INTRODUCTION

How does the library engage in pedagogy? Discussions of library pedagogy in the library literature often focus on established sites of learning and teaching such as in the classroom or at the reference desk. At its core the library is a pedagogical entity especially if “pedagogy occurs whenever knowledge is produced…” (Giroux, 1992, p. 218). The library produces knowledge by participating in the organizing, accessing and accession of information and information artifacts. Hence the title: “everything we do is pedagogy” (Giroux, 1992, p. 218). This paper argues it is essential to integrate a critical pedagogical approach into the decision-making process at every interaction, not just in the classroom or at the reference desk. Recognizing pedagogy is all-encompassing changes the language used to refer to students, how items are cataloged, how spaces are organized and how librarians perceive themselves and the library. Critical pedagogy applied holistically to library practice helps begin to “…re-envision information literacy as more than just a handy set of skills for writing research papers” (Accardi, Drabinski, & Kumbier, 2010, p. 150). James Elmborg has written “…academic librarians increasingly recognize that their primary role is to participate in the teaching missions of their institutions” (J. K. Elmborg, 2002, p. 455). This paper will begin with a definition and brief discussion of critical pedagogy. This will be followed by a discussion of the connections and tensions between critical pedagogy and the ACRL Framework, with particular focus on the Framework’s application outside of the classroom. In conclusion three specific areas, library space, faculty interaction, and student staff, will be examined as sites for applying critical pedagogical practice.

WHAT IS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY?

Henry Giroux offers this definition of critical pedagogy: “Critical pedagogy…affords students the opportunity to read, write and learn from a position of agency-to engage in a culture of questions…imagining literacy as a mode of intervention, a way of learning about the word as a basis for intervening in the world…” (Giroux, 2011, p. 155). While it is tempting to focus on the idea of literacy in this definition, the key point of this definition is on the ideas of “opportunity” and “mode of intervention”. Just as the student is engaging in and developing abilities to intervene in the world critical pedagogy challenges the librarian to do so also. Critical pedagogy invites experimentation, imagination and connective thinking seeing a connectivity in the entire learning process, despite significant attempts to compartmentalize that experience. By applying pedagogy outside of the classroom, infused throughout library practice, the library has opportunity to intervene and do connective work instead of reinforcing already existing compartmentalization. Susan Blum observes “the basic idea is that humans are born to learn…in any version of human culture. The more we take “learning” out of context and put it…into an institutional framework and ask students to perform it in isolation, the less possible it is to learn” (Blum, 2016, p. 3). How then can librarians embody and practice connective, meaningful pedagogical practices that see learning as part of human flourishing? What are the steps to take? “Like all experiments, ours is fueled by a fundamental curiosity about things and processes…emergent pedagogical elements and qualities-that we do not yet understand and that provoke us to think or imagine in new ways” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 5). It is this curiosity that fuels learning, that catalyzes towards intervention.

Embracing critical pedagogy gives the librarian a consistent identity. It is not that in the classroom I am a teacher,
and when I am supervising student staff I am a manager. Rather, I am engaged in pedagogy at all times. In practicing a culture of opportunity and intervention, the critical pedagogy is thinking, imagining and processing as regular practice. These practices inform how colleagues and other staff members are treated. Critical pedagogy recognizes the student staff as “whole human beings in search of meaning” and in their role within the library are uniquely suited for practicing and imagining intervention and personal agency (Liston & Garrison, 2004, p. 2). Student staff work has distinct opportunities to engage the students in the immediate present with their work. This is not just to prepare them for work after the library but rather to engage them in the present with a holistic sense of who that student is and what is required of them.

Critical pedagogy emerges from an active pursuit and understanding of relationships. This is not just relationships between students and co-workers, though these are important. This is based on the drive to understand the power relations that affect the access to available knowledge and decision-influencing power at institutional, and other, levels. Heidi Jacobs has written “All forms of learning are always additive, cumulative, iterative and relational…” (Jacobs, 2008, p. 256). Elizabeth Ellsworth builds upon this stating “learning always takes place in relation…Learning takes us up to and across the boundaries between ourselves and other and through the place of culture and the time of history” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 55).

**CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND THE ACRL FRAMEWORK**

Maura Seale eloquently describes the Framework as “…a conflicted and contradictory document” (Seale, 2015, p. 2). Even as a conflicted and contradictory document, the Framework offers a significant opportunity to critically engage with information literacy. Ian Beilin points out the open structure of the framework welcomes a critical pedagogical approach (Beilin, 2015). Colleen Burgess writes “…the Framework offers examples of dispositions or attitudes for learning that instructors can model” (Burgess, 2015, p. 2). This idea of modelling is particularly applicable when moved outside of the classroom and applied to library practice as a whole. “In order to assist our students in crossing thresholds, we need to go on ahead first” (Burgess, 2015, p. 2). A particular application is found in working with student staff to model approaches and interactions with information in order to challenge and contest why certain things are. To be clear, the Framework is not the same thing as critical pedagogy. Rather than locating the library’s identification as supporting the Standards or the Framework, the academic library should find its identity in or as a place of critical pedagogy, choosing from there which approach to information literacy best fits. The library is not responsible to the Framework or to ACRL but to its own calling as a pedagogical entity.

**CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND INFORMATION LITERACY**

Critical pedagogy raises the question, what is the point or goal of being information literate. Emily Drabinski writes “…the need to improve education is tied directly to job outcomes” (Drabinski, 2014, p. 482). Allison Hicks asks “does the concept of information literacy undermine a liberal arts education by focusing our attention on graduate employability and functional competence rather than intellectual agility and lifelong learning?” (Hicks, 2015, p. 9). The indomitable James Elmborg questions when and where the goal for lifelong learning as part of library instruction emerged. Elmborg traces the history of life-long learning through America’s development into an industrialized nation. Throughout this history Elmborg notes a strong emphasis placed on the role of education to maintain a “…civil and manageable workforce” (J. Elmborg, 2006, p. 538). Often this expectation is extended from librarians onto their student staff. The language and approaches of management have driven libraries’ approach to student work due to a failure to recognize library staff work as pedagogical opportunities. “As human beings we are always operating within a power structure of some sort. If we fail to critically examine that structure, if we try to ignore it and go about our lives as though it doesn’t impact us or our work—we are susceptible to becoming subsumed within it” (Henk, 2016).

**BUILDING PEDAGOGY IN/AS LIBRARY SPACE**

The pedagogy of space first references the physical layout and the way in which a patron is able to move through the space based upon its physical attributes. Ellsworth writes about the pedagogy of spaces: “…each [space] expresses a concern with setting the viewer, learner or audience in motion across boundaries between insides and outside…” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 46). What does the design of libraries as a whole and library spaces teach users about library use? Granted, many librarians work in spaces that cannot be renovated or redesigned with any degree of ease. A pedagogy of space recognizes the limitations and attempts to work within them so that setup of the space is not a barrier to use. This is as simple as regularly walking through the library space and trying to see it as though for the first time, each time. Or enlisting the help of others who are seeing the library space for the first time and asking for their point of view. It can take significant energy, time and money to change a library’s physical space. But there are times when intervening in the world means insisting on library space meet particular requirements. This requires tenacity, patience and realization that intervening in the process can have a long-term impact.

Secondly, the pedagogy of space references the use of space in order to “…set interior self-experience in motion to encounter the outside…the unthought…” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 39). This happens regularly. When libraries screen movies and hold discussion afterwards, when libraries hold brown bag sessions for faculty and staff, when libraries give opportunity for student groups and other discussions to take place—this all
sets self-experience in dialogue with the other. These may seem to be part of a library’s programming simply to get students in the door, but these are pedagogically rich opportunities. It is not the event itself but the ideas generated by the event that are important.

**PEDAGOGY AND FACULTY**

If critical pedagogy is a way of making meaning in the world, critical pedagogy is not only outward-facing (affecting one’s interaction with students) but it also reflects back upon one’s practice and perceptions. Involvement with critical pedagogy should encourage its practitioners to also be learners. This can be accomplished with and through interactions with other faculty members. If Jacobs and Ellsworth are correct that learning happens in relationships, then time needs to be set aside in order to explore, develop and grow relationships where that learning is going to happen. Thinking, reading and cultivating approaches to critical pedagogy provides opportunity for growth in teaching and developing relationships. If we are really going to embrace the life-long learning ideal, this implies we as teachers should also be challenging ourselves in how we are communicating, and in what we are communicating. This means trying new ideas in the classroom, sitting in on colleague’s teaching not to critique but to learn/observe and ask for peer interaction on your teaching process. It is not always enjoyable to hear but being challenged by people who care about being better teachers and who want you to be a better teacher will, by embracing critical pedagogy as foundational, push you into this change. “Teaching is really hard” (Blum, 2016, p. 21). Intervening in the world is hard work and it is distinctly helpful to have colleagues for support, engagement and development.

**CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND STUDENT STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

The library’s student staff navigate inside/outside boundaries more than many other students on-campus. Joe Kincheloe writes the misperception of “the role of the teacher is to learn “best practices” from the experts and to put their dictates into practice…in this uncritical knowledge context teachers are reduced to rule-following information deliverers who have no need for scholarly abilities”(Kincheloe, 2008, p. 7). For librarians responsible for supervising student staff “best practices” have been pulled from managerial practices and processes because students are seen as assets to be managed rather than human beings in the process of learning-making. Managing students as employees is safe. It is tried and it is true; there’s a template for it. The lack of scholarly emphasis is evidenced in many ways in the library literature, which has spent very little time on pedagogically developing or engaging with the student staff issue, again because of the emphasis on instruction as limited to the classroom. The area of student staff employment is consistently seen as one that is to prepare students for future learning rather than intervening in the present. Library management approaches to student staff have included teaching, but have focused on employment structures as motivating teaching. In contrast pedagogy is not a model but rather a “…condition for possible experiences of thinking…” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 27). Rather than funneling students through their library employment experience on the way to becoming tractable, malleable employees, library work offers opportunity to create conditions for student thinking, experiencing and being in the world, using the library as a pedagogical platform, connecting with what students are learning and thinking in the rest of their academic, spiritual and personal development. What does this look like? It is here where experimentation, intellectual agility and imagination must be employed.

**CONCLUSION**

Critical pedagogy challenges libraries and librarians to rethink approaches to library services, spaces and staff. If every decision a library makes is recognized as having pedagogical impact libraries will continue to challenge themselves and their respective institutions regarding what it looks like to be actively intervening in the world.

**REFERENCES**


