A DECADE OF CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY

A review of the literature

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As information literacy continues in its centrality to many academic libraries' missions, a line of inquiry has developed in response to ACRL's charge to develop information literate citizens. The literature of critical information literacy questions widely held assumptions about information literacy and considers in what ways librarians may encourage students to engage with and act upon information's complex and inherently political nature. This review explores the research into critical information literacy, including critical pedagogy and critiques of information literacy, in order to provide an entry point for this emerging approach to information literacy.

Communications in INFORMATION LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

Since first entering the professional discourse in the 1970s, the concept of information literacy (IL) has created a massive amount of discussion regarding its definition and implications for learners and librarians in an ever-changing information environment. Librarians across the world have quickly adopted various information literacy policies and guidelines, eager to provide students with the training necessary to access and evaluate information. The major transformation that information literacy has brought to the profession has not gone unexamined. The literature of critical information literacy questions many widely held assumptions about IL and the very nature of education in library settings, broaching such topics as the impossibility of pedagogical neutrality and the incompatibility of skills-based instruction with student engagement in the learning process. Critical information literacy considers in what ways librarians may encourage students to engage with and act upon the power structures underpinning information's production and dissemination. It is this critical appraisal of information literacy's conventions and norms—from a lack of involvement with the sociopolitical dynamics that shape student learning and scholarly information to the notion that IL is an educational obstacle that can be conquered—that in part distinguishes critical information literacy from traditional conceptions of IL and makes it an important perspective to consider.

This article reviews the literature on critical information literacy, including the main tenets of critical pedagogy and critical approaches to information literacy. A substantial amount has been written on topics concerning critical information literacy in the past decade, and this body of work is likely to hold particular significance for librarians seeking to reflect upon or reconsider their approaches to instruction and librarianship in general. Critical information literacy is an approach to IL that acknowledges and emboldens the learner's agency in the educational process. It is a teaching perspective that does not focus on student acquisition of skills, as information literacy definitions and standards consistently do, and instead encourages a critical and discursive approach to information (Simmons, 2005). It is critical information literacy's intent that students will ultimately "take control of their lives and their own learning to become active agents, asking and answering questions that matter to them and to the world around them" (Elmborg, 2006, p. 193). In these ways critical IL has a great deal to offer librarians interested in developing a deeper engagement with their work and its implications, as well as the potential to shift the focus of information literacy instruction to an authentically student-centered mode.

Opposed to the increasingly corporatized operation of higher education institutions, critical information literacy provides a useful perspective with which to interrogate and contend with this job- and skills-based schooling and argues that education should fulfill a purpose other than that of creating efficient workers. Educators have a responsibility to students to ensure that they can interact with complicated issues, and critical information literacy and critical pedagogy equip librarians to meet this challenge. Critical IL ultimately helps the

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profession to question and resist the damaging effects of capital-centered education on learners, teachers, and society, and encourages librarians to develop an information literacy theory and practice that recognizes students' personal agency and attempts to create positive personal and social change.

The intent of this review is not to normalize the discourse of critical information literacy, but to instead draw attention to the many thought-provoking works within this body of literature and provide a starting point for librarians interested in critical approaches to information literacy pedagogy. While this review seeks to appraise the topic comprehensively, some sources determined to be outside the scope of critical IL, such as those applying non-critical theoretical frameworks to information literacy, were not reviewed. It is possible that the author did not discover all pertinent resources, thus resulting in their inadvertent omission. A majority of the sources are positioned within higher education, which for the purposes of this article is the assumed environment authors are basing their work with the exception of the critical pedagogy section. As the basis for much of critical information literacy, critical pedagogy and its inspirational texts will serve as a place to begin.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

While there is no one singular critical pedagogy, the scholarship related to this educational theory and framework contains themes that contribute to a definition. Joan Wink offers these words towards locating critical pedagogy's primary concerns: "Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relationships of the wider community" (2005, p. 26). One issue of keen interest to critical pedagogy that is central to the core tenets of librarianship, in particular that of information access and retrieval, is the construction of knowledge, including how and why the dominant culture reinforces certain discourses and marginalizes others. Jonathan Cope suggests that "one of the key insights of critical pedagogy is that there is no such thing as an 'apolitical' educational exchange" (2010, p. 24). Critical pedagogy is in essence a project that positions education as a catalyst for social justice, and no writer better communicates this goal than Paulo Freire.

