

University of Windsor

## Scholarship at UWindsor

---

LRI Participants at CAIS - ACSI

CARL Librarians' Research Institute (LRI)  
Participants' Research

---

2014

### Pedagogies of Possibility Within the Disciplines: Critical Information Literacy and Literatures in English

Heidi LM Jacobs  
*University of Windsor*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/lricase>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Jacobs, Heidi LM. (2014). Pedagogies of Possibility Within the Disciplines: Critical Information Literacy and Literatures in English. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 8 (2), 192-207.  
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/lricase/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the CARL Librarians' Research Institute (LRI) Participants' Research at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in LRI Participants at CAIS - ACSI by an authorized administrator of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact [scholarship@uwindsor.ca](mailto:scholarship@uwindsor.ca).

# PEDAGOGIES OF POSSIBILITY WITHIN THE DISCIPLINES

## Critical information literacy and literatures in English

Heidi L.M. Jacobs  
*University of Windsor*

While most disciplines have responded to the generic openness of the ACRL Standards by creating discipline-specific guidelines and competencies, there is a need for us to consider other ways to approach information literacy in the disciplines. Critical information literacy reminds us to engage ourselves and our students with what Freire described as "problem-posing education," which "bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality" (84). This article discusses how information literacy work in literatures in English could engage students and librarians in the act of collective problem-posing about the discipline. Drawing upon critical information literacy's emphasis on questions, this article argues for the importance of engaging our students, our colleagues, our campuses, our selves, and our profession in the act of questioning related to information literacy and the disciplines.

Communications in  
INFORMATION LITERACY

*I went into education in large part to change the world through reading and writing. It is through reading and writing that we compose both self and community, that we learn the other and value that difference. This is the commitment we make: to learn how to do this in a way that balances both text and person, that understands text as operating at the intersection of media and genre, that raises questions and possibility as it fosters a public reader.*

—Kathleen Blake Yancey (*Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice* ix)

*Answer.*

*That you are here--that life exists and identity,*

*That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.*

—Walt Whitman (O Me! O Life!)

## INTRODUCTION

In their article, “Rethinking Information Literacy in a Globalized World,” Laurie Kutner and Alison Armstrong (2012) describe the need for a “twenty-first century ‘deep information literacy’” that encompasses “additional content-based engagement with the social, cultural, economic and political contexts of information access, retrieval, use, and creation” (p. 25). They go on to raise a question that undoubtedly resonates with many librarians working with information literacy: “how do we as practitioners, engage in [an] expanded notion of information literacy, given the limited time we have with our students?” (p. 26). Recognizing “the inherent challenges posed by this question,” they write, “we would

like to begin this conversation.” Believing Kutner and Armstrong pose one of the most pressing problems for information literacy practitioners at this time, this article works to join this conversation and raise several more questions about information literacy work today, particularly information literacy work within the disciplines.

This article is a form of problem posing about problem posing. Picking up on Kutner and Armstrong’s questions of how to “engage in this expanded notion of information literacy,” I pose two “problems” of information literacy within the disciplines: how can we make information literacy relevant to disciplinary study? How can we incorporate problem posing into our disciplinary information literacy work? Rather than attempting to take on all of the disciplines and all of information literacy, it is useful to engage in problem posing with a specific and tangible example. To this end, I will use my own area—literatures in English—as a way to examine how problem-posing education might work within a literature classroom to engage students and librarians in the act of collective inquiry about what Paulo Freire called a “reality in process, in transformation” (p. 83). Connections with other disciplines can be made readily from this example. In this article, I draw upon critical information literacy’s emphasis on questions and argue for the importance of engaging our students, our colleagues, our campuses, our selves, and our profession in the act of questioning related to information literacy and the disciplines.

Many librarians who work within information literacy tend not to confront the challenges and opportunities of information

literacy as a generic, overarching endeavor. Rather, by necessity and by design, we tend to focus our information literacy work within specific disciplines and consider how we might best approach information literacy for our business, chemistry, psychology, or English students. Even when for-credit information literacy courses are offered, the underlying assumption is that students go on to conduct research within the disciplines using discipline-specific tools.

