

A Liaison Model Approach to Research Skills Instruction In Light of the New ACRL Information Literacy Framework

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Abstract: The objective of the presentation is to discuss the impact of the new *Information Literacy Framework Threshold Concepts* on the delivery of library research skills instruction at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU). In 2011 KPU Library had adopted the Instruction Core Principles of the previous Information Literacy Standards and our teaching methodology and lesson plans were then based on these principles. With the adoption of the New Framework in 2015, KPU librarians are currently reviewing and assessing library instruction programs, while at the same time piloting new Information Literacy sessions. The new *Framework* seeks to move what librarians teach from the "how" of information literacy skills to the "why" of information creation and use. Threshold concepts enable students to experience possibilities of higher critical thinking within disciplines. This presentation will showcase how librarians at KPU are adjusting their teaching practices to conform to the new *Framework* threshold concepts, and are implementing sequential, integrated information literacy programs based on the liaison model. Methods to assess student learning are also being presented.

Keywords: Information Literacy, Information Literacy Standards, Academic Librarianship, Teaching Methods

1. Introduction

Teaching Information Literacy skills is crucial for supporting student learning in post-secondary institutions and librarians play a vital role by offering research skills sessions. "Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning." (ACRL, 2015).

The new *Framework* for Information Literacy has been filed by the ACRL Board on February 2, 2015. It focuses on six threshold concepts (frames) to

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serve as "passageways or portals to enlarged understanding or ways of thinking and practicing within that discipline." (ACRL, 2015)

The Framework is based on conceptual understandings and ideas about information, research, and scholarship, and is addressing these as a process and not as compartmentalized search endeavours (ACRL, 2015). The *Framework* is organized into six frames, each consisting of a concept central to information literacy, a set of knowledge practices, and a set of dispositions. The six concepts that anchor the frames are: Authority Is Constructed and Contextual, Information Creation as a Process, Information Has Value, Research as Inquiry, Scholarship as Conversation, Searching as Strategic Exploration.

2. Threshold Concepts at Work

Students in the 21st century live in an information rich society and most of them are looking daily for information online. The *Framework* tries to engage students and challenges them to rethink their pre-conceived notions about today's "increasingly complex information ecosystems." (Burkhardt, p. 164). Locating information and more importantly defining the authority of the information is a skill students need to learn. Students often have difficulties differentiating between the information contained in different contexts and formats, such as blogs, newspapers or websites. Using threshold concepts should provide opportunities for a more focused instructional content leading to more engaged teaching. (Townsend, 5). Literature suggest that to achieve this, students are to engage in active learning. [Activities such as reflective and problem focused exercises for learning threshold concepts should be part of every research skills session. \(Davies, 2008\).](#) As Vong has noted, "overall, threshold concepts are meant to be taught over a long period of time. Once students learn these concepts, they become a part of their everyday thinking and practice." (par. 10). [This is one of the main challenges at KPU library, because not all threshold concepts can be addressed during our mostly one-shot research skills sessions.](#)

3. Context of Information Literacy Instruction at Kwantlen Polytechnic University

KPU is a four campus post-secondary institution situated in the Greater Vancouver area in British Columbia, Canada. Established by the BC government in 1981 as Kwantlen College it became a University College in 1995 with degree granting status, and was designated a Polytechnic University in 2008. It currently offers over 120 different programs ranging from bachelor degrees to certificates and citations with over 19,000 students attending each year (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2017). KPU has a diverse and relatively young student population, with 12% international students in 2015/16, and 60% of students younger than 22 years. Female students constituted about half (53%) of the total student population. About two thirds (63%) of KPU students attended classes fulltime (KPU, 2015/16).