Freire, a radical Brazilian educator, is widely credited with sparking the critical pedagogy movement with his foundational work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in 1968. Freire powerfully describes the societal justification of oppression, the "banking" concept of education, and the importance of dialogue and "generative themes" in creating empowering educational opportunities. In describing the banking concept, Freire states:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits in which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat…the scope of action allowed to the students

extends only so far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (2000, p. 72).

In order to move away from the traditional banking system educators must create opportunities for students to engage in dialogic co-investigations alongside the teacher, and study problems identified by and of consequence to the learners (2000, p. 81). Freire ignited a great deal of dialogue and thinking on the part of educators across the world, with one of the most prominent authors following Freire's message of education's liberatory potential being Henry Giroux.

Over the span of dozens of books Giroux has considered the nature of power, education, and social change. Giroux claims that institutional power in the educational realm has the potential for both oppression and positive transformation. Critical pedagogy therefore "draws attention to questions concerning who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values, and skills, and it illuminates how knowledge, identities, and authority are constructed" (qtd. in Barroso Tristan, 2013). One major theme in Giroux's work is the necessity of educators defining themselves as intellectuals who act to undo oppressive structures (1988). Along with Freire, Giroux sees hope as essential to the project of critical pedagogy, which "should center around generating knowledge that presents concrete possibilities for empowering people" (1997, p. 108). This language of possibility combined with the centrality of the student experience, as opposed to solely a language of critique, is of major significance. Ryan Gage's review will interest those

considering the many applications of Giroux's work to libraries, in particular the recognition of higher education and libraries as sites of cultural struggle and what Giroux terms "the war against youth" (2004, p. 68).

For an introduction to the wider field of critical pedagogy, a variety of excellent works exist. bell hooks' collection of essays *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) is a text of key importance to the development of critical pedagogy, as is Peter McLaren's *Life in Schools* (1989). hooks reflects on "education as the practice of freedom" (p. 207) from a personal perspective, and discusses building a sense of community in classrooms, the importance of recognizing each student's individual voice, and feminist pedagogy, among many other topics. Ira Shor's *When Students Have Power* (1996) describes the "Siberian Syndrome," based on the author's observation of students' "learned habit of automatically filling the distant corners [of the classroom] first, representing their subordinate and alienated position" (p. 12). Shor uses the extended metaphor of Siberian Syndrome to illustrate power relations in higher education while detailing his semester-long experiment of attempting to cede complete control of a class to students. Joan Wink (2005) takes a practitioner-oriented approach to critical pedagogy and uses her own experience to encourage readers to reflect on their practice, making this title particularly valuable for educators interested in learning how critical pedagogy applies directly to their day-to-day teaching. Other recommended introductions to critical pedagogy include *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, 2003), a collection of essays central to the development of critical pedagogy arranged

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by issues such as language and literacy, class, racism, and gender, as well as Kincheloe's *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (2004), an accessible introduction to critical pedagogical stances regarding classrooms, research, and cognition.

