INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (the Framework) has spurred many ongoing, opposing conversations regarding its practicality and theoretical foundations and ACRL’s role in educating librarians. In early 2015, the ACRL Board of Directors stated that the Framework had become part of the “constellation of documents” for information literacy (Williams, 2015). Yet the conversations around the Framework and the disagreements surrounding the rescission of the Standards demonstrate that a narrow interpretation of this constellation metaphor fails to account for the differences among those in the library profession and their needs. Librarians should instead envision a more expansive star map—one where numerous perspectives on scholarship, practice, and teaching are represented, where we can identify and contextualize connections relative to our practice, and where we can find guidance in times of need.

For many librarians, the Framework represents a deep, paradigmatic shift, both in regards to their practice and their identity as librarians. Regarding their practice, the Framework invites librarians to adopt a broader pedagogical approach to teaching that differs from the skills-based approach often associated with the Standards. As to their identity, librarians are now encouraged to take a more active role in the teaching and learning of their students. While the Framework aims to create self-directed student learners, so too does it serve as a call for librarians to join that journey of self-discovery and “critical self-reflection” (ACRL, 2015) by also becoming self-directed learners, considering different views of our profession, and shifting to a learner-centered approach that supports student success. This transformative journey will be different for all of us, but we can continue to learn from one another since we all share a similar mission: to advance student learning and success.

BACKGROUND

During the drafting of the Framework, the authors of this paper were pursuing their MLIS. Surrounded by divergent voices and opinions, the authors, who did not have much practical experience with the Standards, were intrigued by the conversations evoked by the Framework. Grounded in a strong theoretical foundation that incorporated ideas from Foucault, Freire, Kuhn, J. Dewey, Kuhlthau, Elmborg, and Jacobs among others, the authors were able to recognize the foundational ideas and purpose of the Framework, yet they did not feel able to situate themselves within the conversations librarians were having in regards to the instructional impact of the Framework. Once they joined the profession and began to teach, however, those experiences helped them develop a deeper understanding of the Framework and its relevance to library instruction. This inspired them to explore research in other disciplines, such as education, psychology, cognitive science, philosophy, and sociology, where they discovered pedagogical connections that explained their own experiences both as learners and as instructors.

This paper explores some of these pedagogical connections, beginning with social constructivism, which provides a theoretical foundation for the development of a teaching philosophy; continuing with the intentional design of instruction, informed by instructional design practices; and putting it all together in the classroom through the transformational teaching model. These
connections are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather to serve as examples that will encourage others to make similar connections using their own professional context and environment as the locus of their exploration. Looking to scholarship from other disciplines can help inform our practice, complement the perspectives put forth in library literature, and thus help us improve our pedagogical practices.

**LEARNING FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES**

Identifying a foundation for our teaching philosophy is the first step in developing a more informed practice. Because the ways in which we all interact with information depend upon our context, we need to investigate the social, cultural, economic, and political factors behind the production and creation of information, as part of the teaching process (Critten & Stanfield, 2016, p. 87). For the authors, social constructivism, which “asserts that the knowledge that people create is shaped by their sociocultural environment” (Critten & Stanfield, 2016, p. 86), serves as the theoretical foundation for their teaching philosophy. Social constructivism addresses the contextual factors involved with learning, while acknowledging that learning is shaped by each individual's social context and is “...informed by influences received from society conventions, history, and interaction with significant others” (Talja, Tuominen, & Savolainen, 2005, p. 81). This socially-informed learning focuses on making meaning and developing a “critical consciousness,” and stands in contrast to the “banking” model of education that Freire argues against (Freire, 1970). The banking model, in which students are mere containers waiting to be filled, focuses on performativity and results rather than helping students create their own meaning, which leaves little room for developing critical consciousness. Critical information literacy, however, focuses on developing students' critical consciousness and looks to other pedagogies to “help [librarians] address the complex problems posed by the continuously changing information landscape” (Downey, 2016, p. 25). Downey (2016) highlights experiential education, critical pedagogy, and transformative learning theories (p. 25), but other theories and pedagogies, such as anti-racist pedagogy, universal design, feminist pedagogy, and motivational theory, can also inform our teaching philosophy. The authors find deep value in these approaches and would encourage others to learn more as appropriate for each librarian’s context and learners.

Putting our teaching philosophy into practice requires that we examine both who our learners are and the context for instruction in order to design effective and relevant instruction. First, we should determine the capabilities, needs, interests, previous experiences, motivations for learning, and other similar learner characteristics. With this information, we can then effectively plan the entry point of the instruction, the topics that will be covered, the depth of the topics, and the variety of learning activities (Morrison et al, 2013, p. 52). Second, we need to examine the context for instruction, including the students’ perceptions of accountability and relevance of instruction, the classroom environment, any necessary student accommodations, and availability of technology in the classroom. Echoing the ideas of social constructivism, Morrison et al. (2013) contend that a teacher should understand the instructional context because learning does not take place in a vacuum, and contextual factors can inhibit or facilitate instruction and learning (p. 61). The significance of each of these “situational factors” will vary by context, but a methodical analysis helps “determine which of them need to be kept in mind during the rest of the design process” (Fink, 2003, p. 76). These factors will then inform the design of both the instruction and the learning activities.

