CHAPTER 3

Getting Everyone on the Same Page

Critically Re-imagining Library Instruction for Diverse and International Student Populations

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So a student walks into a library… While this sounds like the start to an old joke, it is the everyday world for librarians. Every day theological libraries are visited, both physically and virtually, by people who want to use library resources. But who are the people? What are they looking for? What do they know about using the library? The list of questions we could ask about library users is almost endless. Layer on top of these unknowns the movement toward more intentional international programs in theological education and you get a very diverse user community who needs to be served. Further, the intersection between the library and the user is making library instruction a tricky proposition because of the many factors at play in student populations. Some of these factors–race, national origin, language, age, and educational background–just skirt the edges of the diverse students that walk through the library door, to say nothing of those students present in online programs. In this chapter, I will explore why I think theological libraries are still working from a perspective that underserves diverse, and specifically international, student populations, and how this affects information literacy. Then I will explore ways to address this using part of the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.*[1] Finally, I will close with examples of how I have begun to get everyone on the same page by reframing information literacy.

Reconsidering the Place of the Theological Library

The basic definition of a library from the *Oxford English Dictionary* is, "A place set apart to contain books for reading, study, or reference."[2] Current libraries, theological or otherwise, are much more complex than this definition. At their core, libraries in the West have operated under an established set of norms that has been in place for decades, if not centuries. Shaped by legacies of colonialism and racism, t hese norms include the use of either Library of Congress or the Dewey Decimal System to arrange physical materials and established systems such as interlibrary loan to give and receive materials from other libraries. Even the arrangement of "service points" such as information or circulation desks and the layout of resources and collections follows predictable patterns in most libraries. With the rise of digital collections and the internet, many libraries are turning to common online tools such as LibGuides and discovery services to curate and manage content. But what lies behind these systems? The systems that are often used to organize and manage libraries have their roots in the American or, more broadly, the Western system of education, which is informed by histories of colonialization and authority vested in white supremecy. In summarizing the work of education theorists Mary Stuart, Catherine Lido, and Jessica Morgan on student experience, Avery and Feist remark in their chapter for *The Globalized Library,*

> *[a]s an individual has a habitus, so too do institutions, which may be at odds with an individual's. This can lead to significant discrepancies between higher education experiences of the dominant cultural group and minority ethnic students in higher education, particularly in regards to issues surrounding entitlement and a sense of belonging.*[3]

Because of existing structures that have evolved, the theological library might be a place set apart, but it is still a part of a greater educational system all of which needs to be reconsidered.

Since theological libraries have been molded in the same form as the institutions they serve, it is highly unlikely that they are going to completely change their classification systems or radically change long-established circulation practices to incorporate other cultural perspectives. However, many libraries have turned to translating library guides and offering library orientations in various languages. Theological libraries have partnered with or established writing centers to offer classes on plagiarism and research skills in order to help international students. Others have embedded librarians in online classrooms to serve as a resource and many libraries have information literacy programs to

bridge gaps in understanding. Whatever form or format it takes, theological libraries are working hard at trying to improve the information literacy skills of their students. But is this enough? Christine Pawley writes in 2003 just after the release of the first set of *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* were released by the Association of College and Research Libraries,

> *But because statements like the ACRL* Competency Standards *also refer, in the techno-management tradition, to the need for 'effective and efficient' information access, and lay out the evaluative criteria on the basis of which information should be selected, information literacy also has the capability to produce and sustain a hierarchical system wherein expert authorities determine what counts as 'knowledge'. Such an approach emphasizes control rather than freedom, and a narrowing (as opposed to a broadening) of selection to those sources deemed 'valuable'. Rather than by all citizens, the tendency of this procrustean paradigm is to fit all contingencies to an 'iron bed', the dimensions of which are predefined by a cultural, social and economic elite.*[4]

ACRL replaced the *Competency Standards* with six interconnected core concepts that can be considered threshold concepts. However, as William Badke summarizes, "The *Framework,* not being a set of standards, becomes difficult to conceptualize and challenging to translate into particular information literacy skill-sets, especially when each discipline views the *Framework* differently. It has been criticized as either overly complex or simplistic, as wedded too strongly to disciplinary structures, and as lacking in emphasis for social justice issues, among other things."[5] With both the *Competency Standards* and the *Framework*, what remains are rigid forms of hierarchy and power as described by Pawley and Badke and they affect the work of the library as a place set apart.

