

Article

Critical Pedagogy in Libraries: A Unified Approach

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ABSTRACT

Critical pedagogy originated in the social sciences during the mid-twentieth century with the foundational work of Paulo Friere. More recently in information science, James Elmborg and others have framed critical pedagogy through the lens of information literacy instruction. As a whole the philosophy is one which considers economic, political, and societal systems which influence the entire information life cycle from creation to consumption. Central to the adoption was the incorporation of learners as equals with valid and highly individualized experiences in academic discourse. Beyond information literacy instruction, critical pedagogy has the potential to also benefit and define the librarian's outreach and support role for the scholarly communications process. Scholarly communications encompasses both traditional academic publishing models (peer reviewed journals, conference presentations, etc.) and nontraditional channels (social media, open access, etc.) and is concerned with the information lifecycle as it relates to teaching research and scholarly work. In consideration of scholarly communications processes, issues of critical pedagogy including external market forces, privilege of information, systems of access, and consumption all play a defining role. A move to a more unified approach of critical pedagogy in libraries would highlight crucial issues of information literacy and scholarly communications while simultaneously augmenting the library's role across campus. The evolution of critical pedagogy in libraries is briefly discussed. Current scholarly communications practices in academic libraries as seen through the literature and by examining U.S. library websites is also reviewed. The author makes suggestions for meaningful inclusion of critical pedagogy in libraries through a unified approach to scholarly communications and information literacy programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Critical pedagogy arose in the mid-twentieth century out of the foundational work of Paulo Freire who advocated a “problem posing education” which is rooted in the human experience, defined by relationships with others and with the natural world. Making these connections explicit empowers students to fully consider global systems, their own place in those systems, and achieve transformative understanding and change.¹ More recently in information science, James Elmborg and others have framed critical pedagogy through the lens of information literacy instruction. As a whole, critical information literacy is a philosophy which considers, “the social, political, economic and corporate systems that have power and influence over information production, dissemination, access and consumption.”² Beyond information literacy instruction, critical pedagogy has the potential to also inform and define the librarian’s outreach and support role in the scholarly communications process. The scholarly communications lifecycle is defined by issues of critical pedagogy including external market forces, privilege of information, systems of access, and consumption.

Core issues of both critical information literacy and scholarly communications include recognizing good information from bad amid a sea of data, understanding the role of new media sources in the face of traditional publishing models, and awareness of the underlying economic motivations that exist in both old and new media/publishing models concern both students and faculty. Current approaches to information literacy and scholarly communications generally address only one approach over the other.³ In adopting a unified approach to addressing these issues across both faculty and students,

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000). A later practitioner, Henry Giroux succinctly explains Freire’s critical pedagogy as an, “educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action.”

² Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins, "Introduction," in *Information Literacy and Social Justice*, ed. Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2013), 4.

³ The author conducted a literature search on April 4, 2016 in Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts and found 1,401 articles around information literacy approaches or methods and 307 articles around scholarly communication approaches or methods. When doing a combined search for both information literacy and scholarly communication, 32 titles were found. In this last combined sample, the reason for inclusion was due to dual indexing in scholarly output and information literacy or communication not for reasons of a unified approach or method. Warren and Duckett reached a similar conclusion when conducting their own search for a shared body of work across LISTA, LISA, and Google Scholar in Scott Warren and Kim Duckett, ““Why Does Google Scholar Sometimes Ask for Money?” Engaging Science Students in Scholarly Communication and the Economics of Information.” *Journal of Library Administration* 50 (2010): 349-372.

libraries and librarians can address the challenges and inequities in the academic information ecosystem holistically. Likewise, a unified approach provides faculty and students with the knowledge they need to empower themselves as authors and information users in their professional and personal lives by highlighting the problematic issues that exist in the academic information ecosystem regardless of discipline or experience. A move to a more unified approach of critical pedagogy in libraries would highlight crucial issues of both information literacy and scholarly communications while simultaneously augmenting the library's role across campus.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOUNDATIONS

Paulo Freire's seminal 1970 work, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*, was shaped by his experience as a product of the public educational system in Brazil and his later role as an educator in that same system. Through this combined experience, Freire identified and refined his view of the hierarchical power structure which exists in the traditional educational systems first introduced in the Western world and later adapted to third world countries through colonization. Freire noted that through traditional methods like rote memorization and lecture, students are simply meant to internalize the world view of the educator without consideration or validation of one's own life experience. This process of *banking education*, in which educators make deposits into the minds of learners, does not leave room for transformative education or inquiry on the part of the student. The pupil is not meant to analyze information but to simply absorb it as it is given by the educator. Freire asserts that the only way to change this dichotomy is to address the central contradiction of the teacher-student relationship. In his view, all participants need to be accepted as both teacher and student, learning from one another and validating the unique life experiences each brings to the classroom.⁴

Akin to Freire's *banking concept of education*, Antonio Gramsci wrote about the power and influence of *principles*. Gramsci wrote that until the subjugated majority sees beyond the dominant cultural systems in which they live, the *principles* (cultural institutions of the ruling class including churches, schools, and libraries) will dominate the field of available options.⁵ This domination leaves the subjugated with a finite field of

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 72.

⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 1:229, 4:200-209; and "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," in *Selections from Political Writings (1921 – 1926)*, ed. Quintin Hoare (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), 14-16.

options, which is limited by the constructed culture and society of the ruling class.⁶ Therefore, the subjugated only perceive opportunities to advance their individual position within the dominant system, thus creating a homogenous society. In Gramsci's view, only by mass organization of *organic intellectuals* could a real *counter hegemony* be established as an alternative.⁷

Steven Lukes further identified three dimensions of powers.⁸ The first dimension defines the way in which the ruling class/group maintains its power via superior resources. The second dimension states that the ruling class' power is further cemented through exclusion of certain players and restrictions on subjects of public debate, which are limited to those that affirm the accepted worldview of the ruling class/group. This second dimension is akin to Freire's *banking* concept in which the student is meant to passively absorb facts and figures without analysis. Lukes' third dimension describes the explicit and implicit ways in which the ruling group successfully constructs the myths and belief systems in which the subjugated operate. Thus, the world of the subjugated is shaped by the rules, beliefs, and value system of the dominate class. This is analogous to Gramsci's view of the ruling class' superior resources as a way to expand and legitimize their power. Lukes' third dimension, as with Gramsci's writings, points to the potent role of mass media and advertising in shaping the lives of the subjugated.⁹

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN LIBRARIES

Library literature has incorporated some of the critical pedagogy theorized by Freire, Gramsci, Lukes, and others, most notably in the philosophy and practice of critical information literacy. Michelle Holschuh Simmons notes that critical information literacy differs from traditional library instruction because it moves beyond research skill acquisition and tool expertise to a transformative discussion with students about the political, social, historical, and economic forces in which information is created, framed, and revised. Through a transformative discussion encompassing the information

⁶ Jonathan Cope, "Information Literacy and Social Power," in *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods*, eds. M.T. Accardi, E. Drabinski, A. Kumbier (Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2010) 18.

⁷ Antonio Gramsci, "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," in *Selections from Political Writings (1921 – 1926)*, ed. Quintin Hoare (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), 21.

⁸ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 25-29.

⁹ *Ibid*; Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) Gramsci's views on media are found in the many "On Periodicals," and "...in popular culture" notes; it should also be noted that George Orwell addresses a similar point about uncritical adoption of dominant discourses replicating hegemonic systems in George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950).

ecosystem, students can understand how to participate in scholarly communities of practice.¹⁰

James Elmborg suggests that librarians must focus less on information transfer and more on developing critical consciousness in students. Elmborg sees critical information literacy as a personal philosophy of librarianship which invites students to fully participate as partners in unraveling and making sense of the inequities at all levels in our societal institutions and civilization at large.¹¹ The incorporation of a critical approach to information literacy therefore means a move to a transformative education focused on the critical navigation of information systems. The discourse, however, remains limited within the established hierarchical system of academia. When serious discussion about the underlying economic and societal influences which impact the structure of the academic environment are neglected, a false construction of the world at large is perpetuated. Therefore, students and faculty are prevented from recognizing legitimate possibilities beyond the constructions of the traditional educational and publishing systems.

SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS DEFINITIONS

The Association of College and Resource Libraries (ACRL) defines scholarly communications as, "the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use. The system includes both formal means of communications, such as publication in peer-reviewed journals, and informal channels, such as electronic listservs."¹² The scholarly communications ecosystem also includes questions of authors' rights and the economics of information as they apply to both institutions and individuals. The questions raised by the ACRL definition of scholarly communications are particularly germane to the discussion of critical pedagogy, since it requires a critical examination of the dominant world system in which the information is created and disseminated. In the

¹⁰ Michelle Holschuh Simmons, "Librarians as Disciplinary Discourse Mediators: Using Genre Theory to Move Toward Critical Information Literacy," *Libraries & the Academy* 5, no.3 (July 2005): 297-311.