When designing instruction, instructors often use the “backward design process” outlined by Wiggins & McTighe (2005) and begin their planning by asking what students should learn from instruction. The answers to this question become the “desired results” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 6), which the instructor then uses to design assessments and appropriate learning activities. While numerous library workshops and conference sessions have addressed the backward design process, library instruction can also benefit from designing and structuring the learning activities in a way that will facilitate meaningful learning and transfer of learning. As L. Dee Fink (2003) explains, “an effective set of learning activities is one that includes activities from each of the following three components of active learning: information and ideas, experience, and reflection” (p. 119). In other words, the instructor first introduces the information and ideas, then students engage with those ideas, and finally students reflect on what they have learned to help them connect that learning to additional contexts. Horton (2012) refers to this as the “absorb, do, connect” model, where students absorb information, do an activity to “deepen learning,” and then connect what has been learned to their own experiences (p. 9). For example, in an instruction session centered around concept mapping, the librarian might first demonstrate how to construct a concept map (introducing the idea), ask students to create their own maps (learning through experience), and finally facilitate a group discussion identifying other contexts in which a concept map might be helpful (reflecting on learning). As students experience learning through direct engagement, they become full participants in the “hard, messy work” of learning (Weimer, 2012). Reflecting on that messy work allows students the opportunity to recognize their own learning and consider how that learning might transfer to other situations or contexts.

While each of the pedagogical connections outlined so far allow us to develop deeper learning opportunities for our students, it is not until we bring these elements together and incorporate them into our teaching that we can begin to develop our pedagogical practice. One pedagogical approach that unifies many of the teaching methods discussed in library literature—such as active learning, student-centered learning, collaborative learning, and problem-based learning—is transformational teaching. This approach is aimed at “increasing students’ mastery of key course concepts while transforming their learning-related attitudes, values, beliefs, and
skills’ (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 576) and presents a framework for understanding learning and delivering instruction. Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) outline six core methods of transformational teaching: establishing a shared vision, providing modeling, encouraging and challenging students intellectually, customizing feedback, creating opportunities for experiential learning, and promoting critical self-reflection (p. 585).

Transformational teaching begins with establishing a shared vision, which means that the instructor helps students see how the instructional goals correspond to each individual’s performance and needs. In class, then, the instructor might explain the focus and ask students to reflect on the relevance of the instruction. Thus the instructor can encourage students to share responsibility for learning, create opportunities for co-learning, and give students control over their own learning. To emphasize the purpose of the instruction, the instructor will also need to model how to approach a task or problem. Librarians are often tempted to demonstrate the use of tools using pre-planned searches, but doing so gives students an inaccurate representation of the messiness of the research process and limits students’ opportunities for learning. The goal of providing appropriate modeling is not for students to learn to avoid failure but rather to encourage experimentation and curiosity and maximize opportunities for learning.

In order to support students as they experiment with learning, instructors should meet students at their point of need, which can be determined through a variety of methods, such as reviewing the situational factors for learning, or through classroom assessment techniques. Then the instructor can scaffold learning activities that appropriately challenge and encourage students to “think independently, challenge commonly held assumptions, and view problems from different perspectives” (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 591). Providing scaffolding and emotional support can also motivate students and empower them to engage in deep learning. The instructor can further promote deep learning by customizing feedback for each individual student. In a library session, this might mean taking a moment with each student or group to discuss what they have tried during their research and where they might be struggling, then providing specific feedback and suggestions. This approach respects each student’s individual learning context while helping them develop as learners. The instructor can foster this development by guiding students through the process of identifying and challenging personal habits and points of view.

Another core method of transformational teaching involves connecting learning to experiences outside of the classroom, for example, decision-making. This can be done in small ways, such as connecting the research process to making an important decision like where to attend college, or in larger ways, like working with the course instructor to design relevant lessons and activities that are potentially tied to experiential learning. Creating the space for this type of learning to occur can increase students’ awareness of their beliefs, values, and attitudes about learning and provide additional opportunities for personal and intellectual growth.

The sixth core method focuses on promoting critical self-reflection, both prior to and following instruction. This method differs from pre- and post-tests in that students are reflecting on their current perceptions, values, and attitudes, rather than being tested on content knowledge. The metacognitive process of self-reflection aids students in considering how their perspective might have transformed. The reflections need not be lengthy writing assignments, but instead might involve the use of classroom assessment techniques or critical incident questionnaires that ask students what they have learned about the content, the process, and themselves.

Ultimately, this transformation cannot occur in single one-shot sessions, but we can take steps to facilitate this type of learning within library classrooms if we take into account that, in order to be transformational in nature, “teaching must enhance students’ mastery of course concepts, their learning-related skills, and their disposition toward learning” (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 596). The six core methods of transformational teaching can help us establish a pedagogical practice that goes beyond skills training and allows students to “take control of their lives and their own learning to become active agents, asking and answering questions that matter to them and to the world around them” (Elmborg, 2006, p. 193).

**Conclusion**

The practical and theoretical examples presented here represent ways in which the authors have looked beyond librarianship to situate themselves within the profession and the larger academic setting. Long gone are the days of bibliographic instruction when librarians were the gatekeepers of information; today, information is more abundant and easier to access, but librarians are rarely the first resource students think about when they need information (Head, 2013, p. 475). Consequently, librarians must now take more prominent roles in their classrooms, instructional programs, and institutions in order to reaffirm the impact of their work and make information literacy a meaningful part of their institution’s mission. Relying solely on documents and literature aimed at librarians is adequate if we are only communicating within the profession, but if we hope to create more meaningful learning experiences within our classrooms and institutions, we need to diversify our teaching perspectives and learn about other partners on campus so that we can truly expand the reach of our work. Therefore, we need to expand our star map by incorporating research from other disciplines to create new constellations that, together with the ACRL documents, further our professional and personal needs and, ultimately, transform our teaching to positively impact our students’ learning.
REFERENCES