CRITIQUES OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Information literacy and the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* have each been the subject of significant analysis and criticism from LIS researchers and practitioners. A selection of scholarship critiquing the concept of information literacy and/or the ACRL *Standards* provides the context necessary for introducing critical information literacy. Stephen Foster (1993) and Lisa O'Connor (2006, 2009) interrogate the rhetoric and very foundation of information literacy, both voicing concerns that IL has been developed and adopted as a means of professional legitimization. In Foster's brief but effective appraisal, IL is "an exercise in public relations" and "an effort to deny the ancillary status of librarianship by inventing a social malady with which librarians as 'information professionals' are uniquely qualified to deal" (p. 346), thereby legitimizing the profession in a time of alleged crisis. In particular Foster takes issue with the expectations of what an information literate individual is to be able to do, including such contextually-divested demands as to know "how information is organized" (p. 346). O'Connor expands greatly on Foster's initial critique to rigorously examine the assumptions underpinning information literacy and argue for a recontextualization of IL's liberatory claims using a consistent

theoretical framework. O'Connor's work is particularly significant in its consideration of information literacy's functionalist assumptions regarding education's purpose, which place too great an emphasis on workplace preparedness and the relationship between education and upward mobility (2009, pp. 83-4). O'Connor suggests possibilities for reconceptualizing contradictory definitions of IL using Radical Democratic Theory and drawing upon the work of critical pedagogues such as Paolo Freire and Peter McLaren as well as critical LIS theorists such as James Elmborg and Christine Pawley (pp. 85-7).

Other researchers have scrutinized traditional notions of IL through analysis of the term "information literacy" and the suppositions it represents. Taking issue with IL's "contradictory coupling" of control and democratic empowerment embodied by the words "information" and "literacy," Pawley (2003) sees the freedom/control dichotomy inherent in IL as producing a creative tension that can be productively utilized by librarians in their research and practice. Pawley recommends that librarians pay acute attention to language use and its political consequences, and that information literacy courses recognize and teach the complications inherent in information access and use. Edward Owusu-Ansah, also examining the profession's construction of the concept of IL by considering the implications of joining two ideologically loaded terms, reviews the "semantic manipulation" involved in the merging of the words into a label and advocates that librarians "concede the existence of a crystallized definition of information literacy" (2003, p. 227).

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The profession's tendency to narrowly and mechanistically define information literacy and the ways it may be developed has also been remarked upon. Dane Ward (2006) suggests that information literacy should and does have aims that surpass critical thinking and encompass lifelong learning, arguing that librarians must work with others to "help students become transformed so that they might transform the world" (p. 402). Jack Andersen (2006) also sees IL as transpiring in a social context, making the claim that information seeking is a sociopolitical skill and considering a potential basis of information literacy located in composition studies and Habermas's theory of the public sphere. Jeff Lilburn (2007) and Maura Seale (2010), among others discussed later in this review, criticize the ACRL *Standards* for an insufficient consideration of the political milieu in which knowledge is created. In particular, Lilburn uses the example of a news network devoted to challenging the status quo to discuss the *Standards* and the profession's potential for fostering active citizenship. Seale details the many political shortcomings of the *Standards* and describes how user-generated content in information literacy instruction can incorporate marginalized voices and challenge dominant forms of knowledge production and discourse.

Others have studied the nature of information literacy policies, the necessity of leaving information literacy behind, and directing one's practice away from standards of any type and towards the learning occurring within a given time and place. One such study is Andrew Whitworth's 2011 content analysis of an international sample of IL policies that found an orientation concerning information processing, but not empowered or socially conscious interactions with information. Jacobs and Berg (2011) argue for the benefits of the often-overlooked ALA Core Values of Librarianship statement in guiding IL policy and practice, and propose appreciative inquiry and critical pedagogy as constructive pedagogical methods for achieving this aim. Susanna Cowan (2013) makes the case that information literacy has been effectively institutionalized, has served its purpose in creating programmatic aims for librarians, and is no longer necessary in its current state, particularly in the form of any policy maintained by the profession. While librarians should still seek to achieve these goals, Cowan asserts, we need not do so using the same model and should seek to transfer "ownership" to other members of our communities such as disciplinary faculty. Most recently, Emily Drabinski (2014) offers *kairos*, the Greek idea of qualitative time, as a means of understanding the contextually embedded nature of teaching and directing attention away from the notion of universal standards, thus avoiding the "Procrustean bed" of information literacy directives described by Pawley (2003). This conceptual shift gives instructors an ability to focus their attention on learning transpiring in their local, inherently unique classroom environments as it occurs.

