

## In the Classroom 102

# Teaching Information Literacy in Your Classroom

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**Stan Skrabut:** Thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, perhaps you are, but you're still hanging out with me. This is the first podcast episode for 2021. We made it home, man, what a rough year, but I'm looking forward to a great year. It may start off a little rough. We still have this COVID thing to deal with, but I am confident that if everyone does what they're supposed to do we're going to end on a great note.

Because of my recent job change, I have become a lot more in tune with information literacy. It is now a part of my everyday discussions. This is not to say that I wasn't interested in information literacy before, only that it is distinctly on my radar now. With instructional technology, information literacy, definitely they go hand-in-hand and I need to explore more on both. The big question is, why should we care? Why should we care about information literacy at all?

I believe information literacy is the heart of critical thinking and lifelong learning. In this age where we have lots of false information being pass around as fact, it is important to know the difference between a fact and a falsehood. We want our students to develop into thoughtful citizens who can think critically about what's put in front of them throughout the rest of their lives. Because of the internet, mobile devices, people can rapidly access information. However, they're not really taking the time to assess the information for accuracy.

I know I have fallen victim to believing something that was true because I had not taken time to fully evaluate it. Information literacy is much more than just verifying sources. It's also a matter of verifying so-called facts with multiple authoritative sources. Not just looking at one source, but can you find multiple sources that are credible that speaks to that fact. We also must control our own biases, just because we want to believe something is true doesn't mean it makes it true. I'm going to be looking at this topic through an academic prism since that's my world.

In this world, students need to be able to craft arguments and state positions that are logical and factual. Information literacy plays a key part in developing these skills. Based on my experiences, there's a lot of work to be done. Graduate students I teach are still unable to develop a research question, research and support their topic, and adequately give credit for resources they have used. I've seen this in their writing and worked hard with the students to improve that. I am not a great writer by any stretch of the imagination, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

Too often, they are presenting positions without any support. They claim things as fact, but there's nothing to support it. What I've come to learn is scholarship is a conversation, learning is dialogue. Too often, students just launch into a soliloquy

rather than a discussion and their monologue-- they're not supporting it. They're not having a conversation and therefore, we need to be teaching information literacy in every single class, every single discipline, every course in order for them continue to develop the skill. It's not just take a class, take a workshop from the library and you successfully know it.

It is a process. It takes many courses, many years to really develop to the point that is a skillset that you own. First of all, what is information literacy? According to the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries site, information literacy is a set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.

They also see information literacy as a dialogue that we keep continuing and extending the conversation from one document to another, one conference to another, one presentation to another. We keep adding to the conversation and we keep stretching it and moving it in different ways. How do you go about weaving information literacy in your classroom? One of the first places that I think you need to start is with the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries, also known as ACRL, their framework for information literacy.

As I was preparing to talk about this idea of information literacy, I came upon this framework and it's something that I am going to be weaving into my future because I think it really captures what we should be doing to help students develop into better scholars. If you take the time for both you and your students to understand this framework, you're going to be steps ahead in developing better practices. The ACRL Framework for information literacy goes into detail explaining why information literacy matters. I have put a link linking to this framework, so please do check it out.

The framework, and as they talk about this framework, they acknowledge that this is not a one-and-done session. This is going to a sole workshop at the library and you understand the framework, you got it. It is something that needs to be weaved throughout different classes across the whole degree program. The framework focuses more on the concepts rather than specific tasks and procedures. It has six frames and those frames are authority is constructed and contextual, information creation as a process, information has value, research as inquiry, scholarship as conversation, and searching as strategic exploration.

We're going to take a look at each one of these because I think this whole framework if you layer it into your class, into your different classes and build upon it, scaffold it, you will help students achieve this idea of critical thinking and become lifelong learners, become those informed citizens. I'm only taking bits and pieces from this framework. It is a creative commons document so they're allowing me to do that pretty liberally and I am, but I do encourage you to go back and look at the framework as it's written.