Much information literacy work has been guided by the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) wherein the focus has been on teaching students to:

determine the extent of information needed; access the needed information effectively and efficiently; evaluate information and its sources critically; incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base; use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and, understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally. (p. 2-3)

Although ACRL has recently (2014) released a revised document, these original standards, performance indicators, and outcomes have, in many cases, guided and defined information literacy curriculum development in significant ways. While useful in some instances, the *Standards*, on the whole, tend to position students as information consumers: they select, access, evaluate, incorporate, use and understand

information. Beyond mentions of "using" information, these standards rarely position students as information creators or as citizens with power and potential to shape, share, develop, preserve, and provide access to information today or in the future.

Over the past decade or so, much information literacy work within the disciplines has taken cues from the ACRL's *Standards*. Most disciplines have responded to the generic openness of the standards by creating and producing discipline-specific guidelines and competencies. The *Research Competency Guidelines for Literatures in English* (2007) for example, is based on the framework of the ACRL *Standards* but addresses "the need for a more specific and source-oriented approach within the discipline of English literatures, including a concrete list of research skills" (p. 1). As an illustration, Standard Two in the *Standards*—"The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently"—becomes "Identify and use key literary research tools to locate relevant information" (p. 9; p. 4). While it is useful to translate these larger skills, outcomes, and performance indicators into the disciplines, we need to remember that the original ACRL Standards were designed to be "a framework for assessing the information literate individual," not a creative, visionary statement of what information literacy *could* be within our classrooms and campuses (p. 5).

## CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY AND PROBLEM POSING

Within information literacy studies, critical information literacy has emerged as a vital area of inquiry, offering an alternative

paradigm or lens through which we can consider the work we do with students and the communities we serve. Critical information literacy takes its focus from critical literacy, particularly the work of Paulo Freire. One of the most helpful descriptions of critical information literacy comes from Rebecca Powell, Susan Chambers Cantrell, and Sandra Adams (2001) who describe three basic underlying assumptions:

First, critical literacy assumes that the teaching of literacy is never neutral but always embraces a particular ideology or perspective. Second, critical literacy supports a strong democratic system grounded in equity and shared decision-making. Third, critical literacy instruction can empower and lead to transformative action. (p. 773)

The final assumption—transformative action—is a central part of much critical literacy. A major concern for Freire (1970, 2000) is that "people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83).<sup>1</sup> Freire's emphasis on the world as "a reality in process, in transformation" is vital for thinking about critical information literacy since it reminds us that we need to engage ourselves and our students not only with "a reality in process" but also with our potential roles within that process and that transformation. As a way to engage with that "reality in process, in transformation," Freire argues for the development of "problem-posing education," which "bases

itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality" (84). Increasingly, librarians are exploring the ways in which information literacy can begin to do some of this transformative work.

Recent publications such as Accardi, Drabinski, and Kumbier's (2010) *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods*, Accardi's (2013) *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction* and Gregory and Higgins' (2013) *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis* explore the ways in which librarians' work can connect with larger educational and social projects. In particular, many librarians have been drawn to ideas of critical pedagogy, particularly those that shift "the emphasis from teachers to students and making visible the relationships among knowledge, authority and power" (Giroux, n.p.). One of the ways these relationships can be made visible is through problem posing. As Henry Giroux (2010) describes,

Giving the students the opportunity to be problem posers and to engage in a culture of questioning puts in the foreground the crucial issues of who has control over the conditions of learning and how specific modes of knowledge, identity, and authority are constructed within particular classroom relations. Under such circumstances, knowledge is not simply received by students, but actively transformed, as they learn how to engage others in critical dialogue and be held accountable for their own views. (n.p.)

Thus, within critical literacy and critical information literacy, one of the major emphases is problem-posing learning than competency-based approaches.

Critical information literacy emerged, in part, as a response to the limited and limiting approaches to competency-based information literacy and its emphasis on "how-to" questions. Many librarian scholars have been writing about how critical information literacy can help us extend the work we do within librarianship to contexts beyond the library. These discussions of critical information literacy have allowed us to make connections with critical literacy efforts in broader educational endeavors and community contexts. Critical information literacy underscores that we all have an active role to play in this "reality in process, in transformation" and charges us with a mission beyond finding, accessing, evaluating, using, and understanding information.