Cushla Kapitzke's seminal 2003 paper applies a poststructuralist critique to IL and finds its linear and hierarchical approach to learning to be inadequate. Kapitzke calls for a transformative information literacy in which ideology and the socially constructed nature of information is addressed. This critical approach to information literacy

therefore encourages students to "analyze the social and political ideologies embedded within the economies of ideas and information" (2003, p. 49). It is from this point that much of the literature on critical information literacy has developed and continues to expand.

CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY THEORY & RESEARCH

The scholarly texts of critical information literacy take many forms, from case studies to theoretical works. This portion of the review will discuss those writings which emphasize the theoretical component of critical IL, whether towards its own end or to inform practice. It should be noted that information literacy and library instruction are not the only subjects of critical examination in libraries. A small selection of works outside the higher education information literacy sphere includes two volumes edited by Gloria Leckie and John Buschman; one collection of essays applies a wide range of theorists' work to LIS and concepts central to the field (2010), and one analyzes the assumptions behind and use of information technology in librarianship (2009). The former title, *Critical Theory for Library and Information Science*, is a key text in applying critical theory to libraries. Each chapter introduces a theorist, his or her theoretical stance(s), and the theory's potential implications for the field of librarianship. Additional notable works applying critical theory to libraries are Pawley's view of the LIS curriculum through the lens of class (1998), Keilty and Dean's *Feminist and Queer Information Studies Reader* (2013), and Rachel Hall's appeal for critical information literacy in the public library environment (2010).

Numerous scholars, including Olson (2007), Roberto (2008), Drabinski (2013), Lember et al. (2013), and Billey et al. (2014) have addressed cataloging and classification from queer, feminist, and radical perspectives, with queer theory proving to be a compelling and particularly useful framework for "rethinking the stable, fixed categories and systems of naming that characterize library knowledge organization schemes" (Drabinski, p. 96). *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, a collection of essays edited by K.R. Roberto, addresses a wide range of practices within the library, with several authors taking issue with the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) reinforcement of the status quo and proposing techniques to improve upon existing classification systems. Considering the failings of classification systems and the fact that a "corrected" version can never be achieved despite librarians' efforts, Drabinski (2013) encourages a shift in responsibility from catalogers to public services librarians, who are experienced in engaging students dialogically. Lember et al. (2013) touch upon radical cataloging and zine libraries as well as gender discrimination and heteronormativity in LCSH. Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto's (2014) analysis of RDA rule 9.7, which requires the recording of an author's gender using binary labels (male, female, or not known) when cataloging a work, contests the necessity of including gender as a descriptive attribute in authority records and recommends that the rule and section in question be withdrawn.

Reference services have also been considered from critical stances, as in James Elmborg's (2002) call for pedagogy to guide reference, John Doherty's (2005)

application of Freire's theories to reference (particularly in light of reference services moving increasingly online), Melissa Morrone and Lia Friedman's (2009) discussion of Radical Reference (a collective devoted to socially responsible librarianship), and Kate Adler's (2013) deployment of critical dialogue in reference interactions reframes the traditional reference interview with the intent of fostering "purpose-centered education." Each work will be of interest to public service librarians seeking to integrate a more critical and reflective approach into the provision of reference services. Elmborg (2002) in particular makes a strong argument for reference as more than question-answering. Noting the lack of discussion around how one is able to "teach *well*" despite the longstanding acknowledgement of reference as a form of teaching, Elmborg proposes the use of constructivist learning theory and a shared teaching-oriented vocabulary to improve the quality and relevance of reference services.