First of all, let's start with authority is constructed and contextual. Information resources reflect their creator's expertise and credibility and are evaluated based on the information need in the context in which the information will be used. They don't

specifically talk about using journal articles. Any information that is out there and available can be a credible source and can be applicable to how it's being used. When you're looking at this, you should be able to recognize different types of authority. It could be the subject expertise. It could be a special experience or position of stature, public office, or something like that that defines the authority of something.

Learners also need to be able to use research tools and indicators of authority to determine the credibility of sources and understand how this credibility is formed. This goes back to what I was saying that on the internet you may find something, a document, and it fits to your biases and like, "Oh, this is great I got to show this everybody," when in fact it's fabricated. Going back to understanding, whoa, how did this article originate? Is it supported by other institutions? It's not just looking at is it a .com, is it a .gov, is it .edu. There's more to it.

The fact that this document, this product may be packaged either formally or informally. It could be a journal article. It could be a book. It could be a blog post. It could be a podcast. There's all types of media types that can go into this and knowing how to do that. Then pretty much, in the end, the learners, your students, and you have to recognize that they're developing their own voices and how they fit into this. They ensure that they are writing accurately. That they're writing reliably. That they respect the intellectual property. How they're participating in communities of practice. That they become an expert voice in the end and that's what we're trying to develop.

Number two information creation as a process. Information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences. The fact as I mentioned, it could be a variety of different formats, different ways that the information is being delivered, and that how the format may change based on the context, such as, are you writing academically, are you writing for a journal, or are you writing for a workplace, and what are their norms in writing?

Some skills or practices that the learners should be able to develop is start seeing the fit between the information products creation process, and a particular information need, recognizing that information may be perceived differently based on the format in which it's packaged. How information is displayed in a video will certainly be displayed different in newsletter and different to a journal article. Learners should be able to continually build their skills and be able to transfer the knowledge of how to research and pull together information and use it for different types of information products.

In the end, they're going to be developing their own creation processes. One of the things that defines an expert or delineates an expert from a novice, is the fact that they have built up a repertoire of tools and strategies in order to communicate in their field. That's what we're trying to do with students is, teach them these expert practices. Number three, information has value. Information possesses several

dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, as a means of negotiating and understanding the world.

This value is manifested in different contexts, including publishing practices, access to information, the commodification of personal information, intellectual property laws. The novice learner may struggle to understand the diverse values of information in an environment where they perceive free information, related services are plentiful, and intellectual property is first encountered through rules of citation or warning about plagiarism, and copyright law. Really, it's just understanding their rights and responsibilities when participating in a community of scholarship.

Part of this is how they participate in this dialogue. I've talked about this. Scholarship is a conversation. They have to recognize others in that conversation, they need to give credit to original ideas of others through proper attribution and citation. Maybe framing this in our classes this way that they're having a conversation, they're extending the conversation. They also have to understand that intellectual property is a legal and social construct, and how they fit into that. They have to understand copyright, fair use, open-access, public domain.

It's interesting if we write a paper and with a Creative Commons license, we can take information just like I'm taking this information from the actual site, weaving it into a podcast. If we take, say, something from Wikipedia and put it into a paper, and we acknowledge that with a Creative Commons license, now, are we plagiarizing when we put that into a paper and we can copy the whole article? Is that plagiarism, or is that not? Ooh, that becomes an interesting question. You can use it wholeheartedly.

They've given permission that you may use this, so long you acknowledge where you got it from. Interesting discussions in how that plays out. They need to be able to make informed choices regarding their online actions as it relates to privacy and the commodification of personal information as well as copyright, fair use, public domain, all that. Number four, research as inquiry. Research is iterative and depends upon increasingly complex or new questions whose answers, in turn, develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.