## PROBLEM POSING AND THE ACRL STANDARDS

Perhaps the most significant "problem" we need to confront is the role the ACRL *Standards* play in our information literacy work. Before I proceed, it will be useful to parse my use of the word "problem." As I have noted elsewhere, a "problem" can either be "a difficult or demanding question" or a "matter or situation regarded as unwelcome, harmful or wrong, and needing to be overcome" (Jacobs, p. 180). I am approaching the "problem" of the ACRL *Standards* as a "difficult and demanding question" that our profession needs to consider.

The major problem related to relying exclusively on the ACRL Standards for our vision and development of information literacy work is, in my mind, two fold. The first issue has to do with using a pre-existing assessment tool as a curricular or pedagogical framework. Such an approach means that we put parameters on the kind of work we do in classrooms and limit the scope of inquiry to things we can test and assess: knowing the "best" indexes and databases, using catalogues and search engines effectively, and understanding the structure of information in literature studies. Because these topics emerge from an assessment framework, they are easy to test for and assess and we can put lots of checkmarks in assessment boxes to suggest our literature students are information literate. This is not to say that knowing how to do Boolean searching or being able to recognize the differences between primary and secondary sources, authoritative and facsimile editions, reviews and criticism are not important to literary studies: undeniably, they are. But, I argue, there are many more intersections between literary studies and information literacy that we can explore. Focusing on the skills and competencies described in the *Standards* positions literatures in English students as passive consumers of literary information rather than active participants within the world of literary information. Increasingly, the digital world positions students as information creators and curators and our work within information literacy needs to focus on empowering students in these capacities.

The second problem I see with using the ACRL *Standards* for curriculum development is the way in which disciplinary standards are created. When we

start with a framework of generic skills and then adapt them to our disciplines, we run the risk of putting the *Standards* first and the discipline second: in this case, we shape our disciplinary work around larger, more generic assessment-based frameworks. Instead, we need to put the discipline first and build our curriculum around disciplinary questions. We need, in other words, to fully engage our students, faculty, and ourselves in the act of problem posing and confronting those “difficult or demanding” information literacy questions within their disciplines.

### QUESTIONING AND THE DISCIPLINE

Gerald Graff's (1987, 2007) work on the field of literary studies is useful in reminding us of the importance of engaging ourselves and our students in questions and confronting the controversial ideas within our fields. The assumption, he observes, "has been that students should be exposed to the *results* of the disagreements between their instructors . . . but not to the debates that produced these results" (p. vi). Controversial issues, he goes on to argue, "are not tangential to academic knowledge, but part of that knowledge" (p. xv) and "good education is about helping students enter the culture of ideas and arguments . . . teaching students to engage in intellectual debate at a high level is the most important thing we can do" (p. xvi). In this paper, I want to put aside librarianship's professional inclination to provide answers and argue instead for the full engagement with the act of questioning. As Jonathan Cope (2010) writes, "There are occasions when critical IL [information literacy] calls more for the asking of new questions than it

does for the provision of clear, instrumental answers" (p. 21). Information literacy and, arguably, librarianship as a whole, are at a juncture where we need to focus on asking new questions and reflecting upon these questions using a problem-posing approach.

It is useful to remember the ACRL *Standards* are but one approach to information literacy. The International Federation of Library Associations' (IFLA) statements regarding information literacy, for example, offer a more open, less prescribed vision of information literacy work. IFLA's (2011) *Media and Information Literacy Recommendations* states,

Media and Information Literacy is a basic human right in an increasingly digital, interdependent, and global world, and promotes greater social inclusion. It can bridge the gap between the information rich and the information poor. Media and Information Literacy empowers and endows individuals with knowledge of the functions of the media and information systems and the condition under which these functions are performed (para. 3).

Along with IFLA's *Alexandria Proclamation* (2005), these statements present a very different view of information literacy, in part because they are visionary statements or proclamations not assessment frameworks. With these two documents, our visions of information literacy are not tied to what we can test for, assess, or quantify. If we begin our thinking about information literacy and the discipline of literatures in English with IFLA's statement, we have a

much “messier” view of information literacy yet we have one that offers many more pedagogical and curricular possibilities. What, then, might this new vision of information in the disciplines look like?

