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Applying the Framework for Information Literacy to the Developmental Education Classroom

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Shortened Title: Applying the Framework for Information Literacy

Abstract

Translating the new *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* (ACRL, November 2014) into learning outcomes, instructional content, and assessments might appear to be an overwhelming task; however, in many cases the revision exemplifies how many librarians have been teaching information literacy in the digital information landscape. This article describes the collaboration between a librarian and an instructor to integrate information literacy into a developmental reading class before the revision of information literacy standards were available and provides an example of adapting the new *Framework* to library sessions that already reflect a transformation in information literacy instruction for developmental education.

Keywords: information literacy framework, information literacy instruction, developmental education

Introduction

This article describes the collaboration between a librarian and a college readiness instructor at one community college where we used a series of library sessions and assignments to integrate information literacy into a developmental reading class. The class described is RHT 086 Introduction to College Reading II, a

developmental education course designed to develop or enhance basic skill proficiencies for college readiness. At this community college, placement into developmental education courses (reading, writing, and mathematics) is determined by ACT scores or the placement test required for admission. Developmental reading classes focus on the development of reading and study skills needed for understanding college textbooks. The RHT 086 learning objectives are for students to become active readers and learners, to development college-level reading strategies, and to engage in the exchange of ideas integral to academic discourse.

The transformation of the information literacy standards for higher education into a metaliteracy framework that incorporates threshold concepts provides an excellent opportunity for more relevant information literacy instruction in the developmental education classroom. Metaliteracy, as described by Mackey and Jacobson (2014), is “a conceptual model” that expands traditional ideas of information literacy to include multiple literacies and to place greater emphasis on knowledge acquisition than skills development (8-9). Although this faculty collaboration began before the standards for information literacy were revised, after reviewing the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* (ACRL, November 2014), it became clear that the threshold concepts, which are a core part of the new *Framework*, articulated many of the topics and learning objectives for our series of library sessions, thus providing an example of how to adapt the framework to information literacy instruction for developmental education.

The New Framework: Metaliteracy and Threshold Concepts

At the time of this writing, the new *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* is in its third draft awaiting ACRL approval in January 2015. This revision to the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, which was adopted by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2000, is significant in its attempt to integrate other related literacies that help to “address ongoing shifts in technology” (Mackey and Jacobson, 2011) and its incorporation of threshold concepts.

With this *Framework*, information literacy is reconsidered as a metaliteracy. In “Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy,” Mackey and Jacobson (2011) argue, “Metaliteracy challenges traditional skills-based approaches to information literacy by recognizing related literacy types and incorporating emerging technologies” (62-63). Information literacy can provide the foundation with which to consider not just the nature of information and the skills needed to access it, but also the creation of information, the ability to create meaning from information and its sources, and the ability to select and navigate the tools needed to create and find information (McBride, 2012). Again, Mackey and Jacobson (2014) note, “The primary goal of this reframing is to repurpose information literacy for the 21st century by identifying associations to relevant literacy types, such as visual literacy, digital literacy, mobile literacy, and media literacy” (5). However, by using metaliteracy to reimagine information literacy, the new *Framework* expresses the content and concepts many librarians have already been teaching in the classroom (Bobish, 2010; Luo, 2009; Magnuson, 2013; Garcia, Walstrum, and Morrison, 2011) to adapt to the impact of technology on the information environment, such as the use and evaluation of Web 2.0 technology as ways to find and create information.

In addition to reframing information literacy as a metaliteracy, the *Framework* also revolves around threshold concepts. Threshold concepts are gateway concepts in a given discipline that are transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded, and potentially troublesome (Meyer and Land, 2006). Instead of standards that outline competencies, skills, and outcomes, the ACRL Task Force, through a Delphi Study and public comments to drafts, has articulated six Frames with corresponding threshold concepts that also include sets of knowledge practices and dispositions. According to Gibson and Jacobson (2014), the co-chairs of the ACRL Task Force charged with revising the information literacy standards, the information literacy threshold concepts allow “individuals to incorporate elements from their earlier conceptions of doing research, while moving them to a more sophisticated level of understanding” (252). The six threshold concepts are:

- Authority is constructed and contextual

This concept refers to “the recognition that information resources are drawn from their creators’ expertise and credibility based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used” (ACRL, November 2014, 4).

- Information creation as a process

This concept pertains to “the understanding that the purpose, message, and delivery of information are intentional acts of creation” (ACRL, November 2014, 6).

- Information has value

This concept is described as “the understanding that information possess several dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a

means to influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world” (ACRL, November 2014, 8).

- Research as Inquiry

This concept refers to “the understanding that research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field” (ACRL, November 2014, 9).