Using the Frame Information Creation as a Process to Begin Reimagining Instruction

In many academic libraries, information literacy needs can be vast. Particularly in the case of theological libraries, which tend to be smaller in size and staff, this need feels more acute because not all seminary students have the same educational background or research experience. Add to the mix varied cultural experiences and information literacy quickly becomes overwhelming for librarians. A brief literature search turns up multiple articles and books about information literacy which seem to fall into three broad categories. First, the undergraduate and specifically first-year experience or secondly, some type of

discipline-specific library instruction; generally it is much harder to find literature on information literacy with graduate students. The third category is information literacy with international students. In the introduction to *The Globalized Library,* Yelena Luckert and Lindsey Inge Carpenter write,

> *[w]hen reflecting on libraries in the United States, we almost never think of them as being international in nature. We view them as 'American' institutions, serving 'American' patrons and our 'American' organizations. But academic libraries, like institutions of higher education at large, are key players in the effort to educate a diverse student body to be globally conscious members of our communities.*[6]

Theological education serves a very diverse student body both geographically and culturally. Who makes up our diverse student body? Are we just working with international students, or do we include a larger population of students in theological education from widely different cultural backgrounds regardless of where they were born? I think it is important to understand who our audience is as we work within the *Framework* to provide instruction for them.

The *Framework* states in its introduction, "Librarians have a greater responsibility in identifying core ideas within their own knowledge domain that can extend learning for students, in creating a new cohesive curriculum for information literacy, and in collaborating more extensively with faculty."[7] This statement suggests theological librarians can draw on their own knowledge domain for their information literacy curriculum. To sharpen the focus of information literacy for theological librarians, let's consider it as a social justice issue. In their 2013 work titled, *Information Literacy and Social Justice,* the editors Gregory and Higgins introduce the concept of critical information literacy building on the work of librarians who are applying critical theories to information literacy. They offer the following proposal:

> *Therefore, when we apply critical theoretical approaches to our work as librarians, we consider the historical, cultural, social, economic, political and other forces that affect information so that we may explore ways to critique our understanding of reality and disrupt the commonplace; interrogate multiple viewpoints to identify the status quo and marginalized voices; and focus on sociopolitical issues that shape and suppress information in order to take informed action in the world. Furthermore, when we apply critical theory to our teaching practices, we are working to create a critical pedagogy that helps the learner become aware of the forces that have hitherto ruled their lives and especially shaped their consciousness.*[8]

While this seems like a tall order for any librarian to follow, let alone a theological librarian in a small library, I think this is a viable approach to begin getting everyone on the same page and start critically rethinking library instruction. Of the six concepts in the *Framework,* the one I use is Information Creation as a Process. In the following paragraphs, I will explain more about this choice and how I have worked with it.

ACRL describes this concept as "Information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via a selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences."[9] The field of theology and religion creates information. Many degree programs require students to develop a portfolio or thesis project to complete their master's degrees. So students become participants in the information creation process as they work on their degrees. With the information creation process in mind, I work with this threshold concept for two reasons.

First, I work with it because of the latitude it has for accommodating the wide range of information formats which seminary students encounter from printed works on the one hand to electronic resources on the other. Even within those information formats there is a wide range of formats our students must work through. I often see students in my library with print sources scattered around them while they read an article online and look up vocabulary they might not know on the Internet, all at the same time. Whether engaging students in formal information literacy or in casual conversation, I want students to understand that the information they are using was produced to convey a message. Can they identify the message? How does the information they find in a book compare with something they might have found online? How does using a full text article they found online compare to an article in a print journal? Helping students discern subtle contextual cues about information creation helps them in their own information creating process.

Secondly, I use Information Creation as a Process because it indirectly addresses the many issues listed above in the quote from Gregory and Higgins on the forces that affect information. Further, I think this concept brings students closest to what Pawley referred to above as "opening up possibilities for social, cultural, and economic participation in knowledge production."[10] Helping students understand that information just doesn't appear in a finished format but has a creation process then creates a place for them to insert themselves into the material. Students can bring their contexts and experiences into worship resources or search for a Bible commentary from their cultural perspective. I think this picks up on some of the dispositions associated with the threshold concept such as seeking out characteristics of information products and

accepting their uncertainty about the value of information creation in emerging formats.[11]

The *Framework* offers other threshold concepts to reimagine library instruction, but it isn't a quick fix. With the sheer amount of information available to students, this isn't an easy task for librarians either. I think by teaching students to see themselves in the information creation process, we can teach them to utilize their own contexts and experiences to understand and use information more effectively. There is also plenty of room to weave in other threshold concepts from the *Framework* as well.

What's Working for Me

One of the most frequent questions I hear when librarians talk about information literacy is "What works for you?" In this closing section, I will give three examples that have worked for me and that I continue to use. In each of these examples, you may be able to layer other threshold concepts that I don't work with as much or that may work better in your context.