¹¹ James Elmborg, "Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 2(March 2006): 192-199; and James Elmborg, "Critical Information Literacy: Definitions and Challenges" in *Transforming Information Literacy Programs: Intersecting Frontiers of Self, Library Culture, and Campus Community*, eds. C.W. Wilkinson and C. Bruch (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, A Division of the American Library Association, 2012), 75.

¹² "Association of Research Libraries Focus Areas: Scholarly Communications," accessed October 28, 2015, <http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/scholarly-communication#.VnFI-9IrJhF>.

cycle of scholarly communications, the dominant is the traditional publishing model which in turn has the support of the academy via institutional subscription purchase, as well as its wide acceptance as evidence in the tenure and promotion process.¹³ Access to information is also a core aspect of the scholarly communications cycle. Ian Carter writes, "Scholarly communications is not only about the dissemination of new knowledge to other scholars. It is (or certainly should be) about informed dissemination to a range of audiences, for multiple purposes."¹⁴ Indeed, the open access movement was founded out of this principle of democratized access to information. If the philosophy of critical pedagogy is adopted in both information literacy instruction and scholarly communications activities, a unified critical examination of the lifecycle of information emerges. A strategy which addresses issues of economics and privilege in the individual experiences of both student and teacher, and holistically and explicitly examines the world of information at large, fosters a critically trained student, an empowered faculty, and a stronger partnership between faculty and librarians. For institutions which do not qualify as Research I, this unified approach has huge implications in the training of the 21st century student for life beyond the academy, and for the overall awareness and action in support of authors' rights and access to information. What does the current landscape of scholarly communications in libraries look like and how can teaching-centered institutions achieve a unified approach?

SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS IN CURRENT PRACTICE

The ACRL emphasis on scholarly communications and accompanying literature around the scholarly lifecycle makes clear that this is an area of concern for the library community. The Association of Research Libraries released a 2012 SPEC Kit on scholarly communications which included an environmental scan of libraries at research heavy and Research I institutions.¹⁵ The majority of institutions profiled had established offices, resources, and points of contact in the scholarly communications lifecycle. The environmental scan identifies outreach in scholarly communications in a certain portion of the academic landscape: the most prestigious portion of the landscape. The group of institutions that leads all debates in academia also has the largest share of resources available. For the purposes of addressing issues of accessibility, economics, etc. which are

¹³ Dennis Dillon, "Hand Wringing in Paradise: Scholarly Communication and the Intimate Twinges of Conscience," *Journal of Library Administration* 51 (2011): 415-431.

¹⁴ Ian M Carter, "Changing institutional research strategies," in *The Future of Scholarly Communications*, eds. Deborah Shorley and Michael Jubb (London: Facet Publishing, 2013), 151.

¹⁵ Rachel Radom, Melanie Feltner-Reichert, and Kynita Stringer-Stanback, *SPEC Kit 332: Organization of Scholarly Communication Services* (Washington DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2012).

found in a critical pedagogical approach, the author examined teaching-focused institutions for scholarly communications activities.

Indiana State University’s (ISU) Office of Institutional Research has identified nineteen peer institutions who serve a similar student profile.¹⁶ This author considered the identified group of peers as a sample of practice in scholarly communications at teaching-focused institutions. A scan was performed via the institutions’ library sites with a focus limited to scholarly communications activities, which included the following areas: repositories, copyright/authors’ rights, open access (OA), open data, and explicit university policy as it relates to these areas.¹⁷

Table 1. Peer institutions with concentrations in areas of Scholarly Communications

Explicit Areas of Focus	Number of Peer Institutions
Copyright/author’s rights	19
Open Access	8
Open Data	3
Repositories	8
Resource Use Guidelines	4
University Policy	4
Scholarly Communications	4

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN FINDINGS

The most highly featured area of outreach among the institutions was copyright/authors’ rights (nineteen institutions). Eight institutions included information on institutional repositories and open access issues as they relate to their repositories. Of these eight, three showed strong support for OA with sites featuring funding support for institutional authors who wish to publish with open access journals.

Only four of the nineteen institutions in the sample featured webpages specifically under the heading of scholarly communications.¹⁸ These four institutions also explicitly integrated wider university policy in the area of copyright/authors’ rights into their approach to scholarly communications. The acknowledgement of broader institutional policies implies, at the very least, an open conversation or partnership between library and institution in the area of scholarly communications. Also, interestingly, scholarly communications points of contact varied from site to site among

¹⁶ “Indiana State University Institutional Research: Peers,” accessed October 28, 2015, <http://irt2.indstate.edu/cms/ir/links/peers/>.

¹⁷ See Table 1.

