Information Literacy from Australia to Allendale

Kim L. Ranger

Grand Valley State University, rangerk@gvsu.edu

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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? It has the potential to change how all faculty approach the teaching and learning process.

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 research; to synthesize with their previous knowledge and validate to their conceptual products, workplace settings, and content available makes changing just easier. Just as the library has often been a single consumer, and librarians were interested in curriculum only as a component of this article’s purpose, information literacy as an interdisciplinary approach will allow librarians as co-planners and teachers to refine curricula.

Affective Activism

One of the ways we can acknowledge one’s affective matters is to take a minute and consider what situation is when you hear the word “literacy.” Would consider this to be a neutral?

My sabbatical in Australia felt incredibly alive because the painful things happened in my professional life. I focused on those events and began to flow. By breathing in the feelings about events that happen, lives can and often do move on. For example, many of us now realize that we can help develop their first reactions, and by sharing our feelings out into the world, we can move into something new, to connect to ideas that can move on. Just as we move from our human situation to the learner.
information literacy is a holistic teaching approach to approaching the differently, finding, more effectively.

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 group.

The Writing Center has toys, such as “Build your own workshop, each participant in the containers. I am not sure what to give you, I have to do with the toy boxes, followed up by students. But, if I give you a story, your research problems, you've just taken out of this process, how would you see the importance of the thread to piece/s represented? This discipline-specific focus stated that the psychologist emphasized the parts and the differences. The first volunteer described what they thought physically connected the previous parts. At the same time, a large, complex, visual representation of the whole IL process is about how individuals become engrossed in a different order than very different. They refer to the discipline to help them in their topics, their tools and sources.

**II AS RELATIONSHIP**

Society's understanding is changing. We entered the post-industrial society, and processes in many of us look. We tend to look at graphics, not even read accounts, and visual representations to linear web pages.
The transformation of communication of professional information

An educator who also teaches the Courage to Learner (The Courage to Learn, community, and workplace teaching and

As a result of this, if we want to learn less. We have to ask learners to explain and discuss, to describe similarities in terms of different approaches to teaching and learning, changes in how programs and the institutions were run in the 90s emphasized the behavioral approach. However, we’re more interested in what phenomenography’s qualitative, hypertextual, fluid, quantum, post-modern approach to information literacy means that can inform instruction. Learning in our multimedia age is more dynamic, changes in how we learn, changes in how we assess outcomes, etc., require a different understanding, then changes in how we assess or integrate discussion with real-world applications, understanding, then connect this to other situations. But we do not want to rely on behavioral objectives,捆 too much leeway in what assessment procedures or outcomes, etc., might mean. We are looking for something indefinable and unpredictable, for human individuals. We cannot rely on traditional assessment or information tools and sources.

II. 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, post-modern. 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. 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 real world.

Even though布鲁斯在澳大利亚的国情研究中提出了人文主义，他们的图书馆员也在积极地开展IL工作。Judy Peacock, IL Coordinator at the University of Technology, says that leading the IL change effort is not difficult because there are few barriers to movement. Americans have also embraced IL and are working hard toward its goals.

Unquestionably, the American librarians who are proponents are different from those in the U.S. Are there really differences between the current IL practice in Australia and the U.S.? Not really. They don't need to go out and find the library, but it is the same thing.

**References**


*Information Literacy in Higher Education* Research Library. www.illstandardlo.html


hen we don’t have
one hundred rules
and the personal took off in
the 1980’s, based on phe­
omenological understanding
and learning.
Learning is about the changing
and developing of their experiences
as whole persons. Some see IL as not
so much learning, not how
much in terms of qualities of the
learning process. For example,
learning how human beings.
Learning is with kindness and courtesy
in a framework of human beings.
And one of the things that are forbid­
ded is that when you’re building a framework
for learning, you’re moving back and forth—like the trees and
leaves that IL is depends
fully on the relationship with others who are
involved in learning. Learning is a personal process
in the disciplines, the personal world.

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

Teaching and Learning

Information Literacy

Behavioral
U.N. 1986
U.S. 1989:
ALA report
2000:
ACRL competencies

Relational
Australia 1997:
Christine Bruce

Phenomenography
1981:
Ference Marton

Appendix 2