Kutner and Armstrong (2012) succinctly summarize a recurrent thought within much information literacy scholarship: “it is time for us as a profession to reconsider a totality of what information literacy means within a twenty-first century higher-education context” (30). Scholars such as Elmborg (2006, 2012), Drabinski (2008), Accardi (2013), Seale (2010), Simmons (2005), and many others argue that information literacy must be more contextual, social, cultural, and political than it tends to be in a *Standards*-based approach. As Andrea Baer (2013) notes, “When students are encouraged to consider the academic world in its sociopolitical context, they are better positioned to understand, engage in, and to effect change in scholarly practices that have grown out of a complexity of sociopolitical and institutional structures, some of which do not align always with ideals of equality and social justice” (p. 103). While it is not clear what information literacy might look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a strong impetus to make it less focused on helping students, as Elmborg (2012) writes, “play the game of school” and more focused on engaging students to become active, creative, critical thinkers and citizens (p.92).

A recurrent concern among practicing librarians is “but how do we do these things within the confines (real or perceived) of what we’re supposed to do as information literacy librarians?” In this section, I want to

argue that we can continue to do the kind of work we have been doing, we just need to expand our parameters to ask ourselves and our students new questions and push our collective inquiry further. To this end, I want to briefly explore three key areas we often talk about in English literature information literacy sessions and suggest ways in which we can push our inquiry further: cataloguing and classification; literary information; and the library as place.

### POSING THE PROBLEMS OF CATALOGUING AND CLASSIFICATION

One element that almost all instruction librarians include in English literature sessions is searching the library catalogue and databases like the Modern Languages Association International Bibliography (MLA). As Emily Drabinski (2008) observes, “Surely we must continue teaching students how to use the library catalogue, database indexes, and other classified information retrieval systems. Students cannot succeed unless they know how to navigate our many and varied classifications with all their limitations and political difficulties” (p. 204). Drabinski, however, goes on to take this staple of library instruction a few steps further by asking, “How might we teach these tools while simultaneously including critical reflections on the tools themselves?” (p. 204). Classification schemes, she notes, “are socially produced and embedded structures, they are products of human labor that carry traces of all the intentional and unintentional racism, sexism and classism of the workers who create them” (p. 198). As an example, Drabinski describes how if students wanted



to find material about white women, the term “women” would suffice, however students wishing to find information about African American women would need to use search terms such as “African American women” or “black women” (p. 199). Thus, Drabinski writes, “The language used in the classification is also a reflection of broader social structures. The thesaurus acts as a meta-text, a symbolic representation of values, power relations, and cultural identities in a given place and time” (p. 199). If we can enter into conversations with students about how the catalogue structures information, how certain words are used, and how these words reveal larger social, political, cultural assumptions, we then ask students to consider how catalogues or databases are something other than a passive or innocuous tool. We can engage students with problem-posing about how language shapes what we know, what kind of information we find or do not find, what assumptions are made about language and knowledge and how language reveals cultural, social, and political assumptions. Most important, these questions illustrate that libraries themselves are not neutral spaces but are culturally constructed spaces informed by larger socio-political factors.

## POSING THE PROBLEMS OF LITERARY INFORMATION

Similarly, when we discuss various print and digital literary historical resources, we can also talk about how literary information<sup>2</sup> has been shaped and formed by larger social, political, and cultural forces. How do we present literary history? What do the various databases, digital archives, anthologies, editions, and collections suggest about literary history? Who

preserves it? Who packages it? Who makes decisions about what is considered literary or not literary? Significant or marginal? Major or minor? Whose voices are considered “English”? Or “American”? What forms, formats, and genres are considered “literature”? What does it mean that we have resources that cover “American literature,” “women’s literature” and “Native American literature”? Baer’s (2013) work connecting critical information literacy and Digital Humanities poses useful problems that could easily be brought into discussions about literary information:

What within the digital environment counts as scholarly activity? Should peer review be an open process to which anyone can contribute or does such openness compromise the authority of academic writing? Should venues like *Wikipedia* and *Twitter* have a part in academic discussions or do such tools trivialize or ‘dumb down’ scholarly discourse? In what ways might digital technologies serve as openings and/or barriers to democratic systems that support open information and free expression? Are there dangers in viewing technology and digital tools as neutral, and if so, how can we make more transparent the ways that digital tools and structures are shaped by cultural bias or philosophical perspective? (p. 105).

