start defining behaviors, and a student does something that is not on the list, what do we do? We would have to define and make rules for all human behavior. The solution may be to accept a holistic rule, e.g., "be kind" or "be responsible." We can
all agree on this larger standard and then we don’t have to micromanage behavior and have one hundred rules or skills defined to meet this goal.

The view of IL as being relational took off in Australia with Christine Bruce’s book, based on phenomenography, which focuses on deep understanding and a holistic approach to teaching and learning. Phenomenography concentrates on the changing relationships between people and their experiences and conceptions of the world. Bruce sees IL as not quantifiable (she asks what has been learned, not how much has been learned) and focuses on qualities of the individual in relation to the environment. For example, Australians emphasize the equality of human beings. Each person is important, so kindness and courtesy are important in the social and business environments. Americans define individual behaviors that are forbidden and subject to litigation.

Phenomenography is about providing a framework for specifics to fit into, and constantly moving back and forth between the parts and the whole—the trees and forest. It incorporates paradox. What IL is depends on context. We’re meant to learn with others who are carrying out the practical applications. Learning is a very individual process, yet rooted in the disciplines, and cannot be separated from the real world.

**How This Impacts Us As Teachers**

Much of teaching has been left-brained. Phenomenography is right-brained, and about the whole person. Just as current educational thought values student-directed learning and knowledge construction rather than the “pouring” of knowledge into students’ heads, now in higher education we understand librarians as a vital part of the educational team, from curriculum development to assessment. That makes perfect sense when viewed from the phenomenographical standpoint. We can’t separate the finding, evaluation, and incorporation of information from the learning and knowledge creation process. Finding is a creative, nonlinear process. Evaluation is equivalent to critical thinking. Incorporation equals the knowledge creation/learning process itself. Sharing means teaching and thus learning more fully. Using info wisely requires the deliberate placing of oneself in the context of community values. It is relational, inseparable from the community—a community that is rooted in the individual, not the other way around.

Even though Brúce’s Australian approach resonates strongly, their librarians embrace it. Judy Peacock, IL Coordinator at the University of Technology, says, "We're leading the IL charge because there are few librarians here who have been able to move collectively towards their own goals. We have also embraced the IL philosophy and are working hard to implement it.

Unquestionably, the librarians who are proponents of IL in the U.S. Are there really any who are applying the current IL philosophy in the U.S.? Not really. There are not enough out how to apply the IL philosophy to combine both the right and left brain.

By providing a framework for specifics to fit into, and constantly moving back and forth between the parts and the whole—the trees and forest. It incorporates paradox. What IL is depends on context. We’re meant to learn with others who are carrying out the practical applications. Learning is a very individual process, yet rooted in the disciplines, and cannot be separated from the real world.

**References**


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...in their changing environments. They see IL as not only learned, not how to learn but on qualities of the environment. For example, behavior of human beings. It is educenseness and courtesy in the contexts of environments. Even in the contexts of forbiddenness.

By providing a framework for finding, evaluating, and using information, relating the differences between behavioral and relational approaches, we can discover new ways of understanding IL, and relate these to the practical aspects of teaching.

References


### Behavioral Approach

- measurable
- definable
- quantifiable (how much has been learned)
  - quantity of knowledge
- skills-based
- individual apart from environment
- left-brained
- dualistic, fragmented
- standardized across all disciplines
- education-related applications
- sequential
- quantitative, mechanical, assessment-based
- transferability of skills
- knowing what to do
- teacher-focused
- lecture/demonstrate/practice
- emphasize skills
- competencies
- individual knowledge
- librarians as "masters" of research skills
- objective
- legalistic
- learning as an event

### Phenomenography/Relational Approach

- not measurable
- describable
- qualifiable (what has been learned)
  - quality of understanding
- conceptual, cognitive
- individual in relation to the environment
- right-brained
- holistic
- contextual, rooted in disciplines
- practical, real-world applications
- hypertextual/hyperlinked/interconnected
- fluid, quantum, post-modern
- deep understanding necessary to extrapolate
- understanding key concepts
- learner-focused, learner-directed
- contemplate/discuss/solve problems
- emphasize meaning of activity
- deep understanding
- community-based knowledge creation
- shared ownership for teaching
- subjective
- shared values
- learning as mysterious process
- learning transformation
- interpret & understand relationships
Appendix 2