The first example is using games to teach concepts like the library research process. In the early 2000s, I used a quiz show-style game with the questions projected on a screen and students would call out the answers. This was easy to prepare and easy to adapt for different research topics. However, it favored bolder students who felt comfortable speaking up in a group or had a better grasp of English. I also experimented with breaking the group in teams of two to three students to encourage both individual and group learning. During that time period, using handheld clickers to encourage student participation was somewhat popular. The preparation was more complicated because the software wasn't always user-friendly and it also required purchasing the clickers. Another disadvantage I discovered to using clickers in games was that it didn't allow me to identify the students who didn't understand the concepts I was teaching. The software aggregated the responses to the quiz questions and, depending on the responses, I could only offer broad explanations and examples to illustrate my point rather than targeting who was still having trouble. The use of games in the classroom can be a welcome change from a regular lecture format and encourages interactive learning. With Information Creation as a Process, gaming can be used to teach the pros and cons of using one source over another, explaining how reference works like encyclopedias are created, and why libraries have more than one edition of a book on a shelf.

In the more than fifteen years since I started working with games there has been a virtual explosion in gaming software and gaming apps. A good source that

I have used to stay current on gaming for the classroom is from the website *Ditch That Textbook* by Matt Miller. He offers a regularly updated analysis of the latest in web-based resources to create a game show classroom.[12] Personally, a colleague has tried Kahoot! (*kahoot.com*) with some success in teaching research skills. Although Kahoot! offers an easy way to get classroom gaming up quickly, there are a couple of drawbacks. First there is no free, anonymous trial. In order to use Kahoot! you must create an account, even for the free version. Second, students need to have loaded the Kahoot! app onto their mobile devices to play along. While neither of these is a deal breaker since most students have some type of mobile device, you will need to build setup time into your classroom schedule to ensure every student can participate in your games. Unfortunately, only the paid versions, Kahoot! Plus and Kahoot! Pro, offer detailed reports on student progress so there isn't a ready way to identify which students may need additional help. There are also many other online packages such as Quizlet which might offer different features more apt for use in your information literacy instruction. The best part of using web-based resources is they are usually easy for the instructor to set up and can be recycled for use in other classes easily.

A second example is identifying the prerequisite or common library research skills that might not be so common to your audience. As Russell and Hensley point out about digital tools, but which I would argue applies to library research skills in general, "One of the most challenging aspects of teaching digital tools is forgetting what it is like to be a novice learner."[13] Let me give you three scenarios from my experience that illustrate this and how I responded. In the first scenario, students from a class walk into the library with a bibliography. The assignment was to find items from the bibliography to read for a class discussion and most students seemed to be finding the items quite quickly. However, one of the international students was struggling to make sense of the bibliography. After a lengthy conversation, I realized the student didn't know how to identify the parts of a citation in order to find articles and books. To remedy this, I included a small-group exercise in library instruction where students are handed a bibliography and need to identify the parts of each citation. Then the bibliography is projected at the front of the room and the groups name the parts of a citation, such as author, title, year of publication and so on. The bibliography used in the game was designed to highlight hard-to-identify items like an essay in an edited work, various ways journals are numbered, and differences in editions. The ulterior motive is to also reinforce the process of how information is created. There is also room here for the novice learner to learn from other students by allowing students to work in lanugage groups such as Spanish-speaking students or Vietnamese students working together around an English-language bibliography.

In the second scenario, it may be sometimes important to understand what a library is where the student comes from. Recently I had a student in the reference stacks ask me about which was better, the first or second editions of a common Bible dictionary. In conversation, the student told me the library at her school in Asia has closed stacks and she is allowed only a few volumes at a time. Further, she said having access to all the books on the shelf in my library was overwhelming. I realized that she may not know the difference between editions and how to compare them. In previous information literacy instruction I have always skirted around this issue, but now I realize that, depending on the audience, I need to make this a deliberate part of future instruction. As a library, we also need to make these seemingly basic library skills part of any online research guides we create, and we need to promote their use to our students. Students may not understand information creation is a process if they only have access to a few books at a time and it is important to provide them with the necessary clues to working in a different library environment.