In a similar vein, Samuel Jones and John Holden (2008) have noted, “It is only when people care about things that they get conserved. So, in choosing what things to conserve, and how to conserve them, we simultaneously reflect and create social

value" (p. 15). We can pose questions to our students asking that they consider what social values are reflected in, created by, or perpetuated through our library's literary history resources. What kinds of choices are made, what values are reflected, for example, when we talk about preserving forms such as electronic literature,<sup>3</sup> literary e-zines and twitter poems<sup>4</sup>? We can invite students to examine the range of social, cultural and political contexts that inform preservation and collection practices and to consider factors such as the digital divide (who has access to the internet) and the participation divide (who is participating in what kind of digital activity).<sup>5</sup> By approaching these literary historical concepts in a problem-posing way, students will see that decisions regarding what gets digitized, what gets discarded, what gets collected, anthologized, and preserved, how a literary history is told, how it is made accessible, and to whom it is made accessible reveals a great deal about what a particular society, group, culture or individual values or anticipates will be valuable.<sup>6</sup>

## POSING THE PROBLEMS OF THE LIBRARY

The impact of these choices on our scholarship and our understanding of literatures in English is almost invisible yet it is indelible. What we see in our stacks and our library e-resources are the result of decades (if not centuries) of choices and decisions, values and assumptions about what is valued, valuable, useful, literary, or historical. As is the case with cataloguing and classification, the materials we purchase, preserve, and make accessible in our libraries is also, as Drabinski notes, "a

symbolic representation of values, power relations, and cultural identities" (p. 199). Discussing a library's literary historical holdings from a problem-posing perspective will reveal that print and digital collections are always informed by value-laden decisions about what is relevant, important, useful, and significant as well as what is marginal, redundant, inconsequential, and irrelevant. When we talk of e-literature or digitizing the past, it is quickly apparent that digitizing print material or preserving born-digital material are never neutral endeavors.

In this way, our information literacy work in literatures in English should challenge the notion that libraries are value-neutral spaces. Literatures in English students are highly skilled in reading multiple kinds of texts carefully and critically and are adept in asking critical, probing questions. In this context, the library (either our institution's specific libraries or The Library as a cultural and historical institution) can also be presented as something we can read as a text. James Elmborg (2006) argues that. "Librarians need to develop a critical consciousness about libraries, by learning to 'problematize' the library" (p. 198). Problematizing the library along with our students can help us to think critically about a space many of us see so often we rarely look at it. Engaging with this kind of problem posing with our students can help us (and by extension our students) to see that the library, in the words of Elmborg (2006),

can no longer be seen as value-neutral cultural space, and librarians cannot be defined as value-neutral information providers. Librarians will be involved with the daily

struggle of translation between the organized conceptions of knowledge and the efforts of all students to engage that knowledge. This struggling with meaning is crucial to literacy education, and for librarians and libraries to realize the full potential inherent in information literacy, libraries need to realize the full potential inherent in information literacy, libraries need to engage this struggle, thereby aligning the values of critical literacy with the day-to-day work of librarians (p. 198).

By extension, our students also can see that their own work within libraries or in literary historical research is not value neutral but, rather, situated in a complex matrix of social, political, and cultural forces with which they may interact in numerous ways. In order to “realize the full potential” of a broadly defined information literacy in literatures in English, we need to pose problems about libraries to our students (and to our selves) that interrogate all of the choices, values, actions, and inactions that shape our libraries and inform what we, as individuals and as a society, know and how we know it. When we approach the library as a value-laden place and entity, we pose problems for students to consider. Once we start to “read” the library as a text, we begin to ask questions about that space as a social, political and cultural space and a representation of the values and power structures inherent in this version of our cultural history. Whose voices get heard? Whose voices are not heard? Why are some voices more accessible than others? Asking problem-posing questions about the literary historical collections in English allows us to think creatively and critically about our own