¹⁸ See Table 2.

these four: two were general library professionals (i.e., librarians), and two were under the purview of the library director. Of the four positions, only two held position titles in scholarly communications or communications.

Table 2. Peer institutions with concentrations in Scholarly Communications

Office	Point of Contact
LibGuide Scholarly Communications: What is OA	Communications Librarian
Webpage on Scholarly Communications	Dir. Library Info Tech & Technical Suppl.
Scholarly Communications LibGuide	Assistant Dean for Collection Management and Scholarly Communications
Web guide on Scholarly Communications	Reference & Instruction

The majority of these institutions have addressed related scholarly communications areas in a piecemeal fashion, addressing institution specific and particular needs as they arose. For example, when an institution establishes a repository, a large influx of copyright questions may appear. To address these questions a point of contact is established and a subject guide assembled. While this approach may serve the needs of the institution in the moment, the broader long term questions of scholarly communications are left unaddressed.

The library at Indiana State University is similar in focus to the majority of its peers. The emphasis on scholarly communications to date has been very specifically in the areas of copyright/authors' rights and institutional repositories. Recently, the library has become a member of Springer Open/BioMed Central to provide university open access authors a discount in publishing in Springer Open/BioMed Central titles. The university is a teaching-focused institution where the need for greater integration of guidance in scholarly communications is necessary. The majority of ISU students are first generation college students from working class and/or traditionally marginalized

groups.¹⁹ Though there is a push for incorporating information literacy in the classroom to foster critical thought, a greater emphasis in critical pedagogy and understanding the economic and societal factors that shape and control the information they encounter would benefit both faculty and students in school and beyond.

In practice, discussions on the construction of the academic ecosystem rarely happen in the classroom, though there is an awareness that it is an important and sorely missing aspect of the undergraduate curriculum.²⁰ However, students would benefit from an understanding of the academy's construction and how it effects not only what they learn, but how they learn. For-profit companies like Google, Netflix, and Amazon have created complex algorithms that deftly build on an individual's preferences, crafting custom results based on a user's past behavior. These results are then presented en masse to the user for consideration and suggest the illusion of unlimited and unfiltered choice, but the user does not know what information is left out. Christine Rosen suggests that this "illusion of perfect control" only serves to limit our worldview and lose what might be considered "genuinely individualistic."²¹ For the sake of perceived convenience, users are unable to see beyond their own constructions and remain safely part of Gramsci's *homogenous culture*. Thus, students are dually crippled in assessing information. First, they are often coming out of the public education system which teaches memorization and little higher-level analysis techniques. Second, they are often familiar and comfortable with a fully curated presentation of information throughout their daily lives, coupled with a limited life experience outside of these spheres.

How can libraries/librarians reveal the homogeneity of culture so ubiquitous in information to benefit both faculty and students in their scholarly and everyday endeavors? Indeed, outside of some faculty discussion of the economics of traditional publishing models, a cross disciplinary unified understanding of emerging open publishing models, what institutional repositories mean for authorship rights, and ethical

¹⁹ Catherine Tucker, et al. "Indiana State University Environmental Scan." SEM Data Team for the Pathways to Retention and Student Success SEM Plan: 2013-2017, University, 2012. <http://irt2.indstate.edu/cms/ir/u-data/archive/environmental-scan-fall2012/>.

²⁰ Sung Un Kim and David Shumaker found that while faculty (and librarians) rated questions of information creation and the associated ethical concerns as important, they also reported that they rarely incorporated them into classroom instruction. Sung Un Kim and David Shumaker, "Student, Librarian, and Instructor Perceptions of Information Literacy Instruction and Skills in a First Year Experience Program: A Case Study," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41 (2015): 449-456. Professor Nicolas Lehmann calls for a greater curricular focus on "understanding how information is produced, how to locate it, and how much faith to put into it." Nicolas Lehmann, "What Graduates Should Know," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 62, no. 17 (2016), <http://chronicle.com/article/What-Should-Graduates-Know-/234824>.

²¹ Catherine Rosen, "The Age of Egocasting," *The New Atlantis* 7 (2004/2005): 51-72.

information sharing among colleagues does not exist.²² By adopting a unified approach to scholarly communications and critical information literacy across user groups (faculty and students), librarians can address the core issues shared across both methodologies as two integral components of a larger critical pedagogy of information fluency across the educational experience. It is through this recognition and practice that librarians move from gatekeeper to guide, and in doing so become closer to Gramsci's *organic intellectuals*.