Though introduced in years prior, critical information literacy greatly increased in visibility with James Elmborg's highly influential article, "Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice" (2006). Contemplating Freire's arguments against the banking model of education Elmborg states, "a critical approach to information literacy development means changing the view of education as the transfer of information or 'getting the right knowledge into students' heads' to an awareness of each person's agency and ability to make meaning within the library setting" (2006, p. 194). When put into action critical information literacy "provides a way for libraries to…more

honestly align themselves with the democratic values they often invoke" (p. 193). Other writings of Elmborg's consider the importance of moving beyond the traditional bibliographic narrative and casting critical information literacy as the profession's new narrative (2010), present the significance of "contact zone" theory to libraries—including recognizing the library as a site of cultural clashes (2006)—and negotiate the complexities of defining critical information literacy (2012).

LIS researchers took up Elmborg's appeal for critical information literacy in various ways. Heidi Jacobs follows Elmborg's 2006 article with a resonant call for the "need to foster critical, reflective habits of mind regarding pedagogical praxis within ourselves, our libraries, and our campuses" (2008, p. 256). Like Elmborg, Jacobs sees useful connections between information literacy and the field of Composition and Rhetoric, including thinking and theorizing about our work in a wider context. Jacobs argues for a broader, theoretically informed conception of "pedagogy" beyond simply teaching information literacy sessions that addresses the many sites that our interactions take place, and offers Freire's strategy of problem-posing, in particular the engagement of creative and reflective dialogue, as a starting point. John Doherty (2007) follows Elmborg to propose that information literacy should be informed by critical pedagogy. In his article Doherty provides concrete examples of the shortcomings of the ACRL *Standards* in practice and considers the consequences this shift to critical information literacy might entail, including a redefining of librarians' roles as educators as opposed to service

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providers and a potential de-emphasis of the library as a resource.

Accardi, Drabinski and Kumbier's pivotal collection *Critical Library Instruction* (2010) is a major foundation of the critical IL literature. The volume contains chapters on a range of topics that speak to the theories and methods of critical pedagogy and information literacy instruction, from the editors' useful framing of the book in relation to praxis to Eisenhower and Smith's contestation of the idea that critical library instruction is even possible under the extensive corporatization of higher education (2010). The result is an informative investigation into the significance of critical pedagogy to library settings and how it might be attempted in the library classroom. Gregory and Higgins' excellent *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis* (2013) similarly touches upon concepts key to understanding critical approaches to information literacy. A monograph inspired by the educators and theorists Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, as noted in the foreword, the chapters are grouped under four sections: Information Literacy in the Service of Neoliberalism; Challenging Authority; Liberatory Praxis; and Community Engagement.

Barbara Fister (2010), Karen Nicholson (2014), and Stuart Lawson, Kevin Sanders, and Lauren Smith (2015) identify neoliberalism's force in academe as necessitating professional response. Fister's "Librarian's Manifesto for Change" observes that the commodification of higher education, including the university's increasing tendency to treat students as customers and faculty as easily-replaced

course instructors with limited roles in guiding the academy, has resulted in libraries' current financial crises. In response to the endless funding spent on the "temporary rental of information" from subscription resources and cooperating with a broken scholarly publication system, Fister calls for a "Liberation Bibliography," a manifesto for change to challenge this exploitative situation (p. 88). Nicholson advocates a critical reexamination of information literacy within the skills-driven neoliberal agenda. Nicholson expands on the work done by Kapitzke and Seale and proposes Multiliteracies, a theory focusing upon "discourse, literacy, and socioeconomic and cultural forces," as a way to rethink IL within the corporatized academy and contend with globalization and fast capitalism (2014, p. 4). Stuart Lawson, Kevin Sanders, and Lauren Smith (2015) examine the commodification of scholarly communication and advocate critical information literacy as a means to interrogate and challenge prevailing modes of thinking about and understanding information, identifying Fister's Liberation Bibliography as one possibility for reclaiming scholarship and eschewing its commodification. Lauren Smith (2013) uses critical pedagogy and the works of Giroux to evaluate critical information literacy's potential for the realization of personal political agency, in particular how it may benefit the critical abilities of high school students in relation to politics. This ethnographic research examining young people's political beliefs and the ways in which critical IL might contribute to the democratic goals of LIS provides a valuable and unique perspective in the literature.