As the institution evolved from college to university, the library kept pace by adjusting the way librarians teach information literacy skills. Initially, bibliographic instruction consisted of one-shot tours of the library and a demonstration on how to locate print resources. The librarian scheduled to work at the Reference Desk would typically conduct these orientations, leaving the Reference Desk unattended. Further, librarians taught classes in all disciplines, which became increasingly difficult in a more complex information environment. Realizing also that a more solid approach to teaching information literacy skills was needed, the Library adopted the Core Principles of the Information Literacy Standards in 2011. Librarians consequently based teaching methodology and lesson plans on these principles. To address the increased workload when teaching in all subject areas as well as the problem with staffing the Reference Desk, librarians adopted the liaison model in 2013. This model stipulates that each librarian liaises with specific department(s), which includes collection development, collaboration with faculty, and teaching library research sessions in these areas.

The role of the Information Literacy Program in the context of a teaching library is to encourage and facilitate life-long learning. In order to empower students in the pursuit of knowledge, librarians aim to teach the skills of critically evaluating and using information. As KPU library moved towards the liaison model over the last several years, librarians now teach the vast majority of information literacy classes in their subject areas. One of the advantages of this model is that liaison librarians over time develop relationships with instructors in their areas which often leads to collaborating on integration and embedding information literacy components into the curriculum (KPU Library, 2016). However, challenges consist of increased teaching workloads for some librarians and the lack of an overall assessment strategy

The library's information literacy instruction program is grounded in the following five core principles (KPU library 2016):

1. Fundamental. Information literacy instruction is a core library function.
2. Collaborative. Collaboration among key stakeholders, including faculty, librarians, and administrators, is essential for creating an effective and sustainable information literacy program. The development of a successful IL program requires that faculty and librarians engage in frequent consultation, and regard each other as active partners in this educational initiative.
3. Integrated and systematic. IL instruction is most effective when it is sequenced into the curriculum and structured across a student's entire course of learning. Information literacy programs should provide students with systematic instruction beginning in the first year and continuing until graduation. (Bruce, 2003)
4. Learner-based. Instructional design is based on the active learning model in which the student is at the centre of the learning

environment. Instruction should include a variety of in-class activities designed to meet multiple learning styles and link information literacy to coursework assignments and objectives

5. Evidence- based. Librarians consult the professional literature for models of appropriate instructional practices and assessment techniques, and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their programs in light of the ACRL competency standards.

Currently, the majority of library research sessions at KPU are still one-shot “teaching to the assignment” sessions. Most of the time sessions are booked at the time of need, which ensures the relevancy of the class content. This ‘just-in-time’ teaching approach increases student participation and engagement. Since moving to the liaison model, librarians have developed a series of library workshops for students in specific classes ranging in duration from 50 to 120 minutes. KPU librarians are continually trying to develop meaningful research sessions for students to ensure they not only succeed in their academic pursuits but also become information literate citizens. Adopting the Core Principles in 2011 has given librarians guidelines when preparing for research sessions and the new *Framework* provides us with additional concepts to consider.

4. Research Class Outlines

Liaison Librarians are working with instructors to ensure that the course assignments incorporate the *Framework* concepts by encouraging the use of various search tools and sources of information, incorporating critical thinking skills, requiring that students compile a bibliography, and encouraging appreciation for scholarship and academic research. Meyer and Land suggest that teaching and learning across the disciplines may be improved by employing the threshold concept framework (2003). Since threshold concepts are best addressed when taught over time, apart from the standard one-shot sessions, some liaison librarians also teach sessions sequentially.

The following are examples of how we are using the *Framework* to teach information literacy concepts in ENGL 1100 and ELST 0381 sessions. We offer one-shot sessions as well as sequential ones where we meet with the class three times either in the classroom or the library.

Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
Research sessions for ENGL 1100

Learning outcomes:

- Students learn to look for authors' credentials when evaluating the authority of a source

Class activities: Bring print journals and magazines to class. Students work in small groups and determine which journals are scholarly based on a chart/video previously discussed. Students look at three articles from the Library subscription database and determine which one is scholarly using online quiz.