The third scenario involves the issue of citing sources and avoiding plagiarism. In my institution students are sent to either the library or the writing center for citation help and the library director teaches the plagiarism and citation workshops. I know even students educated in U.S. universities who struggle to make sense of style guides in order to avoid plagiarism. Several years ago while working at another library, I was asked to teach a citations workshop for a group of African students. Without thinking, or considering the citation as a colonial construct, or recognizing what legacies are embedded in our teaching context, I pulled out my standard workshop on citations and began to teach the class. While the students were sitting quietly and nodding as if they understood, only one student was answering my follow-up questions during the session. At the midpoint of the workshop, I stopped teaching and asked them if I was really making sense. Following a prolonged period of silence, one student spoke for the group in telling me no, this made little sense to them. As it turns out, for many of the African students, English was their fourth or fifth language after the colonial language of their country and various tribal languages they spoke. Further, for some their previous education was not concerned with plagiarism or citing sources. In that moment, I realized my whole presentation wasn't going as planned. So, I stopped the presentation, turned off the PowerPoint slides, and began to teach Turabian like math problems because they said they all could do math. By presenting book citations as author + title + city of publication + publisher + year of publication = book citation, I began to teach these students to cite sources. Similar "math equations" were written for journal articles, websites, and the like, until the students had a basic grasp on the elements of a citation and the order in which they needed to go. This was by far a less-than-elegant solution,

but one I have found very useful working with students from many backgrounds. It also reminds me to place many checks for understanding in my lesson plans while at the same time not making assumptions about workshop participants and acknowledging the content and consequences of the instructional context, as well as my own positionality as the instructor.

The above scenarios point to only three instances when "common knowledge" or prerequisite skills just weren't present in the students during information literacy instruction. In the past, I would have gone with my assumptions that this applied to mostly international students, but more recently I am seeing the same skills lacking in students educated in the U.S. I have yet to determine if this is due to cultural context, social influences, or the economic circumstances the students are coming from, however these factors can influence how students see information creation as a process. I think that, without the prerequisite skills, students cannot see themselves in the information creation process or see how to use their own stories to create new knowledge. They also cannot make informed choices about which information sources they want to use for their research or understand how using one edition over another may matter in their field of study.

In my final example, I want to take up the old debate among librarians of the "one shot" workshop over longer teaching opportunities as part of the wider school curriculum. Is it realistic to think librarians can cover enough in a workshop or two so students understand Information Creation as a Process or any of the other threshold concepts? Of course, I would answer that librarians never think one shot is enough. However, what can we do with the one shot we may get? I think we can use the "one shot" or any limited opportunity as a gateway to multiple library instruction sessions. At a prior institution, following a conversation in which faculty were lamenting about the quality of student papers, I suggested sessions of library instruction to improve assignment quality. Unfortunately, what I received in return was a single class session when the professor was out of town. Concentrating on improving their research skills, I worked with the students on their next writing assignment to find sources they could include. This wasn't a writing workshop, but rather an opportunity to improve research skills. After the workshop, during a follow-up with the faculty, there was noticeable improvement in the next assignment. While this didn't result in immediate adoption of a wide-ranging information literacy program, it did lay the groundwork for repeated one-shot workshops which could be strung together to teach a variety of information literacy skills over time. Further, it led to creating assignments with faculty that intentionally included developing research and information management skills. By using the gateway approach, I was able to move toward what Powell and Kang refer to as "advocating for an intensive

workshop model that gives librarians the space to move beyond solely skills-based learning outcomes to more advanced, situated knowledge."[14]

What I have not covered in my three examples above is the burgeoning world of online programs that theological libraries are required to support. Many theological schools are much further along in this process than others. Just because I didn't choose to highlight that world in the above examples doesn't imply that I take it lightly. Rather, I think online education holds great promise for theological libraries in embedding librarians in online classes and being able to design more detailed self-paced instruction for students. Many librarians in Atla are leading the way on this front and I think it is important to acknowledge their work. Directly and indirectly, any efforts theological librarians make toward critically reimagining their libraries using the *Framework* will improve the scholarship in the field of theological education. It will also inch along the process of challenging and reimagining instruction to be more inclusive of diverse student populations, including international students.

Conclusion

Getting everyone on the same page in the library is a Herculean task given the diversity in theological education. Nonetheless, any time we can use critical theory to break out of existing preconceptions and paradigms, librarians can try to challenge and reconceive library instruction for diverse student populations, one workshop at a time. Given that the *Framework for Information Literacy* lacks an emphasis on social justice issues, it becomes the responsibility of librarians to insert those issues back into their information literacy practices. As a whole, many parts of the *Framework* could help work toward reimagining library instruction and Information Creation as a Process is only one frame. I think when students understand how the information they are working with was created, it unlocks the opportunity for them to see themselves as co-creators of information too. As Russell and Hensley point out, "in other words, we are guiding scholars along the process of learning how to learn."[15]

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