Chapter 4
Library Instruction in the 21st Century

Rosanne M. Cordell
Northern Illinois University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The adoption of Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy standards, the rapid development of teaching and learning technologies, and the movement toward assessment of academic programs have shaped library instruction programs as formal, conceptual areas of study with increasingly greater presences in their institutions.

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, The American Library Association's President's Commission on Information Literacy defined information literacy as including four components: the ability to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. This ushered in a new era in library instruction. However, it would take time for the library profession to make the transition from library instruction programs focused on how to use the quickly increasing number of electronic databases, to a more academic approach. Students need to learn to determine information needs; define types of information sources and their uses; view scholarly information as communication within a field; understand

organizational schemes and working within them to locate sources; evaluate sources by criteria dependent on their characteristics; vary search strategies to refine result sets; understand literature outside one's area of expertise; cite sources properly and use information ethically; recognize unethical practices such as scams, hoaxes, or lies; synthesize information; and present it effectively. More broadly, students need to develop critical thinking skills; that is, students need to think in deliberate and reflective ways about the information they need, seek, retrieve, and use. Some librarians had always approached instruction sessions as opportunities to teach concepts rather than skills, but many had approached these sessions as requiring only that they indicate where to find a list of sources on a subject or how to navigate a

database, and did not easily incorporate this new view of library instruction into their thinking. Gibson stated that, "Information literacy builds on the previous work of the library community in the instructional movement called bibliographic instruction (sometimes called library instruction or library user education as well). This earlier effort focused on teaching students the tools, resources, and strategies for using a specific library's information resources to best advantage for particular assignments given by faculty… bibliographic instruction is sometimes useful, but self-limiting and often peripheral to any true programmatic reach and development for teaching research and information skills (2008, pp. 12-13). The opinion of some library leaders that library instruction would soon be unnecessary (See chapter 3) was not so much a philosophical stance as the failure to envision the cognitive processes behind information seeking behavior.

Academic areas see value in the research and knowledge that other subject areas can bring to their own; in fact, interdisciplinarity is increasingly common in scholarly pursuits. William A. Perry's article, "Different Worlds in the Same Classroom: Students' Evolution in Their Vision of Knowledge and Their Expectations of Teachers" in 1985 began a discussion in library literature about the development of cognitive processes in college students. When students state that they are looking for information to support their opinions, they are not merely expressing a misconception about the research process that can simply be corrected; they are revealing the current stage of their development in understanding the nature of truth and research in influencing our decisions. As explained by Perry, the student's view of the role of the teacher varies, depending on the student's own stage of cognitive and moral development. Thus, the responsibility of the librarian/teacher is to provide the learner with "the support of some elements that are recognizable and familiar [at the learner's current stage]...and a degree of

challenge," to assist the student in the maturation of their thinking.

Subsequent books by William G. Perry, Jr. (1990) and King and Kitchener (1994) further elucidated the importance of facilitating cognitive development in information literacy programs. King and Kitchener stated that "One of the most important responsibilities educators have is helping students learn to make defensible judgments about vexing problems" (p. 1). This is in sharp contrast to Brown's very pragmatic view that "In many lines, ability to use a library is necessary for success" (1927, p. 99). King and Kitchener outline 6 stages of Reflective Judgment:

Stage 1: Knowledge is assumed to exist absolutely and concretely...

Stage 2: Knowledge is assumed to be absolutely certain or certain but not immediately available...

Stage 3: Knowledge is assumed to be absolutely certain or temporarily uncertain...

State 4: Knowledge is uncertain and knowledge claims are idiosyncratic to the individual since situational variables (such as incorrect reporting of data, data lost over time, or disparities in access to information) dictate that knowing always involves an element of ambiguity...

Stage 5: Knowledge is contextual and subjective since it is filtered through a person's perceptions and criteria for judgment...

Stage 6: Knowledge is constructed into individual conclusions about ill-structured problems on the basis of information from a variety of sources...

Exposure to theories such as these on ethical and intellectual development and reflective judgment led academic librarianship to develop standards for information literacy programs, including general standards and separate standards for subject areas and distance learning.

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