Research sessions for ELST 0381

Learning outcomes:

- Students learn to look for authors' credentials when evaluating the authority of a source.
- Students learn that the authority of an author will vary depending on the text's format and context.

Class activities: Class discussion about what constitutes 'authority' in different areas of life: public, private, or academia. What types of credentials are needed – if any- to be considered an authority in a specific area? What credentials generally makes one an expert in an academic setting?

Demonstrate a search in Summon (all-in-one library search). Students review search results in small groups and report to the class which of the sources have been written by experts based on the discussed criteria.

Research sessions for ELST 0381

Learning outcomes:

- Students learn that search engine results need to be carefully evaluated for reliability of the information.
- Students learn how to evaluate websites for their authority.

Class activities: Website evaluation activity includes a discussion about 'reliable' information. Show CRAAP test criteria (KPU library, 2017). Search Google on a topic. Students review the first five websites and evaluate whether they are finding reliable information using the CRAAP test as a guide.

Information Creation as a Process
Research sessions for ENGL 1100

Learning outcomes:

- Students use information effectively and understand the information cycle.
Class activities: Divide class in groups of three to five. Each group looks at a newspaper, academic or magazine article, book, webpage or blog. Class discussion on the formats of sources and their potential value for different topics e.g. current event sources will differ from sources providing background information. Students complete Information Cycle tutorial and discuss. (SOL*R, 2008)

The Information Has Value
Research sessions for ENGL 1100

Learning outcomes:

- Students understand the value of information, i.e. economic, ethical, legal and social issues.
- Students understand they have to give credit to the original ideas through proper attribution and citation.
- Students understand copyright, open access, and public domain rights.
Class activities: Divide class in two groups. One searches for a topic in Google and the other in a library subscription database. Discuss whether search results include references. If yes, evaluate the types of sources used and quality of citations.

Research sessions for ELST 0381

Learning outcomes:

- Students understand why and how to cite sources for their assignments
- Students learn how to correctly format in-text citations
- Students learn how to create a 'References' list
Class activities: Class discussion about the reason for citations in academia. Students complete an online tutorial on how to cite. Students then create a 'References' list based on the sources they are using for a research assignment.

Research as Inquiry

Research sessions for ENGL 1100

Learning outcomes:

- Students determine the nature and extent of the information needed.
- Students perform increasingly complex research, and evaluate information critically.
- Students incorporate new information into his or her knowledge base.

Class activities: Sort sources into formats (books, scholarly articles, newspaper articles) using online quiz, online collaborative tool Padlet or just plain paper. Students decide which types of sources are most useful for their assignment.

Research sessions for ELST 0381¹

Learning outcomes:

- Students learn how to read abstracts to determine the usefulness of an article for their assignments.

Class activities: Students search two different databases to find relevant articles on their topics. They have to read the abstracts and explain why the information is useful for their paper. What new information does each article provide? Students don't just ensure that these articles are scholarly and written by experts but also have to decide how/if they relate and are useful for their own research paper. Librarian emphasizes that evaluating search results takes most of the time when doing research in academia.

Scholarship Is a Conversation

Research sessions for ENGL 1100

Learning outcomes:

- Students understand the nature of scholarship communication, by evaluating information and incorporating it into his or her knowledge base.
- Students evaluate sources critically and incorporate them into their research ethically.

Class activities: Hand out a list of references that include a variety of

¹ Note: Many ESL students at KPU have come to Canada from China. They often have not learned how to critically evaluate the information they are finding. Learning how to do research therefore includes the process of not just finding relevant sources but to also critically evaluate that information. (Lin, p.5)

sources. Students locate additional sources of information by searching for a book, journal article and a report from the reference list.

Searching as Strategic Exploration Research sessions for ENGL 1100

Learning outcomes:

- Students determine the scope of research
- Students design search strategies
- Students use search tools effectively
- Students evaluate information and sources critically

Class activities: Students complete Identify Key Concepts quiz. They develop a concept map of key concepts and keywords creating a search strategy using these. Students identify subject terms used in the database and perform another, more precise, search.