Experts see inquiry as a process that focuses on problems or questions in a discipline or between disciplines that are open or unresolved. They recognize a collaborative effort within the discipline to extend the knowledge of that field. It's continuing that conversation, keep stretching it in different directions. Novice users or novice learners, they're building their repertoire of these different methods. Part of knowledge practices as far as what you want learners to be able to do is be able to formulate questions for research, based on these gaps, where those information gaps are, being able to re-examine existing possible conflicts of information.

Part of this is being able to narrow it, identify the proper scope of the investigation, being able to break down complex questions into simple ones, limiting that scope, and using appropriate research methods based on the need, circumstance, or type of inquiry in order to get at those questions. Once they are into that gathering information, they have to organize it in a meaningful way, and therefore be able to synthesize ideas gathered from multiple sources.

I do a lot of reading. Right now I'm reading James Lang's book on small teaching. I am looking at it how he synthesizes these ideas from multiple sources, and I'm quite taken with how he does it. He definitely writes extremely well, and I like how he pulls his ideas together. Finally, this idea of research as inquiry is being able to draw conclusions based on the analysis interpretation of the information. Number five is one of my favorites, and this is scholarship is conversation. Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engaged in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.

Basically, learning is about dialogue. Research in scholarly and professional fields, ideas are formulated, debated, weighed against each other over an extended period of time. It's not something that just happens in a vacuum. These ideas then take a life and are continued in many different directions. You can see this in journal articles when there're references.

There's good activities where you can start with an article going backwards and going forward to see how this article has been used. It's a nice way to show how the conversation has been continued over a period of time.

Therefore, providing attribution to relevant previous research is also an obligation of participation in the conversation. It enables the conversation to move forward and strengthens one's voice in the conversation. For our learners, they need to know how to cite the contributing work of others in their own information production. They have to be able to contribute to the scholarly conversation, whether it is an online community, guided discussion, undergraduate research journal, conference proceeding, poster session, they are part of that conversation, and they have to acknowledge everyone else in that conversation.

They need to be able to summarize changes in scholarly perspective over time, on a particular topic within a specific discipline, just learning how to be part of that conversation. What are the rules for the conversation? Every communication device, every communication method has its own sets of rules, its own norms, and how to participate into that. Number six, searching as strategic exploration. Searching for your information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops.

The search begins with a question, and then that question guides finding needed information. Experts realize that information searching is a contextualized complex experience that affects and is affected by the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of the searcher. The difference between novices and experts is, novices may only select just a few references to what they're doing, where experts will search more broadly and deeply to determine the most appropriate information within the project scope. Seen this recently in student papers. A student will have written a paper then realize they need to have sources, then they'll call the librarian and ask for sources that they can put into their paper. They are taking it entirely backwards on how to write that particular paper. Novices, they only use a few search strategies, while experts use a variety of different strategies, depending on the sources, the scope, and the context of the information they need. It's a matter of



building the toolset for those novice learners, teaching them how to continue to expand that, ways to help the learners.

They need to be able to determine the initial scope of the task for their information needs, and what those sources maybe. It could be other scholars, it could be different organizations, they need to know, for a particular discipline, those resources. That's where LibGuides come into, come in handy and I'm going to be investing time and energy into developing LibGuides for different courses, from where I work. Learners need to be able to select the right tools for their information needs, and the strategies that they're using and be able to continually refine those search strategies, depending on their needs.

Those are the six strategies and once again, let me just remind you of those particular strategies. Authority is constructed and contextual. Information creation is a process, information has value, research as inquiry, scholarship, as conversation, my favorite, and searching as strategic exploration. Now, once you have those, like I said, you'll start to figure out ways that you can weave those into your courses but how can you do this more thoughtfully. I've pulled together a number of different strategies to help you do that. I think the first place and I've talked about backward design quite often but this is the place to start.

Like all other frameworks, if you want to weave them into your classroom, it's best to start with backward design. You figure out what are the essential questions, big ideas that you wish to teach and how does your program prioritize those essential questions or big ideas? As you're planning your course, thinking about this idea of information literacy, you need to develop some learning goals, learning objectives, and start mapping these out. Identify the things that you want to have students successfully know or do as part of your class.