In regards to feminist pedagogy—an

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educational approach related to critical pedagogy and rooted in feminist theory—Maria T. Accardi's excellent 2013 book *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction* considers salient themes such as the "classroom as a collaborative, democratic, transformative site, consciousness raising about sexism and oppression, and the value of personal testimony and lived experience as valid ways of knowing" (p. 35), all of which are used to inform library instruction. For librarians seeking an introduction to feminist theories and practices to apply to their teaching, the book is a highly beneficial source. Gina Schlesselman-Tarango (2014) employs critical information literacy and feminist pedagogy, including Accardi's book, as frameworks to propose a cyberfeminist approach to instruction, one that encourages students to interrogate dominant paradigms as reflected in the digital world.

Other scholars have taken different approaches to critical information literacy through the application of genre or critical social science theories. Karen Strege (1996) discusses Freire, Giroux, and Habermas and uses a critical action model to consider how critical pedagogy might improve librarians' instructional practices, finding that community college students responded positively to a critical pedagogy approach but lacked interest in library research despite selecting topics of personal relevance. Critical IL informed by the concepts of genre theory is proposed by Michele Holschuh Simmons (2005) as a means to help students simultaneously recognize the contested nature of information and adapt to the discourse of their chosen discipline, and, moreover, that librarians are uniquely positioned to do so.

Andrew Whitworth draws upon critical social science theorists, in particular Habermas and Bakhtin, to advocate for a focus on knowledge production in IL education (2006) and to argue that information literacy's revolutionary potential was coopted early in its development because of its institutionalization in the exclusionary and centralized educational system (2014).

CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY IN PRACTICE

Significant overlap exists in the critical information literacy literature in regards to theory and practice, and appropriately so, as critical pedagogy calls for the continual reciprocity of both theory and practice to form praxis. The following works have been identified as containing a strong practice component and are in some respect based in day-to-day classroom work, whether reporting on a case study or presenting specific teaching strategies. Early in critical information literacy's development Troy Swanson offered a model for instruction based on Kapitzke's appeal for a critical IL, in particular that of reframing "conventional notions of text, knowledge, and authority" (2004, pp. 259-60). Swanson bases his example of critical IL instruction in a course-integrated first-year composition course at a community college (2004) in which students discuss source evaluation and types of information sources in small groups; this is a practice modeled after the problem-posing method advocated by Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, and draws upon Karen Strege's work in a critique of the ACRL *Standards* and reflection on what critical pedagogy in the context of information literacy would entail (2005).

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Others have spoken to the application of critical information literacy concepts in credit bearing courses (Beilin & Leonard, 2013; Broidy, 2007; Doherty & Ketchner, 2005; Whitworth, 2009), with each detailing the rationale for such a pedagogy as well as content addressed in class. These case studies address practical considerations involved in developing and implementing critical IL approaches in library instruction. Beilin and Leonard's (2013) three-credit course integrates library skills into all aspects of the research and writing process rather than compartmentalizing these activities, with critical information literacy serving as the course's organizing principle. Broidy (2007) reconceptualizes a credit course from one that emphasizes tools that "encouraged students to commodify information without stopping to consider the political ramifications of facts on a page" (p. 495) into one that critically examined "Gender and the Politics of Information." Doherty and Ketchner's (2005) seminar for first-year undergraduates and Whitworth's (2009) move from the "one size fits all" approach to IL education to encouraging postgraduate students towards a nuanced understanding of different types of literacy provide additional illustrations of critical information literacy in practice in the higher education classroom.