- Scholarship is a conversation

This concept is defined as “the idea of sustained discourse within a community of scholars, researchers, or professionals, with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of competing perspectives and interpretations” (ACRL, November 2014, 11).

- Search is strategic

This concept pertains to “the understanding that information searching is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a broad range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding is developed” (ACRL, November 2014, 13).

Because the *Framework* awaits ACRL adoption, there is not yet extensive research on its use in information literacy instruction. Gibson and Jacobson (2014) note the adaptability of the *Framework* and the belief that information literacy instruction is more than a one-shot session, thus requiring conversations and collaboration among faculty. Oakleaf (2014) provides a useful roadmap to begin working with the new document: “Essentially, librarians can use the *Framework* as inspiration to focus on concepts, rather than exclusively on tools and techniques, and those concepts can be

added or subtracted as student and faculty needs change” (511-512). However, she also notes that it will be the task of librarians to translate threshold concepts into learning outcomes, instructional content, and assessments (Oakleaf, 2014, 513). While this might appear to be an overwhelming task, in many cases such as the one described in this article, the threshold concepts may be applied to what and how many librarians already have been teaching information literacy.

Using Metaliteracy to Teach Developmental Reading: Integrating Information Literacy

The collaborative opportunity to fully integrate information literacy into a developmental reading classroom arose when the college readiness instructor redesigned her course so that students had the opportunity to read, write, and investigate issues that deeply affect their lives. She divided the course into units that addressed the real world issues of sexism and racism and incorporated film as required text. Her goal for the course was to develop visual literacy, media literacy, and writing skills as related and integral components and social processes used to create meaning when reading a variety of information sources. This was very much a metaliteracy approach to teaching reading.

With this approach in mind, the instructor and the librarian used information literacy as the foundational literacy with which students could begin to think critically about information and how they “read.” We developed a series of library sessions that introduced students to concepts that touched on the changing nature of information, the impact of technology on information, and the need to evaluate sources critically. Our

theme for the series of five library sessions was “Types of Information Sources,” which proved to be simple enough for students to understand, but also complicated enough given the digital information landscape to provide an entryway into more complex discussions about the nature of information formats. Although the collaboration exemplify changes to information literacy instruction already taking place in the profession due to the educational and digital environment, now that the *Framework for Information Literacy* is available, we can apply specific threshold concepts to each of these sessions.

Searching is Strategic

The first library session took place within the first week of the semester. While its primary purpose was to provide a brief physical orientation to the library, we also had a clear task for the session that would introduce students to the search process as well as help prepare them for an assignment that would be due later in the semester. After a tour of the library and a discussion about books as a type of information source (i.e. characteristics, when this format might be useful), there was hands-on instruction on how to use the library’s online catalog to find books. Students were then introduced to the assignment: a “book talk” in which students would talk about a multicultural novel or memoir that they read. Together, the librarian and the instructor developed a reading list of possible titles that were available in the college library or through interlibrary loan. By the end of the session, students needed to have found a book that they were interested in reading for the “book talk” and check it out from the library or request it through interlibrary loan.

It was important to keep this first library session simple with clear instructions and expectations for tasks, a common characteristic of library instruction for developmental education students (Roselle, 2009). Students used a very basic search strategy, searching for a book by its title; with this search, we were able to introduce students to the threshold concept, “searching is strategic.” As stated in the *Framework*, “The act of searching begins with a question and directs the act of finding needed information” (ACRL November 2014, 13). Students had to look up titles in the catalog and read a summary of the book to decide whether or not they wanted to read the book for the assignment. However, if the book was not available in the catalog, they might need to look up the book on the Amazon website to find out what the book is about and read reviews. When they decided on a book they wanted, they would then have to create an interlibrary loan account to request the book from another school. Throughout the process, students had to remain flexible and eventually understand that they might have to use several different search tools before they found all the information they wanted. These students ultimately displayed many of the dispositions noted for this particular concept: the value of persistence, adaptability, and flexibility and the ability to reevaluate needs and next steps throughout the search process (ACRL November 2014, 13).

Information Creation as a Process

The next library session was scheduled during the course’s sexism unit. We focused on news sources and media literacy, a literacy that closely relates to information literacy (Mackey and Jacobson, 2011). We discussed topics such as the

purpose of the news, characteristics of different news sources, and ways to access news. In addition, we started to consider more complex issues of format, which is encompassed in the threshold concept, “information creation as a process.” Through class discussion, students considered the pros and cons of accessing news in print, online, on the television, or through the radio. We also developed an in-class activity in which students compared a print news article and the same article on the news website. Students were asked to think more critically about the information and format by considering: How in-depth is the coverage? What outside sources are included? What multimedia elements are included? Do these elements add or detract from your understanding of the content? Through this activity, students began to “recognize that information may be perceived differently based on the format in which it is packaged” and “recognize the implications of information formats that contain static or dynamic information” (ACRL November 2014, 6).