practices today regarding the preservation of and access to literary historical material from the past, present, and future. Problem posing also positions us to think actively about literary history in the future and what we can do collectively to shape and preserve literary history for the future. As social media starts to take curation and preservation of cultural material out of the exclusive realm of highly-credentialed academics and experts, our students can create digital literary artifacts on their own and in our classes. Approaching literary history as something malleable and participatory means students can be active creators of information, not just consumers: Virtual anthologies can be created using one of many different kinds of apps or social media platforms; digitized literary manuscripts and collections can be explored to find “new” or recovered voices from the past; and digital archives can be created to draw attention to new, marginalized or recovered writers. Digital technologies and social media are allowing students opportunities to problem pose with real-world examples and to create products to share with the world and, potentially, change how literary history is seen.

The above are crucial questions with which we—librarians, students, and faculty working within literatures in English—must contend. These are not abstract issues for scholarly debate: these are real issues with which scholarly communities are currently grappling and are the precisely the kinds of debates with which Graff argues we need to engage our students. In this way, they present perfect problems to pose to our students for co-exploration. A problem-posing critical information literacy approach within literatures in English can help to

position students not as mere information consumers but as active participants in the development and discussion of literary historical information.

## POSING PROBLEMS TO CHANGE THE WORLD

As described above, information literacy for literatures in English can be much more complex and varied than knowing research tools, MLA citation formats, and Boolean searching. A broader definition of information literacy will allow us to make new and innovative connections within disciplines and between librarians, faculty, and students. Moreover, a broader vision of information literacy can help us forge connections and partnerships with teaching faculty within the disciplines who have similar pedagogical goals and with students who have broader, global concerns. Just as many librarians are drawn to the profession as a way to make a difference in the world, many professors and students in English studies (and not just literature studies) are drawn to the profession “in part,” as Kathleen Blake Yancey (2004) describes, “to change the world through reading and writing” (ix). Many classes are informed by critical pedagogy’s insistence that, in the words of Giroux (2010), “one of the fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world, a world in which critique and possibility—in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom, and equality—function to alter the grounds upon which life is lived” (n.p.) Although there are many engaging and nuanced connections that could be explored between information literacy and literatures in English, I am going to explore one current within

literature studies today which is nicely summarized in the title of Elizabeth Ammons’ 2010 monograph: *Brave New Words: How Literature Will Save the Planet*.

In her introduction, Ammons (2010) writes about humanities teaching and scholarship:

Our task is to open young people’s eyes to oppressive systems of human power, how they work, and how we are all involved in them. We expose the injustices and the ideologies driving them. . . We help others see the importance of interrogating the bases of contemporary thought in order to understand destructive forces in the world today such as racism, environmental devastation and economic imperialism (p. 11-12).

Ammons goes on to argue that, “Thousands—millions—of thoughtful people wish to make a positive contribution to progressive social change and restoration of the planet. The liberal arts should be offering practical, useful inspiration to everyone seeking to create a different and better world” (p. 12). The next set of conversations to have within critical information literacy might be how we go about creating those partnerships in the common ground between the library and the disciplines with which we work. How might we make connections between discussions in librarianship regarding documents like IFLA’s Recommendations and similar discussions within literary studies? This, I believe, is a problem we need to pose collectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

As Jeff Lilburn (2013) cogently states, “The extent to which citizens can be said to be informed, critical, and engaged, hinges on the extent to which they are aware not just of the questions they are permitted to ask but the full scope of questions they might ask” (p. 64). When we limit the kinds of questions we ask our students and ask ourselves about information, about information literacy, about libraries to things we can count, quantify or check off in a box, we limit the ways in which we can be informed, critical, and engaged. Graff’s argument that “teaching students to engage in intellectual debate at a high level is the most important thing we can do” (p. xvi) is a reminder that our information literacy work needs to engage students in large, problem-posing questions that actively relate to the worlds in which they live. Engaging students with the problems of literary history—how literary historical information is selected, presented, packaged, catalogued, classified, preserved, not preserved, made accessible, forgotten, canonized, or marginalized—might be the most important thing we can do in our information literacy work with literatures in English. Engaging them in these questions reminds them that the writing of literary history is never closed, never finished, never absolute. Literary history is an ongoing narrative to which each of them may, in the words of Walt Whitman (1871, 1982), “contribute a verse” (p. 410). Digital projects and social media are making it increasingly possible for literatures in English students to actively participate in the work of literary history and to engage in the pressing literary historical questions of our time and we need to find ways to

facilitate this participation.