Different methods and techniques that can be implemented in critically conscious classrooms have been discussed. Drabinski (2008) recommends drawing students' attention to the ways in which in classification systems such as Library of Congress subject headings reinforce dominant culture. Library classifications systems' reification of power structures and hierarchies provide an opportune teachable

moment for instruction librarians, and Drabinski offers critical pedagogy in order to "transform users' relationships to these systems" (p. 203). Robert Detmering (2010) notes the work of Jacobs and encourages the use of popular film texts to situate the political nature of information use, access, and evaluation within both semester-long and one-shot instruction sessions. Michelle Dunaway (2011) speaks to the roles of emerging technologies and user-generated content in posing questions of authority in IL instruction, given these technologies' basis in the user's creation of and control of information. Actively teaching the economic aspects of information and scholarly communication processes in a credit-bearing course for upper-level undergraduate science majors, Scott Warren and Kim Duckett (2010) detail instructional strategies from initiating a class dialogue on how Google and Google Scholar monetize information to playing a "The Price is Right" game wherein students guess the yearly subscription cost of individual journals and thus learn about the business of scholarly communication. Finally, Amy Mark (2011) draws upon Freire and Elmborg to argue that the privileging of peer-reviewed works by teaching faculty and librarians is to the detriment of students' intellectual growth.

Critical IL models as applied to various subject matter are considered by Claudia Dold (2014) within the behavioral health sciences and as a catalyst for encouraging transdisciplinary learning, Kathleen Fountain's (2013) setting of a women's health interest group, Alison Hicks (2013) in foreign language education, and Michelle Reale (2012) and Heidi Jacobs (2014) in literature. Dold (2014) considers the ways in

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which critical IL recognizes how a discipline's cultural identity and shared understandings are socially constructed, and she provides a hypothetical example of how students in three behavioral health fields would benefit from critical information literacy's cross-disciplinary approach to information. Fountain (2013) bases her study outside of academe, serving as an intern for a national women's health interest group based in Washington, DC for six months and observing the organization's information needs and responses to outside inquiries. The use of critical IL within foreign language education is the subject of Hicks' (2013) exceptional article, with the author suggesting that the best way for students to be educated in transcultural competence is through a critical information literacy model. Reale (2012) provides a personal account of collaborating with a disciplinary faculty member to employ critical IL in instruction sessions for an undergraduate English class. Jacobs (2014) takes "literatures in English" as an example of what problem-posing can look like in a literature class. Using a Freirean line of inquiry, she deftly examines questions of situating information literacy with academic disciplines. Jacobs makes the important point that "When we limit the kinds of questions we ask our students and ask ourselves about information, about information literacy, about libraries to things we can count, quantify, or check off in a box, we limit the ways in which we can be informed, critical, and engaged" (p. 203).

Two practice-oriented dissertations have emerged from the literature of critical information literacy. Rob Morrison (2009) examines IL from a cultural perspective to provide advice to practitioners seeking to engage in culturally relevant instruction. Morrison's research investigates the role of culture in the information seeking behaviors among three Hispanic college students, and applies concepts from critical race theory to data collected from student interviews and observations. Beth McDonough's (2014) dissertation uses an interpretive synthesis methodology to draw practice implications from select critical pedagogy and information literacy texts. McDonough distinguishes the primary differences between traditional and critical forms of information literacy and describes characteristics of critical IL instruction as gathered from the literature in regards to pedagogy, instructional design, and class content. These characteristics include critical IL librarians embracing new roles for themselves and students; designing instruction that is meaningful to students; and teaching about all types of information. Each of these major themes contain several subthemes that specify additional patterns regarding critical IL practices as represented in the selected texts.