The culminating assignment for this unit was to locate a news article online (from an online news source, not through a library database) that reports on a women’s issue, summarize the article, and then evaluate the article by answering specific questions. In this session, it was clear that we began to delve into more complex issues, but we tried to isolate factors so that discussions could focus on critical evaluation. For example, we provided a list of possible news source, but also brainstormed with students other news outlets that could be searched. We also provided students with a list of topics that were discussed in class or related to sexism that students could use as search terms. In this way, students could begin to “value the process of matching an information need with

an appropriate product,” a disposition for this threshold concept (ACRL November 2014, 6).

Authority is Constructed and Contextual & Scholarship as a Conversation

After the unit on sexism, the course moved into the unit on racism, which included watching the film, *Bamboozled* (2000). The final assignment for this unit was to write a movie review of the film that incorporated some of the themes discussed in class readings. Therefore, the library session for this assignment focused on finding movie reviews by using both Google and library databases. By the end of the class, students needed to find a movie review and, in preparation for writing their own review, to read, annotate, and analyze it (by answering assigned questions) for homework.

We covered three main topics during this session: revisiting the concept of developing a search strategy; evaluation of sources; and navigating library databases. We introduced the concept of “authority is constructed and contextual” in which students could begin to “define different types of authority” and develop “their own authoritative voices” (ACRL November 2014, 4). For example, we did a Google search for movie reviews and compared reviews from well-known news sources or movie critics with those from sites where users post reviews. We discussed the difference between seeing a movie for entertainment and analyzing a movie for more in-depth messages, a more academic assignment, and why one might read one reviewer over another, “relevant questions about origins, context, and suitability for the information need of the moment.” (ACRL November 2014, 4). Again, by simplifying some of the elements - asking students to read and write movie reviews, which can be brief and simplistic or

more complex - we were able to find information sources that were truly relevant to students.

In addition, the movie review assignment and corresponding library session provided an opportunity for students to begin to see themselves as information creators. As noted in the dispositions for the threshold concept, “scholarship is a conversation,” students should begin to see themselves as contributors to scholarship rather than only consumers of it (ACRL November 2014, 11). While movie reviews are not scholarship, this more simplified writing assignment was a good entryway for developmental education students. They had read reviews, and with this assignment, they were participating in the conversation about the movie. By writing their own review, they were taking the first step in creating information.

Research as Inquiry

The last two library sessions focused on combining the information literacy skills and concepts taught during the semester into a cumulative assignment for the course: a PowerPoint presentation on a person who has worked to create a more just and ethical world. The presentation had to include biographical information, including some background or historical information related to why the individual became an activist, a definition or description of the issue the person is concerned with, and a brief summary of why the student chose the person.

To simplify this final assignment, we broke up the research into steps during two separate library sessions. In the first session, we introduced students to websites that could be used to browse possible people to research. After browsing and brainstorming,

we showed students the general reference source, *CREDO Reference*. With some hands-on instruction as to how to navigate and search the database, students could then use *CREDO* to refine their research. They would search for individuals, look at the information available, and determine whether or not they could use the information to satisfy the biographical and historical information requirements for the project, essentially evaluating the source based on their information needs.

By the second library session for this research assignment, students had chosen the person for their project. During this class period, we returned to the general database, *Academic Search Premier*. After a brief review of the database, students were asked to find one article on their person or the issue the person was involved with. Again, we emphasized evaluating database results and selecting information sources based on the information required for the presentation (for example, a description of the social issue). With this final research assignment and corresponding library sessions, we were able to address several knowledge practices associated with the threshold concept, “research as inquiry.” To complete the assignment, students needed to “synthesize ideas gathered from multiple sources” as well as “organize information in meaningful ways” (ACRL November 2014, 11). Additionally, because we had instructions for students and clear requirements about the information needed about the person, students were able to develop research strategies based on information gaps (ACRL, November 2014, 9).

Conclusion

The *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* provides a valuable point of reference for us to contextualize our information literacy instruction for the developmental education classroom. At first viewing, the *Framework* with its threshold concepts and metaliteracy approach may seem intimidating in its application with no clear skills or learning objectives defined. However, many instruction librarians already revised library sessions to address the impact of technology on information and the complex issues of related literacies that did not fit neatly into the former information literacy standards. Therefore, in many instances such as the one described above, it will not be necessary to completely re-envision how we teach information literacy. Instead we can view the threshold concepts as an opportunity to provide context and additional guidance to what we had already begun to do in helping students access, evaluate, and create information in the digital age.

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