The fact that students, teachers, librarians, and members of the public can “contribute a verse” to literary history through problem-posing reminds us of one of the central tenets of critical literacy: that it can “empower and lead to transformative action” (Powell, Chambers Cantrell and Adams 2001 p. 773). We need to find ways in our instruction to facilitate that empowerment and encourage transformative action. The future of digital literary history is deeply controversial and at an urgent juncture in terms of selection, classification, preservation, and access. We should not only be inviting our students to be part of the “culture of ideas and arguments” in our field and to engage in the problem-posing of digital literary history, but also to participate collectively and creatively in transformative actions that will help us work through the problems of selection, classification, preservation, and access.

These questions are not just pressing for literatures in English: they are urgent in many other disciplines on campus and in many different contexts around the globe. Engaging students with the controversies within our disciplines—be they literary history, political science, sociology, or commerce—and with problem-posing not only engages them and us with the subject matter but helps us all to see that within our disciplines there are ways in which the work we do in classrooms can—and should—be part of transformative action that makes a difference in the world.

## ENDNOTES

1. Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelley (2001) persuasively remind us that "we need to remember and take heart from Freire's warning: 'To read is to rewrite, not memorize the content of what is being read' (Critical Consciousness 100). Recognizing his popularity among educators in the US, Freire cautioned: 'It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them. Please, tell your fellow Americans not to import me. Ask them to recreate and rewrite my ideas' (Politics of Education xii-xix)" (p. 612). Within critical information literacy work, we need to be cognizant of the impulse to import his ideas and work toward rewriting and recreating them in our particular contexts.
2. By literary information, I mean things like the primary sources themselves, the editions, the anthologies, the publication history, the reviews, the criticism, the databases, the archives that preserve literary history and the libraries that steward and make accessible a vision of literary history—in short, the entire literary historical record.
3. N. Katherine Hayles (2008) writes that electronic literature is "generally considered to exclude print literature that has been digitized, is by contrast 'digital born,' a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer" (p. 3). See examples of electronic literature at the Electronic Literature Collection website: <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/>
4. See, for example, Ben Okri's twitter poem "I sing a new freedom" (2009) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/mar/25/ben-okri-poem-twitter>.
5. The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project (2011), for example, has explored Twitter use and discovered that black, non-Hispanic and Hispanic internet users use Twitter at significantly higher rates than white, non-Hispanic internet users (white, non Hispanic: 9%, black, non-Hispanic: 25% and Hispanic: 19%). In 2012, the Pew study of Twitter use noted "Black internet users continue to use Twitter at high rates. More than one quarter of online African-Americans (28%) use Twitter, with 13% doing so on a typical day" (n.p.)
6. Significantly, Roy Rosenzweig (2007) notes that while "digital preservation projects have occasioned enormous commentary among librarians, archivists, and computer scientists, historians and humanists have almost entirely ignored them" (p. 313). This detachment, he argues, "stems from the assumption that these are 'technical' problems, which are outside the purview of scholars in the humanities and social sciences" (p.313). Digital preservation is indeed a "technical problem" but literary historians

(and other humanists) must engage with what Rosenzweig calls the "important and difficult questions about digital preservation"—questions that are "social, cultural, economic, political, and legal—issues that humanists should excel at" (p. 313).