Research sessions for ELST 0381

Learning outcomes:

- Students learn how to determine main keywords for a given topic
- Students learn how to narrow/broaden a search
- Students understand the difference between a keyword and a subject search

Class activities: Students work on a sample topic to define the main keywords for a search. They will look for synonyms, broader, narrower terms. Students will then repeat this process for their own topics. They will try searches using the keywords and try to find the best subject terms for their topics.

5. Assessment

Librarians at KPU sporadically apply some types of formative assessment that are quick and easy to use. Examples include the following: At the beginning of the class, a quick, confidence-check questions can serve as good ice-breakers. Simple questions ranging from ‘have you used the library as a study place or checked out a book?’ work well. To obtain more information of the level of student familiarity with the library, librarians can use the background knowledge check type of questions, such as ‘have you used the catalogue to search for books?’ This can be done using live interactive software such as Poll Everywhere, Padlet, or just plain paper.

At the end of the class, some librarians use the so called ‘Minute Paper’. It usually consists of a couple of questions, such as: ‘What are the two most significant things you learned in this class? What questions do you still have? What is the most surprising or interesting thing you learned today? What is the most confusing thing?’ Again, this can be done on paper or students can submit their answers online.

6. Conclusion

Teaching information literacy concepts to students at KPU takes continuous effort, creativity and reflection. As the Information Literacy Core Principles helped us align teaching methods with learning outcomes, the new *Framework* now challenges us to broaden our perspective and consider how best to include new knowledge practices and dispositions. The *Framework* does not specify how to teach these broadened information literacy skills. As Burkhardt points out “The good news is that everything we have previously created to help students be information literate is probably still valid. The frames ... are open to interpretation. Although they do not provide guidance in any practical sense of the word, neither do they limit.” (p. 5).

Liaison librarians continue to include broader information literacy concepts when working with students and explore more opportunities to collaborate with other university departments. Focusing on developing critical thinking skills during library sessions will allow students to reflect on current information needs and strategies to translate this knowledge to other areas of life. The library’s ultimate goal is to establish a fully supported and scalable university-wide approach to teaching information literacy skills.

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Appendix A

Finding Books using the Library Catalogue and Summon (Library fast search)

Choose one of the topics: **Topic #1:** _____ OR **Topic #2:**

- [Use the following two library search tools to locate books on your topic: Summon and Library Catalogue](#)

Summon Search

- a. Find an **e-book** using Summon Search tool. **Limit your search by Discipline** (your choice, e.g. environment, politics, etc.) **and Date** (books published after 2000). Write down the book title:

Library Catalogue

- a. Find a **print book** in the Catalogue using keyword search:
 b. Title _____ of _____ the book _____
 c. Call number _____ of _____ the book:
 d. Subject Term(s) assigned to this book (check Catalogue Record link)

Appendix B

Search **Two Library Research Databases** for three **scholarly articles** on your topic

Evaluate each article:

	<u>Article 1</u>	<u>Article 2</u>
<u>Article 3</u>		
Article relevant to your topic? YES	YES	YES
Author credentials provided? YES	YES	YES
Journal is peer-reviewed? YES	YES	YES
Includes references/bibliography: YES	YES	YES
Article longer than 5 pages? YES	YES	YES

If you answered yes to all questions you can record the citation information in APA style:

Appendix C

Finding Scholarly Articles in Library Subscription Databases (e.g. Academic Search Complete)

Topic: _____

- I. Locate a **full-text, scholarly journal article, published after 2000** related to the topic above.

- a. Write down the **article citation information**, e.g. Author, Article Title, Journal Title, vol., issue, Pages, DOI (if available), etc.

- b. What **Subject Terms** are used to describe the content of this article?

List 3 criteria that you used to decide if this article is **scholarly**.