Incorporating both scholarly communications and information literacy approaches into a unified critical methodology is a daunting task. Smaller teaching-focused institutions often do not have the time or resources to devote to developing a comprehensive approach. Nevertheless, a unified approach to the discussion of the lifecycle of information would provide a long tail strategy and mission for the library's role in both scholarly communications and information literacy instruction. Additionally, a critical approach would bring the personal life and cultural experiences of students from traditionally underserved communities into the scholarly discourse. At the featured sample of schools, who serve nontraditional and marginalized populations, a move to a unified approach empowers students with the skills they need to successfully navigate through the information ecosystem beyond the college classroom. The critical approach also serves as a call to greater partnership between libraries and academic departments toward the goal of greater access to information.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE: A UNIFIED APPROACH

What does a unified approach look like? Comprehensive scholarly communications plans that work in tandem with university policy is a first step. As with any initiative, in order to make the most impact and effect real change, a partnership with the institution at large (and true buy-in from university administration) is necessary. This partnership must be unambiguous and strategically aligned with any university offices which have a part to play in the scholarly communications process (i.e., general counsel, student success, graduate school, etc.). In addressing students' education, the plan needs to span the entire student experience and be curriculum-based. It should include all facets of the information lifecycle and consider information from traditional and non-traditional

²² G. J. Kocken and S. H. Wical, " 'I've never heard of it before': Awareness of open access at a small liberal arts university," *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian* 32, no.3 (2013): 140-154, accessed April 12, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/01639269.2013.817876>.; and Diane Dawson, "The Scholarly Communications Needs of Faculty: An Evidence Based Foundation for Development of Library Services," *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* 9, no.4 (2014): 4-29, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18438/B8R88C>.

sources. The curriculum should avoid passive lecture and rely on active dissemination, with attention given to both student and faculty experience in the scholarly discourse.

Though faculty are already experts in critical analysis, they are also a product of a very particular process and discipline. Therefore a complementary faculty component, be it a seminar or workshop series, should also be established. The goal of this component must bring to light the issues of traditional publishing in the promotion and tenure process, the economics of the process, and the inherent privileging of information which arises from the system. This privileging of specific information within the traditional academic system affects the way in which individual students engage in their own educational experiences. Specifically, students are taught to give precedence to published scholarly information and devalue open and new sources of information. Additionally, privileged information creates economic barriers for students who may have difficulty affording information required by faculty. Further assisting faculty to make explicit connections to privilege and economics inherent in the system should also be tied to an understanding of how this system and the world of digital curation has shaped their students' worldviews outside of the classroom. Finally, as the rapid evolution of knowledge creation and dissemination continues, the plan should be regularly reviewed and updated. It must always be institution specific, in step with current practice in libraries, and clearly address the current (and rapidly changing) information landscape.

Possible Obstacles to Change and Strategies to Overcome Them

As with any change, some entities throughout the institution will have a more difficult time adapting to a unified approach. The reasons for disengagement vary but can include overall indifference to the organization, a lack of understanding of the importance of the potential change (lack of buy-in), or lack of funding. Library faculty and staff may be weary to initiate a new approach to information fluency because of an already full plate of responsibilities, lack of funding, or a perceived lack of subject matter expertise. To reinforce the importance of the approach at the institutional level, a library champion external to the library, would be useful in advocating to university/ college administration the value of the approach. This champion needs to be assisted by the library faculty/ staff member who is to lead the approach. Education at the level of non-library faculty and administrators on what exactly this approach means for the enhancement of the curriculum and the critical information skills of the entire university community must be established. Librarians, with multidisciplinary backgrounds and information specializations, are uniquely situated to highlight the overall societal and economic forces which span the disciplines to the benefit of faculty and students. Within the library, care needs to be taken to provide existing faculty/ staff with the support and tools they need to provide outreach. Are there workflows that can be adjusted to alleviate overwhelmed librarians? What do questions of critical pedagogy mean for institutional repositories, classroom technology, resource description, and collection development? Every institution has its own unique issues to contend with.

Current practice and research in libraries around information literacy instruction and scholarly communications remains fairly removed from one another. Viewed through critical pedagogy, there is recognized overlap and potential for coordinated action. Doing so would allow libraries to address the broader issues of economics and power which are pervasive throughout the whole information lifecycle. Through this unified approach to information fluency, students and faculty can truly be empowered to understand the current systems in which they play a role and look toward change in the university and beyond. As individuals navigate through more and more curated information, understanding the socio-economic factors which influence that information empowers information users to shape and build the worlds in which they live in meaningful ways. Librarians have the opportunity to be guides in this transformative process toward information fluency across the academy.

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