Recent research has expanded beyond the classroom to consider librarian familiarity with critical theory and how it informs personal practice. Robert Schroeder and Christopher Hollister (2014) provide a useful and timely examination of the profession's engagement with critical theories. Schroeder and Hollister's survey indicates that two-thirds of respondents identified themselves as being familiar with some type of critical theory, while one-third was unfamiliar with critical theories of any sort. Because librarians familiar with critical theory found it to be an important part of their practice yet few were exposed to these theories or theorists during their LIS

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programs, the authors suggest that more critical theory be incorporated into library and information science curriculum. Schroeder's (2014) collection of interviews *Critical Journeys: How 14 Librarians Came to Embrace Critical Practice* focuses on interviewees' personal engagement with critical theory and cultivating practice that reflects their critical perspectives. This illuminating and inspiring volume is noteworthy for its representation of librarians working in a variety of positions, from instruction to administration to archives. In conjunction with the interviewees, Schroeder offers a personal and accessible discussion of critical librarianship as practiced by a group of very insightful individuals, each of which have found value in different types of critical theory during their unique personal and professional paths.

Conclusion

In sum, the lessons of critical pedagogy offer us the possibility of hope and change. The library profession can strive to recognize education's potential for social change and empower learners to identify and act upon oppressive power structures. Critical information literacy, as expressed by its literature, examines the social construction and political dimensions of information, and problematizes information's development, use, and purposes with the intent of prompting students to think critically about such forces and act upon this knowledge. A number of librarians have engaged with critical information literacy on theoretical and practical levels, and in the process have created a rich body of work to draw upon as educators in library settings. The literature

of critical information literacy and librarianship gives no indication of slowing its pace, with forthcoming books by Bales (2015) and Downey (2016) offering critical perspectives on both academic librarianship and information literacy.

Perhaps indicative of critical IL's influence upon the profession at large, the forthcoming ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* accounts for perspectives far more critical than those indicated in the previous *Standards* that the task force was charged with revising. Some of the sociocultural complexities of scholarly information and research are explicitly addressed, as reflected in the Frames "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" and "Information Has Value." Programmatically the *Framework* is far less prescriptive than the *Standards* as it offers flexibility in its implementation and encourages latitude for library educators wishing to apply their own pedagogies, critical or otherwise, to the unique needs of their setting. While still representing a national standard to be adopted, an imperative that critical information literacy resists, the *Framework* is a considerable departure from the *Standards*' set of regimented learning outcomes and skills that students must meet in order to be deemed "information literate," a limited approach to teaching and learning which critical IL considers deficient and problematic. Joshua Beatty (2014) finds the *Framework* to be a significant improvement to the *Standards*, yet that the document is still articulated in the rhetoric of neoliberalism and reinforces the notion that the way information is produced and commodified is a natural condition that need not be challenged. Also evaluating the

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Framework from a critical perspective, despite some reservations, Ian Beilin (2015) argues that the document is amenable to and even encourages the practice of critical IL instruction, and that ultimately "it is a progressive document, but it will require librarians to resist it in order for it to be a radical one." That the *Framework* appears to reject North American higher education's climate of continual standardized assessment measures by moving away from easily quantifiable outcomes is meaningful, for as Jacobs notes, "When we limit [information literacy's] potentials to outcomes and standards, we run the risk of minimizing the complex situatedness of information literacy and diminishing – if not negating – its inherent political nature" (2008, p. 258).

One aspect infrequently addressed by critical IL is the necessity of teachers exercising personal control of their curriculum and classroom time in as much as it is possible. Giroux identifies this need, observing that "[teachers] have been reduced to the keeper of methods, implementers of an audit culture, and removed from assuming autonomy in their classrooms" (qtd. in Barroso Tristan, 2013). Instead of teaching what others deign appropriate, instruction librarians must seek to actualize instruction important to them and to their students, which is in part to develop praxis, or, "reflection-in-action" (Doherty, 2005). "The real task for libraries in treating information literacy seriously," Elmborg insists, "lies not in defining it or describing it, but in developing a critical practice of librarianship—a theoretically informed praxis" (2006, p. 198). It is the writings, words, and work of others that helps us as a

profession to achieve praxis via the reciprocity of theory, practice and action, and to thereby provide educational opportunities with emancipatory possibilities for both our students and ourselves.

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