Then you'll need to figure out how to assess them, how are you going to have them demonstrate what they know or can do? Once you've done that you need activities for your students to go and practice those things and then finally, you need content that will support learning about these activities. Basically, map this all out. A spreadsheet is a great tool to do this and I've talked about backward design, and I'll put the link to the episode as part of the show notes and with this, you're going to be able to schedule these things appropriately, you'll be able to scaffold them, building out one concept to another to lead you to those final outcomes.

Part of doing that is determining what the threshold concepts are for your discipline. What are the specialized information skills in your discipline that students should develop? History, developing primary sources. In the sciences, they may be using large data sets. How do they go about discovering those and adequately weaving them into the documents that they're creating or products that they're creating? Another thing that you should be doing is look out for workshops, or look for workshops at your campus Teaching and Learning Center.

These are, I would say, focused on blended learning How you can flip your classroom where you have the lecture portion online, but you really have hands-on activities that they're they're doing these things in class. What can students do

outside of class in order to prepare to demonstrate those information literacy skills in your class? That's where they really need it. You need to be able to over the shoulder with your students, look at what they're doing, and talk to them about the whole process.

Having them try to do this on their own, they're not getting it right and so bringing that into the classroom, that will help a lot. Integrate your library, your library is part of your team. You have a team assigned to you and many faculty don't use these teams appropriately. I talked about this in the episode dealing with coaching, that you have a whole team you have instructional technologists available to you. You have librarians available to you, you have folks that deal with accessibility assigned to you.

There are all kinds of different people that are part of your team and you really need to start using them. Before the term even starts, talk with your librarians on how to integrate information literacy into your classroom. Have them look at the activities, that whole mapping out of your objectives and the activities and the assessments. Bring that map with you and have sit down with your librarians, and learn about strategies that you can use in your classroom. Information literacy is just not for English composition. Every single discipline relies on information literacy.

As part of working with the library, embed a librarian that you can have a librarian to assist you with those assignments. Clue them in on the requirements of the assignments and the needs of the librarian well in advance so they can properly prepare. They can serve as coaches both to you and your students and that episode happened to be Episode Number 99, where I talked about coaching. Librarians can definitely coach on information literacy. Another area where the library can help is develop a LibGuide, a library guide specifically for your class.

These LibGuides will talk about key books that will be essential for your class. Maybe journal databases, could be podcast sources and basically, you can tailor this for assignments. If you want students to learn how to develop an annotated bibliography, the librarian as part of your course LibGuide can provide instruction dealing with creating an annotated bibliography and make that part of your class. If possible, have a library session that's relevant to your particular course and the activities in your course.

Not just a generic library session, but one that will help them complete the assignments that you have put together for your classes. Also, link to library tutorials and workshops that they have held, put them right into your classes, put them into your learning management system. You should be encouraging your students and you should be going to different workshops created by your librarians. Take advantage of the tutorials that they have put together. If you find something is missing, work with your librarians to offer suggestions for upcoming workshops or tutorials.

If you have a need, let them work for you. They are part of your team. Another piece to this is having students view themselves as information. That students are producers, both individually and collaboratively. How do they interact, evaluate,

produce, and share information in various formats and modes? Get them to understand that they are contributing to this knowledge, which then for me, begs that you need to get rid of one-and-done assignments. Disposable assignments, get rid of those, start creating assignments that add to the knowledge of the world and that will also help students take this a little more serious.

Think about your discipline and how information literacy applies to your particular discipline. How might you in a librarian design learning experiences and assignments that will encourage students to assess their own attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses, knowledge gaps related to information? Those are some ways that you can start weaving this idea of information literacy into your class. I think it goes very well with open education resources, it goes very well with Universal Design for Learning, the community of inquiry.

Those are some of my favorite frameworks that I like to work with and I think this dovetails excellently with those particular different strategies. Lots of talk about this, but hopefully, I gave you some things to think about, and before I let you go, here's a quick plug for my book.