## REFERENCES

- Accardi, M.T. (2013). *Feminist pedagogy for library instruction*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press.
- Accardi, M.T., Drabinski E. & Kumbier A (Eds.) (2010). *Critical library instruction: Theories and methods*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.
- Ammons, E. (2010). *Brave new words: How literature will save the planet*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2000). *Information literacy competency standards for higher education*. Available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/standards.pdf> (Accessed 16 December 2013).
- Association of College and Research Libraries. (2007). *Research competency guidelines for literatures in english*. Available at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/researchcompetenciesles> (Accessed 16 December 2013).
- Baer, A. (2013). Critical information literacy in the college classroom: Exploring scholarly knowledge production through the digital humanities. In L. Gregory and S. Higgins (eds) *Information literacy and social justice: Radical professional praxis*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, pp. 99-119.
- Cope, J. (2010). Information literacy and social power. In MT Accardi, E Drabinski and A Kumbier (eds.) *Critical library instruction: Theories and methods*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, pp. 13-27.
- Drabinski, E. (2008). Teaching the radical catalogue. In K.R. Roberto (ed) *Radical cataloging: Essays at the front pages*. Jefferson, NC:MacFarland, pp. 198-205
- Elmborg, J. (2006). Critical information literacy: Implications for instructional practice. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 32(2): 192-199.
- Elmborg, J. (2012). Critical information literacy: Definitions and challenges. In C. W. Wilkinson & C. Bruch (eds.) *Transforming information literacy programs: Intersecting frontiers of self, library culture, and campus community*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, pp. 75-95.
- Freire, P. (1970, 2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. D. Macedo (trans.) New York: Continuum.
- Giroux, H.A. (2010, October 22). Lessons from Paulo Freire. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57(9): B15-16.
- Graff, G. (2007). *Professing literature: An institutional history, twentieth anniversary edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gregory, L. & Higgins, S. (2013).

*Information literacy and social justice: Radical professional praxis*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press.

Hayles, N.K. (2008). *Electronic literature: New horizons for the literary*. Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. (2005). *Beacons of the information society: The Alexandria proclamation on information literacy and lifelong learning*. Available at <http://www.ifla.org/publications/beacons-of-the-information-society-the-alexandria-proclamation-on-information-literacy> (Accessed 16 December 2013).

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. (2011). *IFLA Media and information literacy recommendations*. Available at <http://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-media-and-information-literacy-recommendations> (Accessed 16 December 2013).

Jacobs, H.L.M. "Posing the Wikipedia 'problem': Information literacy and the praxis of problem-posing in library instruction." In MT Accardi, E Drabinski and A Kumbier (eds.) *Critical library instruction: Theories and methods*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, pp. 180-197.

Jones, S & Holden, J. (2008). It's a material world: Caring for the public realm. *Demos*. Available at <http://demos.co.uk/files/Material%20World%20-%20web.pdf> (Accessed 16 December 2013).

Kutner, L. & Armstrong, A. (2012). Rethinking information literacy in a globalized world. *Communications in*

*Information Literacy*, 6(3): 24-33.

Lilburn, J. (2013). "You've got to know and know properly": Citizenship in Kazuo Ishiguru's *Never Let Me Go* and the aims of information literacy instruction. In L. Gregory and S. Higgins (eds) *Information literacy and social justice: Radical professional praxis*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, pp. 63-78.

Okri, B. (2009). I sing a new freedom. Available at <http://benokri.co.uk/2009/04/10/i-sing-a-new-freedom/> (Accessed 16 December 2013).

Powell R., Chambers Cantrell, S. & Adams, S. (2001). Saving Black Mountain: The promise of critical literacy in a multicultural democracy. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(8): 772-781.

Ronald, K. & Roskelly, H. (2001). Untested feasibility: Imagining the pragmatic possibility of Paulo Freire. *College English*, 63(5): 612-632.

Rosenzweig, R. (2007). Scarcity or abundance? Preserving the past in a digital era. In T Augst & K Carpenter (eds.) *Institutions of reading: The social life of libraries in the United States*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, pp. 310-342.

Seale, M. (2010). Information literacy standards and the politics of knowledge production: Using user-generated content to incorporate critical pedagogy. In M.T. Accardi, E. Drabinski & A. Kumbier (eds.) *Critical library instruction: Theories and methods*. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, pp. 221-235.



Simmons, M.H. (2005). Librarians as disciplinary discourse mediators: Using genre theory to move toward critical information literacy. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 5(3): 297-311.

Twitter use (2012). Pew Internet and American Life Project. Available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Twitter-Use-2012/Findings.aspx> (Accessed 16 December 2013).

Whitman, W. (1871, 1982). O me! O life! In J. Kaplan (ed.) *Walt Whitman: Complete poetry and collected prose*. New York, NY: Library of America, p. 410.

Yancey, K. B. (2004). *Teaching literature as reflective practice*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.